

Step Up Cymru Evaluation Summary Report

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Background

The Step Up Cymru scheme was developed in partnership between the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association and ran from October 2009 until April 2010. The idea for the Step Up pilot scheme arose as a result of feedback and evaluation of the Operation Black Vote (OBV) Shadowing Scheme that ran in the National Assembly for Wales during 2007/2008 that aimed at increasing black and other minority ethnic (BME) representation amongst political groups/parties. In building on the work of the previous OBV Scheme, the aim of the partnership was to increase the democratic participation and active citizenship of people in Wales who identified themselves as under-represented in politics and/or civil life.

The scheme involved Assembly Members and local councillors from across Wales volunteering to mentor people from under-represented groups and to invite them to shadow them in their roles as elected members. Thirty-four mentoring pairs undertook the scheme across Wales.

The partners contributed £90,000 to the operation of the scheme which came in under budget at £75,000.

The scheme aimed to provide individuals from under-represented groups with an opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge to act as Community Ambassadors, advising and empowering others to become more actively engaged in civil society. As such, the partnership developed a set of aims for the scheme to:

- Build links with under-represented groups
- Increase participants' knowledge of the political/democratic system in Wales to enable them to obtain a variety of skills with a view to considering further involvement in the civil and political sphere

- Increase the confidence and civic engagement of under-represented groups
- Advance the civic and community representation and civic participation of under-represented groups
- Enhance the understanding of and instil greater confidence in the National Assembly for Wales and Local Government amongst those groups and the public
- Give individual politicians, political parties, the National Assembly for Wales and Local Government in Wales, the opportunity to work with and gain greater insight into the experiences of under-represented groups and identify barriers to inclusion/participation
- Promote a positive message that under-represented communities in Wales can influence and bring about positive change by engaging with politicians and the democratic process.

Operation of the Scheme

A Scheme Coordinator was appointed to act as the main point of contact and reference for all elements of the scheme. The overall project management of the scheme was undertaken by members of the partnership with the support of a Steering Group of representative organisations. The partners are grateful for the work of the Scheme Coordinator and to members of the Steering Group who provided support and guidance.

The project partners developed a promotion/recruitment strategy to ensure access to the scheme from across all communities in Wales. The partners and the Steering Group were particularly keen to encourage individuals to apply who had traditionally been disengaged from civil society and democratic processes. The scheme was promoted for six weeks through the partners and members of the steering group, using mailing lists, newsletters and online fora. A press release was distributed to the local and national media in an attempt to reach individuals who were not affiliated to any representative bodies or groups.

Informal assessment centres were held in locations across Wales. A total of 79 applications were received, 58 were shortlisted and invited to attend an assessment centre. There were 36 successful applicants of whom 34 took part in the scheme. A breakdown of applicants and successful Mentees can be seen in the table below.

	Applications	Short listed	Successful Mentees
Total	79	58	36*
Women	54	40	27
Men	24	15	9
Transgender	1	1	0
Disabled people	40	24	12
BME people	21	16	14
LGB people	7	5	3
Under 25	8	6	5
Over 55	19	12	6

*34 Mentees commenced the scheme

During this time participants were required to have a minimum of ten 'experiences' with their Mentor, for example attending a council surgery, an Assembly committee meeting, constituency visit or campaigns. The project partners produced a guidance document suggesting possible experiences which were provided to both the Mentor and Mentee prior to the first meeting to aid the planning process.

A training plan was offered to Mentees at the outset of the scheme that consisted of a variety of courses aimed at increasing their knowledge, confidence and active citizenship. Mentees were able to select any, or all of the training available, or suggest ideas for learning and development.

Evaluation

Different techniques were used in order to evaluate the scheme in relation to its aims:

- Mentees' pre- and post-scheme questionnaires
- Mentors' Questionnaires
- Steering Group Questionnaires and
- Focus groups – one with members of the partnership, and one with Mentees

Key findings:

- Mentees' understanding of the different levels of government had significantly increased, by the time the scheme had concluded.
- Mentees significantly improved their understanding of differences between the political institutions during the course of the scheme
- There was an increase in the understanding of the roles of elected representatives: Assembly Members, local councillors and MPs
- There was also an increase in their confidence in politicians

- Mentees were asked to rate themselves as active citizens with an average response of 4.4 out of 10 at the outset compared with 8.1 out of 10 by the end of the scheme

On completing the scheme, participants were asked if they felt confident in carrying out activities such as setting up a community group. 56.5% of Mentees said that they would set up a community group, and a further 17.4% had already done so. This question also showed more than 50% of the Mentees that responded would consider joining a political party, with a further 21.8% having joined one through the duration of the scheme.

