
Impact of engaging in learning on increased and sustained confidence, wellbeing, and determination among women in Wales

Catherine Marren, September 2023

Background



Project objective

To explore whether there is a link between engaging in learning and improved and sustained confidence, wellbeing and determination among women



Methodology

- A rapid review of evidence
- Four interviews with learning providers
- Sixteen interviews with women who had recent experience of learning (this included four recent participants of Chwarae Teg's AN2 programme)

Participation in learning

The women learners interviewed as part of this study had engaged with adult learning within a variety of different settings – both non-formal and formal.

- With a hobby group
- In the community
- Through volunteering
- With voluntary sector organisations
- In the workplace
- With a college or university

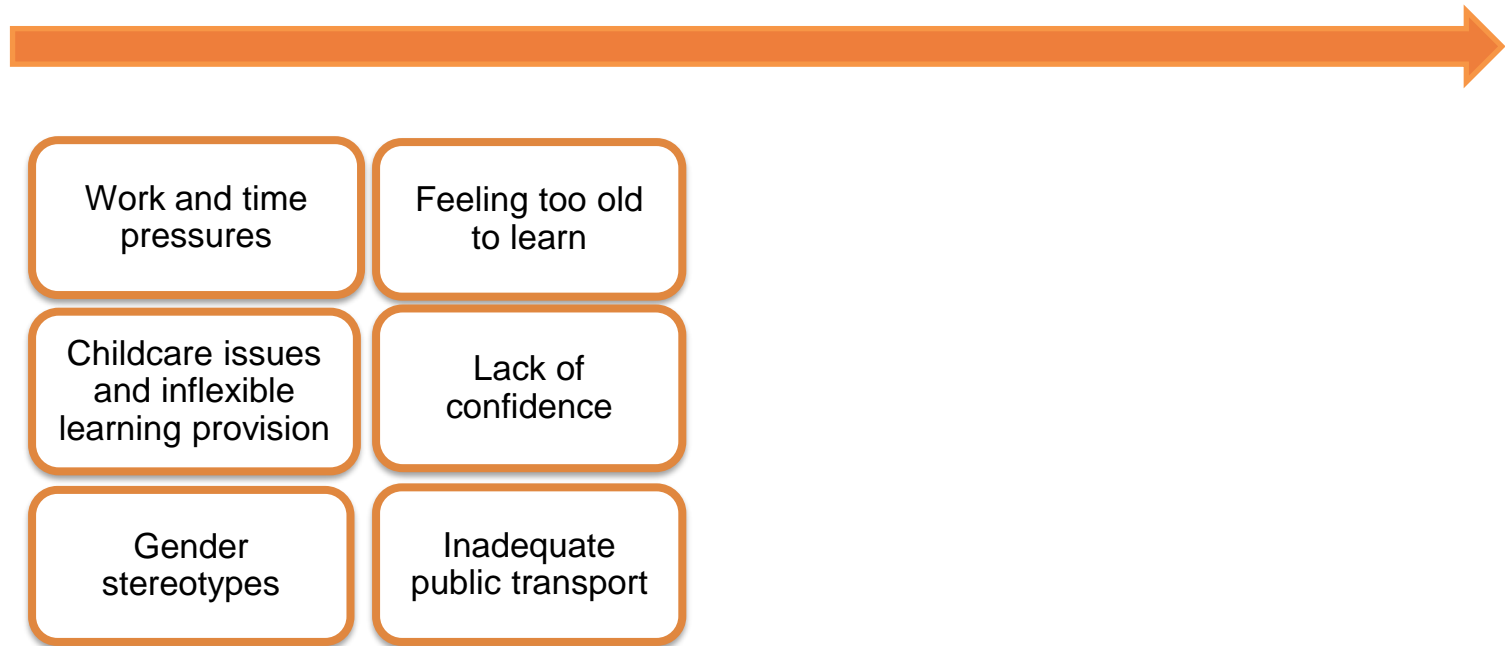
Women engage with learning for a variety of reasons related to their personal circumstances and ambitions for the future.

- Personal development
- Involvement with community network
- Family and children
- New skills
- Opportunities to progress into and within learning and work

Obstacles to engaging with learning

Engaging with learning

Achieving outcomes



Making learning more accessible

Learners and providers identified elements of provision that make it easier to access learning and help to overcome some of the barriers women encounter:

- Flexibility around class times and assignment deadlines
- Online learning
- Family learning in schools
- Engagement with seldom heard groups
- Part of fully-funded provision

Confidence

Increased confidence was felt in many different areas of learners' lives, both personal and professional. This includes:

- Improved confidence in social situations
- Feeling better able to advocate for themselves and others
- Having the confidence to start work
- Being more able to express themselves and live independently

"It's enabled me to engage in activities outside the college as well. I was able to go to a local squash court and start engaging in the events that they have there regularly, and I've made some friends through that, that's been amazing. That's something that I wouldn't have been able to do previously because I would have been too nervous and shy to." (Access to Engineering, Cardiff)

Wellbeing

Predominantly, participants noticed changes to their mental wellbeing, though some also experienced improved physical wellbeing. Some of the key changes were:

- Increased self-esteem
- Feeling proud of themselves and their accomplishments
- Elevated mood
- Feeling more optimistic about the future

“We've had tutors telling me last half term they've had people who've recently suffered a bereavement and they're coming to a singing class within a week of having lost a loved one because they're just needing a space to connect with other people and to get transported somewhere else.” (Provider 1, Pembrokeshire)

Determination

Changes to determination were experienced as increased motivation to pursue career or learning aspirations. This included:

- Determination to pursue career aspirations
- Motivation to apply for job roles
- Increased motivation to enroll in further learning
- Determination to succeed despite discouragement from others

“It motivated me to apply for posts in employment that probably I wouldn't have applied for prior. It gave me that, sort of, sense of security that, you know, I can, and I will” (MSc in Psychology, West Wales)

Wider outcomes

Changes to confidence, wellbeing, and/or determination often acted as building blocks for further outcomes.

