



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Personal Learning Accounts

February 2023

Background

The Personal Learning Account (PLA) Programme stems from an action in the Welsh Government's Employability Plan, which was published in March 2018.

Action:-

We will pilot an individual learning account for workers to fund personal vocational retraining in sectors where there is a skills shortage.

The PLA pilot commenced in September 2019 in two colleges , supporting employed people aged 19 and over to upskill or reskill within the Health, Engineering, Construction and Digital sectors.

Background

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the roll-out of PLA across Wales was accelerated.

During that transition period, the programme became available to all furloughed workers throughout Wales, regardless of salary and as part of the expansion, the programme also became eligible for employers.

The programme grew from £2m in the pilot year in 2019/20 to £27.4m in 2021/22 and 1,187 enrolments in the 2019/20 academic year rising to 7,603 in the 2020/21 academic year. This scaling illustrated both the programme's ability and its suitability to respond to the situation presented by the pandemic.

The primary aim of the Personal Learning Account programme is to enable people to upskill and reskill in priority sectors; to improve their career and earnings potential, and to help raise the median income in Wales.

PLA is a £17.890m programme for 2022-23. It has benefitted from an additional £3m for targeted Net Zero and Digital Sectors and further £10m to bolster the programme. Overall total investment circa £30m for 2022-23.

PLA offers funded flexible learning opportunities to enable individuals to undertake learning to fit in with their existing family and work commitments delivered by our colleges across Wales.

The courses/qualifications offer has been approved to meet the skills gaps and sector priorities across Wales, working with the Regional Skills Partnerships.

- **Quality career advice and guidance to interested participants** - offering an independent assessment prior to learning to ensure the right learning is considered and undertaken. Each participant will complete an individual learning plan through Working Wales and Further Education institutions.
- **Flexible and responsive local provision to meet skills gaps** - delivering a flexible programme of learning provision through short courses and higher level qualifications linked to regional sector priorities; offering accessible learning choices to enable participants to decide on how and when they learn (weekend, evenings etc.).
- **Employability support** for learners that require additional support to give them the tools and techniques they need to apply for job opportunities.

Individuals must:

- Reside in Wales
- Want to gain skills/qualifications in priority sectors
- 19 years old or over

In addition, Individuals must meet at least **one** of the following criteria:

- Employed people (including self-employed) earning under the median income (£29,534 for 2022/23)
- Workers on zero hours contracts, or
- Agency staff, or
- At risk of being made redundant, or
- Offenders on day release

PLA funding is allocated via a Grant to Further Education Colleges. The majority of funding allocated to colleges is un-hypothecated – colleges have flexibility to deliver approved courses and qualifications in response to learner demand.

Courses and qualifications approved for delivery through the PLA programme are endorsed by Regional Skills Partnerships to ensure they meet regional economic needs and address skills shortages. Qualifications range from vendor qualifications (such as Microsoft) to Level 5.

Welsh Government funds course costs, which may include development costs, additional premises, teaching or associated costs due to the flexible nature of the programme. We also encourage colleges to develop and deliver new or enhanced programmes through PLA which they may not otherwise deliver through mainstream funding.

An additional £10 million was allocated to the PLA programme in 2021-22 to target priority sectors including Logistics and HGV driving, Green Energy and Green Construction, Electric and Hybrid vehicles and Health and Social care.

This was successful in training more than 3,800 individuals, including more than 800 HGV drivers, more than 800 in health and social care; more than 900 in retrofit/net zero construction, more than 500 in green energy and more than 350 in electric/hybrid vehicles.

For 2022-23, £1m has been provided to the PLA programme from Employability and Skills to support the wider Welsh Government Net Zero Plan matched with a further £1m. An additional £1m has also been allocated specifically to support the Digital sector skills needs.

- Colleges mainstream provision is benefitting from PLA activity, bring learning up-to-date with industry. Allows colleges to take risks and not fear failure
- Allows employed learners to learn at times that are convenient to them
- Targeted interventions allow rapid response to local and national need
- No financial input from learner leads to higher drop-outs
- Confusing message to college/employer relationships. On one hand we are asking colleges to gain more commercial income, yet if a priority qualification it can be offered free.