

Empowering Learner Ambassadors



This resource has been created through a partnership of adult learners and providers. It provides insight into building learner voice, engagement and advocacy.



SEFYDLIAD DYSGU A GWAITH
LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE



Ariennin gan
Funded by
Taith

www.learningandwork.wales



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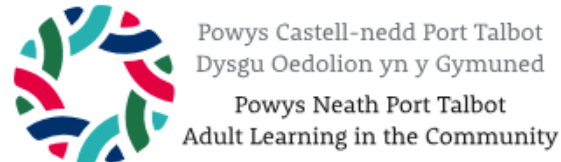
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About the Learner Ambassador programme

The Learner Ambassador Programme is a Taith funded project with representatives from Dysgu Bro Ceredigion County Council, Neath Port Talbot Adult Learning in the Community Partnership, Adult Learning Wales, Dysgu Sir Gâr/ Learning Carmarthenshire (ACL), Conwy and Denbighshire Adult Community Learning Partnership, Gwynedd and Môn Adult Community Learning Partnership, Cardiff and Vale College, Gwent Adult Community Learning Partnership, and supported by Learning and Work Institute (L&W).

Partners:



Learning from Ireland: A knowledge exchange

The partnership has worked alongside AONTAS, a leading organisation for developing learner voice and supporting community learning in Ireland.

A mobility visit took place to Dublin, Ireland in March 2024 with representatives of the project sharing in a knowledge exchange focusing on learning more about Learner Voice and advocacy in Ireland and the AONTAS **Learners as Leaders** model specifically.

During the mobility, the representatives also visited NALA, and SOLAS. NALA is the National Literacy Agency which has work focused on learner voice and outreach to raise awareness of literacy in Ireland. SOLAS is the state agency that oversees further education and training in Ireland – setting strategic direction and performance for the delivery of post 16 learning and skills, as well as the implementation of the Adult Literacy for Life strategy.

In March 2025 the project facilitated a second mobility visit to Cork, Ireland, for learners who were involved in the pilots to exchange knowledge and share best practice with Cork Education and Training Board learners, who currently have an established learner ambassador programme.



NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency

AONTAS
The Voice of
Adult Learning

SOLAS
learning works

FET Learner Forum

Cavan & Monaghan

welcome



"It's never too late to start studying"



cmetsb

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
an Chabháin agus Mhuineacháin
Cavan and Monaghan
Education and Training Board



#LearnerVoice



The Voice of Adult Learning

Building the programme

Project partners used this learning to develop various pilot approaches to learner engagement through both course development, delivery and workshop days these included:

- Accredited and non-accredited workshops, to identify local learners' thoughts on what a Learner Ambassador role was, and what resources and training would be needed.
- A co-produced 10-week programme to engage individuals who are currently in outward facing community roles, enhancing their understanding of community engagement and equipping them with the tools to empower others to become learning ambassadors.
- A co-produced 10-week programme to engage individuals who have completed an adult learning course in the community to enhance their understanding of community learning and equipping them with the tools to empower others to become adult learners.



Learning from the mobility visits highlighted some key findings for the partnership:

- A Learner Ambassador Programme should be a resource for providers in supporting and developing the skills and knowledge of learners to reach out to communities to expand participation, build confidence in engaging in learning and identify and shape opportunities to expand provision.
- A Learner Ambassador Programme embraces the fundamental belief that adult learners possess invaluable perspectives and experiences capable of shaping the future of education and work.
- A Learner Ambassador Programme should champion the notion that learners are not just participants, but active agents of change, whose voices and insights are essential for fostering a dynamic and responsive learning environment.
- A Learner Ambassador Programme should be built on the conviction that empowering individuals to become champions for lifelong learning, supporting them to share their journeys and achievements, will inspire others in their community.
- Having a network of advocates will inform policy and strengthen the links between providers and learners across Wales.
- A Learner Ambassador Programme should aim to cultivate a powerful network of ambassadors who can articulate the transformative impact of learning and champion its accessibility for all.

The findings from both the visits to Ireland and the pilot programmes delivered in Wales have contributed to the development of What Works advice, which will enable provision in Wales to support learner engagement and advocacy through developing Learner Ambassador programmes.



What Works – Advice for developing a learner ambassador programme

1. Programme philosophy:



A Learner Ambassador Programme should be driven by a powerful philosophy:

To cultivate a vibrant community of advocates deeply rooted in learner-centred principles.