Some Mentees entered the programme with little or no knowledge of Welsh politics and were involved to build personal confidence and understanding. There were a significant number who were already knowledgeable and ambitious but were being blocked from developing because of numerous social and economic barriers.

Several Mentors suggested the need for additional structure and further training for them to carry out their role. It was interesting to note that there were differences in experiences. Whilst the majority of participants felt that the experience had been a positive one there were examples of less satisfactory relationships.

Key to the experience was the energy and commitment shown by the Mentor where there was a structure agreed between Mentors and Mentees in terms of outcomes and experiences. Mentees commented that the most successful relationships were those where learning was a two way process.

Mentees agreed that the training had been of real benefit to the scheme with 45% of those responding to the post-scheme questionnaire stating that training was the most enjoyable part of the programme.

Participants particularly valued the opportunity to meet and share experiences with other Mentees. A number of participants felt that it would have added to the scheme if Mentees could have met more often.

Conclusion

The scheme has been a positive sign that there is a pool of talent and potential available across different communities across Wales. This in turn builds confidence and fosters a culture which values different insights and views of the world. The importance of this must not be under-estimated; by creating more inclusion and diversity across civil society policies and public services are more likely to meet the needs of all communities and draw on the talents of the wider population.

The main question to be answered in concluding this report is has the Step Up Cymru scheme achieved its aim: to increase the knowledge and confidence of Mentees and to provide participants with the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge to act as community ambassadors, advising and empowering others to become more actively engaged in civil society? This is a difficult question to answer because success can be measured in so many different ways. This report has sought to evaluate the Step Up Cymru scheme with a view to making recommendations as a result. At this stage, evaluation can only be measured in terms of how the participants have initially responded, whether their knowledge, skills and understanding have been increased as a result of taking part in the scheme and if any behavioural change has been incurred. To consider the longer term impact would require further research to investigate the increase in civic participation and consider the return on investment.

Did the participants, both Mentors and Mentees however, learn from their experiences? Has, or will civic participation increase as a result of the scheme? The findings of the evaluation indicate that on the whole learning has taken place and civic participation will increase. There is no doubt from the responses that there has been a profound increase in the knowledge of the political/democratic system in Wales and levels of confidence are far greater in the Assembly and local government amongst those that took part in the scheme. Are the participants better off than they would have been without it? For the majority, this is without doubt, an emphatic 'yes'.

The House of Commons Speaker's Conference Report on Parliamentary Representation (2009) commended Step Up Cymru as an initiative that could potentially be developed across the UK.

Glossary

Active citizenship – how people are involved in helping or working for their community

Assembly Members – politicians elected to represent different areas across Wales. The National Assembly for Wales is made up of 60 elected Assembly Members.

Civil society – consists of people and groups who work for the benefit of the community

Democracy / democratic processes - democracy means that everyone in a country should have a say in who makes decisions and what happens in that country

Democratic participation – involvement of people in democracy

Elected representatives – people who are voted into jobs to make decisions about how different services are run

Focus group – a group of people brought together to discuss certain issues. Our focus group brought together Mentees to discuss their experiences.

Local Authorities There are 22 local authorities in Wales. Each is responsible for providing local government services in their local area, including education, social work and roads services.

Local Councillors – politicians elected to represent people in Local Authorities

Mentee – a person who is guided by a Mentor

Mentor – a person who helps and guides another individual's development. In our Scheme Mentors were Assembly Members and Local Councillors.

MPs – politicians elected to represent people in the UK Parliament based in the House of Commons in Westminster, London.

National Assembly for Wales - The National Assembly for Wales is made up of 60 Assembly Members from across Wales. They are elected by the people of Wales to represent them and their communities, make laws for Wales and to ensure the Welsh Government is doing its job properly.

Steering Group – a group of people from different organisations who helped design and run our Scheme

Under-represented groups – groups of people who share a similar characteristic who may not be involved in civil society– for example, they are gay, from an ethnic minority or are disabled.

Welsh Assembly Government - has the power to write laws and decide what will be done in Wales about some subjects (for example- health, education and the environment). The Welsh Government includes the First Minister, Carwyn Jones, and Welsh Ministers, and is based in Wales.

Welsh Local Government Association represents the interests of local authorities and promotes local democracy in Wales.