

Learner Engagement Code

Sector briefing: Adult Community Learning

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Introduction

Under Section 129 of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, Medr has a statutory responsibility to publish a Learner Engagement Code about the involvement of learners in their provider's decision-making. This includes opportunities for learners to:

- participate in the making of relevant decisions by their provider;
- have their voices effectively represented in provider decision-making; and
- give their views on the education they are receiving and matters of concern or interest to them.

Medr [consulted](#) on the draft Learner Engagement Code in autumn 2025 and published [the final Code](#) in April 2026. The Code applies to all providers in the tertiary education sector in Wales: further and higher education institutions, apprenticeship providers, **adult community learning providers**, and schools with sixth forms. Local authorities will be required to comply with the Code from **1 August 2026**, as a condition of funding.

During our consultation and wider discussions with the tertiary sector, providers asked us to ensure that the Code is tailored to the very different types of organisation and diverse learners in different parts of the sector. We have developed this briefing as part of a suite of reference materials to contextualise the Code to each part of the tertiary sector, and to provide practical information on how we expect the Code to be implemented and evidenced. It is intended to be read alongside the Code itself, which sets out the specific requirements that all providers must meet and the evidence they must provide to Medr to demonstrate compliance.

We will keep this briefing under review to reflect feedback from learners and providers, and to add further resources and examples as they are developed.

Who is this briefing for?

- Local authority staff who deliver and manage adult community learning
- FEI staff who deliver and manage adult community learning
- Staff who lead adult community learning partnerships
- Councillors and committee members responsible for oversight of adult community learning
- Learners including those in representative roles such as course representatives

Sector context: Adult community learning

Adult community learning is delivered by partnerships that usually comprise one or more local authorities, one or more further education institutions, and sometimes other organisations. Most learners study for a small amount of time each week and often on courses with short durations, in community venues. This means that they will often not have the time or appetite to take part in more formal structures for learner engagement or consultation. Their primary engagement with the provider is through their tutor, who is

typically their main contact for providing feedback about their learning experience, or raising any concerns.

This means that providers will need to tailor their approach to learner engagement to meet learners' needs, focusing on structured ways to ensure that feedback through tutors is captured and action taken, and that learners have other ways to engage in wider organisational decisions which are not reliant only on tutor contact.

Medr does not expect or require adult community learning services to have a students' union or equivalent formal, permanent learner representative body. The Learner Engagement Code does not define specific mechanisms or structures that providers must use. However, it does require providers to ensure that learner engagement informs providers' strategic decisions and policies at an organisational level.

Requirements of the Code

Requirements for 2026 – 2027

- ACL providers **must** publish a commitment to embed and support impactful learner engagement in decision-making before the end of the academic year
- This **must** align with the principles of The Code
- Evidence required via the Annual Assurance Return (Autumn 2027)

Requirements from 2027 – 2028

- ACL providers **must** annually review the commitment
- ACL providers **must** provide evidence of impact of learner engagement
- Evidence required via the Annual Assurance Return (from Autumn 2028)

Governance

- The governing body (or equivalent) **must** confirm compliance annually
- Assurance required via the Annual Assurance Return (from Autumn 2027)

Learners

- Learners **must** be engaged in the development and review of the commitment
- The commitment must be promoted in accessible ways to learners

The commitment **must** include:

- How learner engagement in decision-making is embedded and supported
- How any learner representative body co-developed (reviewed) the commitment
- How learners have been engaged in development (and review)
- How the views of diverse learners are taken into account
- Which learners are covered

Wherever a learner representative body (e.g. SU, council, Senedd) exists the provider **must** work in partnership with them to:

- co-produce the commitment
- annually review the commitment
- promote it in accessible ways to learners through provider and learner representative body channels

Wherever a learner representative body exists they **must** sign the commitment to provide confirmation of the above requirements in relation to partnership working.

The learner engagement commitment

The Learner Engagement Code requires providers to work with their learners to develop and publish a commitment to embedding and supporting impactful learner engagement in decision-making in line with the principles of the Code.