It should actively champion the recognition of prior learning, value the diverse experiences and knowledge that individuals bring, and foster transformative learning journeys that extend beyond the acquisition of skills.

By equipping learners to become leaders and storytellers, a Learner Ambassador Programme will aim to amplify their voices, challenge inequalities, and collectively shape a more equitable and empowering learning landscape for all.

**Learner-centered:**

The programme prioritises learners' voices, experiences, and perspectives.

**Empowerment:**

It aims to build learners' confidence, skills, and capacity to lead.

**Inclusivity:**

It ensures diverse representation and participation from all learner groups.

**Collaborative Learning:**

It fosters a community where learners learn from and support each other.

**Social justice:**

It promotes equity and access to education for all.

**Recognition of prior learning:**

It values and acknowledges the existing knowledge and skills learners bring.

**Transformative learning:**

It aims to facilitate personal and social change through education.

2. Programme objectives

A Learner Ambassador Programme should be structured to empower learners to become active contributors and leaders within our educational community. The core objectives should focus on developing essential leadership, communication, and advocacy skills, while simultaneously providing meaningful opportunities for learners to shape and improve our learning opportunities and services.

By fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, providers can enhance learner engagement and participation, promote the intrinsic value of lifelong learning, and develop individuals who are confident to contribute to learning policy and practice.

Central to a programme is the commitment to gathering and integrating feedback from a learner perspective, ensuring that providers remain responsive and learner centred.

- To develop learners' leadership, communication, and advocacy skills.
- To provide learners with opportunities to contribute to the improvement of learning programmes and services.
- To create a supportive and inclusive learning environment.
- To enhance learner engagement and participation.
- To promote the value of lifelong learning.
- To gather valuable feedback from the learner perspective.

3. Programme structure

Recruitment and selection:

The recruitment and selection process should be open and transparent, designed to identify individuals with the motivation, commitment, and potential to excel as Learner Ambassadors. Criteria should emphasise these qualities rather than academic achievement, ensuring a diverse representation of learners across age groups, backgrounds, and learning styles. To encourage broad participation, the process could include both peer and self-nominations. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities will ensure that selected ambassadors are well-equipped to contribute effectively.

- a) Open and transparent application process.
- b) Criteria based on motivation, commitment, and potential, rather than academic achievement.
- c) Emphasis on diverse representation (age, background, learning styles, etc.).
- d) Consider peer nominations and self-nominations.
- e) Clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Initial training and orientation:

A focus on initial training and orientation is crucial for equipping Learner Ambassadors with the knowledge and skills to develop in their roles. A comprehensive introduction should include the programme's philosophy and objectives. Skills development workshops that focus on communication, presentation, facilitation, advocacy, and leadership could be included, alongside an overview of relevant institutional policies and procedures. Participants should also be encouraged to engage in team-building activities designed to foster peer support and receive essential training on ethical considerations and confidentiality.

- a) Induction to the programme's philosophy and objectives.
- b) Skills development workshops (communication, presentation, facilitation, advocacy, leadership).
- c) Understanding of institutional policies and procedures.
- d) Team-building activities, to foster a sense of community.
- e) Training in ethical considerations, and confidentiality.

Ambassador roles and skills:

To ensure a Learner Ambassador Programme achieves its goals, it is essential to define the different roles and responsibilities of an ambassador. These roles could encompass a variety of functions, all aimed at enhancing the learning environment, supporting fellow learners, and promoting the value of lifelong learning. The comprehensive list of skills identified below emerged through the piloting and co-production phase of the project. It was recognised that this provides a checklist of skills development that may be phased in or built on over time.

A learner ambassador's role may include one or more of the activities shown below (see annex for more detailed information):

- **Peer support:** Mentoring and supporting fellow learners.
- **Feedback and advocacy:** Gathering and representing learner feedback to improve programmes and services.
- **Programme promotion:** Promoting learning opportunities and encouraging participation.
- **Event organisation:** Assisting in the planning and delivery of learning events.
- **Community building:** Fostering a sense of belonging and connection among learners.
- **Resource development:** Contributing to the creation of learner-friendly resources.
- **Representation:** Representing the learner voice in institutional meetings and committees.
- **Research and evaluation:** Assisting in the collection and analysis of learner data.