- Meeting new people and building connections
- Establishing a better relationship with family members
- Intergenerational outcomes
- Career progression

"Because I'm a mum, I don't really have friends, my social life is basically non-existent, so it was really nice going and actually meeting people as well."
(NVQ Level 3, South East Wales)

Drivers of outcomes

Supportive relationships

**Inclusive and welcoming
learning environments**

**Structure and format of
provision**

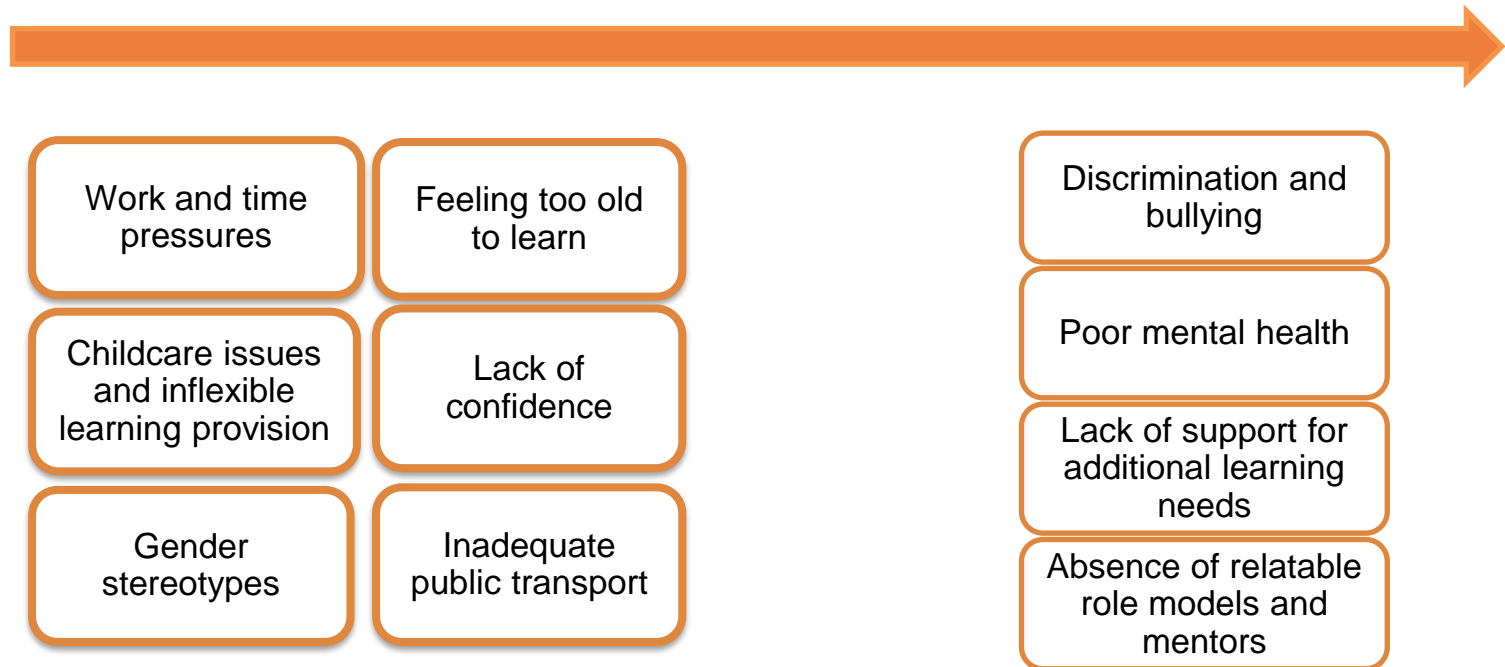
**Developing skills for
work**

**Recognising and
rewarding progress**

Obstacles to achieving outcomes

Engaging with learning

Achieving outcomes



Summary

1. The findings demonstrate that there is a clear, positive link between women's participation in learning and improvements to confidence, wellbeing, and determination
2. Women learners who experienced beneficial outcomes accessed learning across an array of subject areas and types of learning
3. Tackling barriers to access is a key requirement to enable more women to engage in learning

Recommendations

This report makes recommendations in three broad areas.

1. **The policy landscape** and the delivery of post 16 learning and investing in innovation to address the barriers to access.
2. **Practice amongst providers**, how they can be supported, and prioritising a person-centred approach to learning.
3. **Innovation and further research** to review outcome measurement frameworks that capture the wider benefits of learning – including those around confidence, wellbeing and determination.