The commitment is intended to be a clear and honest reflection of current learner engagement in decision-making, rather than an aspirational statement of intent, and should be used as a continuous improvement tool to recognise strengths, identify areas for development, and address gaps.

Individual local authorities or providers who receive funding directly from Medr for adult community learning are responsible for implementing the Learner Engagement Code and Medr will require them to provide evidence of compliance with the Code's requirements.

For adult community learning, learner engagement in decision-making structures can and should be established at partnership level where they relate to partnership decisions (such as the course offer to learners within a geographical area). Local authorities should work with their ACL partnerships to agree processes for learner engagement, share good practice and review the effectiveness of their approaches. Individual providers or local authorities may also have learner engagement and decision-making structures unique to their context.

It may be most effective for a sub-contracted delivery body to prepare and publish the commitment or a group of providers at a partnership level. The requirement for compliance and evidence will remain with the organisation funded by Medr who will need to provide assurance that the published commitment or commitments comply with the Code for the Adult Community Learning they fund.

Learners should be given clear information on the commitment that applies to them, who is responsible for their learning and where they should direct feedback or complaints.

Medr is not prescriptive about the structure or format of the commitment and advises that this should take the most appropriate form for each provider or partnership and its learners, this may include a more streamlined or visual demonstration of learner engagement with links to more formal written documents where necessary to meet the requirements of the Code.

Adult community learning providers can engage with learners effectively by:

- Providing clear information to learners on their rights, how they can share their views, raise concerns or complaints; this should be displayed prominently in venues and explained at the start of courses, so that it does not become “buried” in enrolment paperwork
- Providing routes for learners to engage in decisions and give feedback which are independent from their tutor
- Ensuring that learners are able to raise sensitive issues confidentially
- Formally confirming to learners that their views have been received, recorded and will be considered
- Systematically collating, analysing and responding to learner views in order to build an overall picture, including feedback gathered by individual tutors or centres
- Ensuring that there are structures in place for tutors to capture learners’ views, concerns and suggestions, feed these into quality assurance processes, and escalate any concerns
- Building learner engagement into the planning and evaluation of organisational or partnership decisions that affect the learner experience (see below for examples of decisions)
- Considering appropriate methods to collectively engage learners in decisions that affect them, such as digital platforms, forums or focus groups; these could be fixed structures or convened on an ad-hoc basis, depending on the types of decision being made and the needs of learners
- Ensuring that adult community learning service leaders and any relevant groups or committees have learner engagement and learner voice as a standing item at meetings
- Recording and monitoring changes and improvements that have been made in response to learners’ views
- Having mechanisms to tell learners how their views have impacted on decision-making and influenced the provider’s practices. This could include explaining where learners’ suggestions or requests cannot be implemented and the reasons for this, or explaining changes that may take longer but will benefit future learner cohorts

Examples of “relevant decisions” for adult community learners could include:

- Course availability, timings and venues
- Changes to venues
- Purchasing of equipment or software used by learners
- Course fee policies
- Support for learners to manage costs such as childcare and transport
- How assessment is carried out

Useful links and resources

To inform the development of this briefing, Medr commissioned the Learning & Work Institute to undertake focus groups with ACL learners. A summary of the outcomes is attached at **Annex A**.

Medr has also commissioned the Learning & Work Institute to deliver a project that supports learner engagement for ACL providers. Providers should make use of the Medr-funded resources from this project, available from September 2026, to embed and support impactful learner engagement in decision-making.

Contact us

learnerengagement@medr.cymru

Annex A

Learner Engagement Code: ACL focus group insights

As part of its consultation on the Learner Engagement Code, Medr commissioned the Learning & Work Institute to undertake focus groups with ACL learners. The feedback received is summarised below, and has been used to inform the development of the ACL sector briefing accompanying the Code.

As well as providing some initial feedback to help shape how the Code will work for the ACL sector, the focus groups functioned as a pilot to help test effective methods for engaging learners within a newly regulated tertiary system. These sessions represent a first step towards establishing a consistent and sustainable learner voice to inform Medr's work over time.