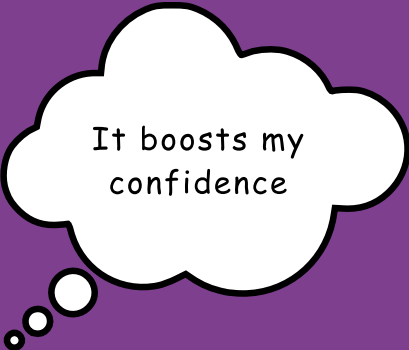


Learner Forums gathered feedback on the proposed Learner Ambassador role, specifically regarding responsibilities and the content of a potential training course. Participants were also asked to share their views on the course structure and any opportunities for further development that could follow the completion of a Learner Ambassador programme, including two ice-breaker activities on ‘why adults learn’ and the ‘benefits of accessing adult learning’.

What are the benefits of adult learning?



Improving
and updating
current
skills



It boosts my
confidence

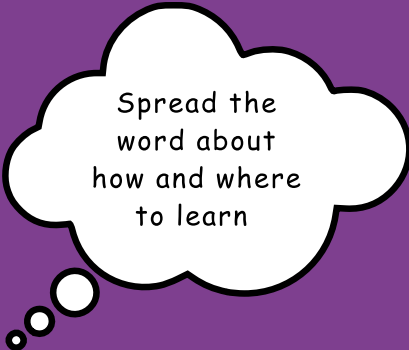


Not feeling
alone

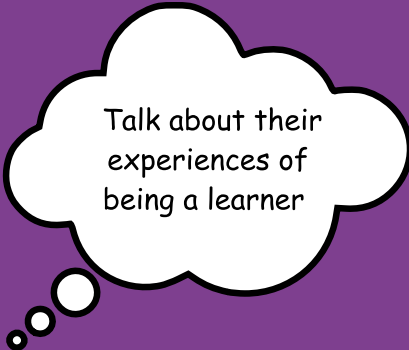


Making friends

What does the phrase ‘learner ambassador’ mean to me?



Spread the
word about
how and where
to learn



Talk about their
experiences of
being a learner



Bring our
community
together while
learning



Breaking down
barriers

Ongoing support and development:

The ongoing success of a Learner Ambassador Programme hinges on providing continuous support and development opportunities for its participants. This commitment ensures that ambassadors are well-equipped to handle their responsibilities, remain engaged in the programme, and continue to grow as leaders and advocates.

To achieve this, Learner Ambassadors should have access to regular meetings and check-ins with programme coordinators, opportunities for ongoing skills development and leadership training, mentoring and coaching from staff and experienced ambassadors, dedicated resources and support materials, a robust peer support network with regular meetings and group problem-solving sessions, and financial compensation for their contributions.

- a) Regular meetings and check-ins with programme coordinators.
- b) Opportunities for ongoing skills development and leadership training.
- c) Mentoring and coaching from staff and experienced ambassadors.
- d) Access to resources and support materials.
- e) Peer support network and meetings, and group problem solving sessions.
- f) Financial compensation.

Recognition and evaluation:

It is vital to acknowledge the contributions of learner ambassadors and to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme itself.

This process not only validates the work of the ambassadors but also provides valuable insights for programme improvement and sustainability. To this end, the programme should incorporate formal recognition of ambassadors' contributions through qualifications, certificates, and awards, and offer opportunities for ambassadors to showcase their achievements.

Regular feedback and evaluation should be used to assess the impact, alongside opportunities for ambassadors to reflect on their personal growth and learning. The programme's effectiveness should be measured through the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data.

- a) Formal recognition of ambassadors' contributions (qualifications, certificates, awards, etc.).
- b) Opportunities to showcase their achievements.
- c) Regular feedback and evaluation of impact.
- d) Reflection on personal growth and learning.
- e) Collection of qualitative and quantitative data to assess effectiveness.

4. Key components for further development

In developing a Learner Ambassador Programme, there are several key components to consider for maximum effectiveness and impact. These include mentorship, pairing new ambassadors with experienced ones; action learning, providing opportunities for ambassadors to apply their skills in real-world situations; and reflection, encouraging ambassadors to reflect on their experiences and learning.

Collaboration, fostering partnerships with staff, and other stakeholders; flexibility, adapting the programme to meet the evolving needs of learners and the institution; digital integration, utilising online platforms for communication, collaboration, and resource sharing; and sustainability, designing the programme to ensure its long-term viability, are also important components to be considered.

- **Mentorship:** Pairing new ambassadors with experienced ones.
- **Action learning:** Providing opportunities for ambassadors to apply their skills in real-world situations.
- **Reflection:** Encouraging ambassadors to reflect on their experiences and learning.
- **Collaboration:** Fostering partnerships with staff, and other stakeholders.
- **Flexibility:** Adapting the programme to meet the evolving needs of learners and the institution.
- **Digital integration:** Utilising online platforms for communication, collaboration, and resource sharing.
- **Sustainability:** Designing the programme to ensure its long-term viability.

5. Evaluation

When evaluating a Learner Ambassador Programme, providers should consider multiple factors to gauge its success and identify areas for improvement. These evaluations should assess the number of learners participating in the programme, the level of learner engagement and satisfaction, and the impact on service improvements.

Additionally, it's important to evaluate the development of ambassadors' leadership and communication skills, the increased sense of community and belonging among learners, and feedback from staff. Providers should also collect qualitative data from interviews and focus groups to provide a comprehensive understanding of the programme's effectiveness.

- Number of learners participating in the programme.
- Level of learner engagement and satisfaction.
- Impact on programme and service improvements.
- Development of ambassadors' leadership and communication skills.
- Increased sense of community and belonging.
- Feedback from staff.
- Qualitative data collected from interviews and focus groups.

Building learner voice

L&W has been working across the tertiary sector to give learners a platform to feed into policy, research and the promotion of adult learning.



“I fully believe in the transformative power of tertiary education having benefitted myself after periods of addiction and prison. Unless we support people to meet their basic needs, they cannot even begin to access tertiary education, let alone thrive when they get there.”

Scott Jekinson, CEO, Youth Shedz Cymru speaking at the WCCP event: Equity in Tertiary Education in Wales.



Change Your Story is a podcast series hosted by Nia Parry.

Each episode features conversations with inspirational people who have embraced lifelong learning, offering listeners a glimpse into their learning experiences, insights and the wisdom that they've accumulated along the way.

Zaina Aljumma and Isaac Fabb, Inspire! Award winners in conversation with Simon Pirotte, Chief Executive, Medr.



“Looking back now, I realise that the challenges truly helped me focus and be more determined to do what I wanted to do, although there were stumbling blocks, there was nothing more rewarding than achieving a career that I once thought was well beyond my reach.”

Isaac Fabb, winner of the Skills for Work Inspire! Award, 2024.

“I take a lot of pleasure from talking to and inspiring others. Representing learners has taken me around the world and to places that I could have never afforded to go to. Doors open and shut, but when a door opens, I have the confidence to walk through it.”

John Gates, winner of the Lifetime Achievement Inspire! Award, 2023.

Annex 1 – Skills

A learner ambassador's role may include one or more of the activities shown below:

Peer Support: Mentoring and supporting fellow learners.

- **Active listening:** Paying close attention, understanding perspectives, and showing empathy.
- **Communication skills:** Clearly and effectively conveying information, providing constructive advice, and adapting communication styles to different individuals.
- **Empathy and patience:** Understanding and sharing the feelings of others and being patient when explaining concepts or providing support.
- **Interpersonal skills:** Building rapport, establishing trust, and creating a supportive and encouraging environment.
- **Confidentiality:** Respecting the privacy of learners and handling sensitive information appropriately.

Feedback and Advocacy: Gathering and representing learner feedback to improve programmes and services.

- **Observation skills:** Identifying challenges and areas for improvement within the learning environment.
- **Data collection:** Employing various methods (e.g. surveys, informal conversations, focus groups) to gather comprehensive and representative feedback.
- **Communication (written and verbal):** Articulating feedback clearly, concisely, and constructively to relevant stakeholders.
- **Analytical skills:** Identifying key themes and trends within the collected feedback.
- **Problem identification:** Pinpointing specific issues and areas where improvements can be made.
- **Diplomacy and negotiation:** Representing learner needs effectively and respectfully and working collaboratively with staff.
- **Advocacy skills:** Passionately and persuasively championing the needs and interests of the learner community.

Programme promotion: Promoting learning opportunities and encouraging participation.