The focus groups were not intended as a representative picture of learners' experiences, or to gauge the effectiveness of learner engagement in their specific providers, but to provide summary insights into how ACL learners understand engagement and what they would like to see.

Methodology

Two online focus groups were carried out in November and December 2025, attended by 13 current and former ACL learners in total from a range of providers. To support recruitment and thank participants for their time, each attendee was given a £25 voucher.

The Learning & Work Institute worked with Medr to design questions around learners' experiences of learner engagement, including:

- Their understanding of how decision-making works in their provider
- How informed they feel as learners on opportunities for engagement
- What makes them feel valued and listened to
- How Medr could monitor and evaluate learner engagement
- How they would like to engage and have a voice in future

Overview of research insights

- Feedback opportunities are currently focused primarily on contact with tutors, personal learning plans and individual progress. Learners would welcome more opportunities to shape structural elements, such as how a course is set up or managed.
- Feedback is often gathered through informal conversations, with more formal opportunities taking place through end-of-course surveys. Participants expressed an interest in greater visibility of how survey feedback is reviewed and acted upon.
- Participants described challenges in influencing structural or strategic changes as they require sustained engagement and complex processes.
- Participants would like to have a greater voice in the practicalities (when, where, and how long), the content (what is taught and how it is taught), and the support structures (accessibility and assessment) of their courses.

- Participants noted that information about providing feedback or raising concerns can sometimes be difficult to locate within enrolment materials or may be presented in complex language. Where provision is delivered through partnership arrangements, clearer guidance on feedback responsibilities could further improve understanding.
- Learners value seeing tangible outcomes from their contributions and highlighted the importance of clear communication to close the feedback loop, including acknowledgement of feedback, clear actions or proposed improvements.

Key themes

Tutor relations

Participants consistently identified their tutor as the primary point of contact and whilst they valued the input they could have on their individual learning journey, they indicated opportunities to contribute to wider course design and decisions affecting the whole cohort could be further developed.

Approachable, supportive tutors play a key role in creating an environment where learners feel comfortable sharing feedback and suggestions. Participants felt tutors were positioned between learners and less visible strategic decision-makers, highlighting an opportunity to strengthen connections between learners and decision-makers.

Learners generally know they can speak to tutors or office staff about issues, but some would like their provider to be more proactive in reminding learners of these channels.

Methods for providing feedback

Most participants felt that they could give feedback at any time through informal and verbal mechanisms.

Formal feedback mechanisms were most associated with end-of-course or end-of-module surveys, presenting an opportunity to expand structured engagement throughout the learner journey.

Participants were keen to see their providers using assistive technology to improve the accessibility of information and feedback routes.

Some learners from larger providers knew that their provider had a more defined learner voice function but said that these staff did not make themselves visible enough to learners.

Feeling listened to

Some participants felt that whilst their feedback was gathered, they wanted more transparency in how it was used.

The more positive experiences described by learners were linked to immediate, visible changes to their course, based on informal feedback to tutors, rather than wider organisational changes.

Participants suggested that greater transparency around decisions, including explanations where changes cannot be implemented, would help strengthen confidence in the feedback process and demonstrate that learner views have been carefully considered.

Influencing organisational decisions

Participants wanted their real-life experiences to influence their provider's strategic decisions, not just changes within the classroom.

Learners identified a number of areas where they wanted to influence organisational decisions. These included the timing of courses, venues, course fees and how funding is allocated, and how their knowledge is assessed.

What good engagement looks like to adult community learners

Clear mechanisms for feedback and engagement in decision-making, along with a feedback loop explaining the actions that the provider is taking as a result.

Transparent information on timescales for effecting changes.

Feedback such as survey data shared with relevant staff as well as learners, to improve communication channels for everyone.

Updates from tutors explaining how learners' feedback has been referred and what the response was (including a rationale where feedback cannot be acted on).

Engagement and feedback processes that reflect the lived experiences of learners, including those with learning difficulties, caring responsibilities, and diverse backgrounds.

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