- **Communication and marketing skills:** Creating engaging and informative content (e.g. presentations, social media posts, flyers) to highlight the benefits of learning opportunities.
- **Enthusiasm and passion:** Demonstrating genuine interest in sharing a passion for learning, spreading the word and reaching into a network of contacts as a trusted voice.
- **Interpersonal skills:** Building connections with potential participants, giving them the confidence to engage and addressing their questions and concerns.
- **Presentation skills:** Confidently and effectively presenting information to groups of learners.
- **Networking:** Building relationships with different learner groups or professionals and understanding their interests and resources.
- **Creativity:** Developing innovative ways to reach and engage potential participants.

Event organisation: Assisting in the planning and delivery of learning events.

- **Organisational skills:** Planning, coordinating, and managing tasks efficiently.
- **Time management:** Prioritising tasks and meeting deadlines.
- **Teamwork and collaboration:** Working effectively with other ambassadors, staff, and volunteers.
- **Communication (written and verbal):** Communicating clearly with event participants, speakers, and organisers.
- **Problem-solving:** Addressing unexpected issues that may arise during event planning or delivery.
- **Attention to detail:** Ensuring all aspects of the event are well-planned and executed.
- **Adaptability:** Being flexible and able to adjust plans as needed.

Community building: Fostering a sense of belonging and connection among learners.

- **Interpersonal skills:** Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all learners.
- **Facilitation skills:** Guiding discussions and activities that encourage interaction and connection.
- **Empathy and inclusivity:** Understanding and respecting diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
- **Conflict resolution:** Addressing disagreements or misunderstandings in a constructive manner.
- **Networking:** Connecting learners with each other and with relevant resources and provision.
- **Initiative:** Proactively identifying opportunities to build community and foster interaction.

Resource development: Contributing to the creation of learner-friendly resources.

- **Understanding of learning needs:** Identifying the types of resources that would be most beneficial to learners.
- **Communication (written and visual):** Creating clear, concise, and engaging written materials, presentations, or other resources.
- **Creativity and innovation:** Developing effective ways to present information.
- **Attention to detail:** Ensuring the accuracy and clarity of the resources.
- **Collaboration:** Working with staff and other learners to develop relevant and useful materials.
- **Technical skills (depending on the resource):** Proficiency in using relevant software or tools for creating digital resources.

Representation: Representing the learner voice in institutional meetings and committees.

- **Communication (formal and informal):** Articulating learner perspectives clearly and professionally in various settings.
- **Advocacy skills:** Persuasively presenting the needs and concerns of the learner community.
- **Understanding of institutional structures:** Familiarity with how the institution operates and who the key decision-makers are.
- **Diplomacy and negotiation:** Working constructively with staff and faculty to achieve positive outcomes for learners.
- **Critical thinking:** Analysing issues and formulating well-reasoned arguments.
- **Confidence and assertiveness:** Speaking up and representing the learner voice effectively.

Research and evaluation: Assisting in the collection and analysis of learner data.

- **Understanding of research methods:** Familiarity with different data collection techniques (e.g. surveys, interviews).
- **Data collection skills:** Administering surveys, conducting interviews, or gathering other relevant information accurately and ethically.
- **Analytical skills (basic):** Identifying patterns and drawing initial conclusions from collected data.
- **Attention to detail:** Ensuring the accuracy and completeness of collected data.
- **Communication (written):** Summarising findings and presenting data in a clear and understandable format.
- **Ethical considerations:** Understanding and adhering to ethical guidelines for data collection and analysis.

Being a learner ambassador is a multifaceted role that draws upon a wide range of interpersonal, communication, organisational, and analytical skills. Developing these skills not only benefits the learner community but also provides valuable experience for a learner's own personal and professional growth.

Resources from partners

Adult Learning Wales

Learner Ambassador Forum Report

Cardiff and Vale College

Learner Ambassadors - A 10 week course co-created with the community

Aontas

Padlet: Learner Voice Development



Learning and Work Institute resources

Wales Centre for Public Policy: Equity in Tertiary Education in Wales: Scott Jenkinson's story

Change Your Story Podcast series

A vision for Lifelong Learning: Interview: Inspire! Adult Learning Award winners in conversation with Simon Pirotte, CEO Medr

John Gates' story: Lifetime Achievement Inspire! Award winner 2023

Learning and Work Institute are an independent policy and research organisation focused on lifelong learning and better work.

Our vision is for a fair and prosperous society where learning and work enable everyone to realise their potential. We research what works, influence policy and develop new ideas to improve practice. We work with a wide range of partners and funders to achieve our vision of a prosperous and fair society in which learning and work provide opportunities for everyone to realise their potential and ambitions throughout life.

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