

LINKING LEVEL 3 TO LEVEL 4 CURRICULUM THROUGH A COMMUNITY HERITAGE PROJECT (0051)

During the 18th and 19th centuries the land around the Blaenavon World Heritage Site (“WHS”), South Wales, was transformed by industrial development and for a while led the world in technology and industrial innovation. Although heavy industry now plays a diminished role in the Welsh economy, the landscapes are littered with reminders of the industrial past: *the Forgotten Landscapes* (“FL”). With time nature has re-colonised and a fascinating landscape has developed, rich in both history and wildlife. The origins, development and achievements of the FL are an evocation of human invention and endeavour and a graphic example of an ongoing process of landscape evolution. In recognition of its importance the area was designated a World Heritage cultural landscape in November 2000.

The WHS seeks to help create a sustainable visitor destination that can withstand the growing competition within the day visitor and short break tourism market while offering inclusive strategies involving the community towards developing and sustaining its own conservation plans. Strengthening, unifying and deepening the heritage experience through the FL “Project” is possible from funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund with support from a number of other funders, including the Welsh Assembly Government.

In contemporary political thinking the concepts of social, community, environmental and sustainability have become “politically” significant: becoming increasingly the focus of government policy in the UK. The Welsh Assembly Government’s (2009a) vision of a sustainable Wales was set out in *One Wales: One Planet* and was in response to the economic and environmental challenges it then faced, identifying that it is the only approach that will secure a long term sustainable future for future generations.

The FL Project is diverse consisting of over thirty projects including adult education and lifelong learning. The Project offers opportunities of integrating the everyday environment into everyday teaching and through curriculum innovation, gain new skills and qualifications and engagement in conservation and heritage management. While the Project is inclusive, the focus of this paper is on the young people (16-19 year olds) as the “*guardians of tomorrow*”.

The Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning (“CCLL”) at the University of Wales, Newport, has a strong reputation as a highly successful provider of courses, programmes and projects that target underrepresented groups, offers flexible and responsive progression routes into and through Higher Education and contributes substantially to the community engagement and regeneration agendas of both the University and the Welsh Assembly Government. While traditional transition and progression routes for 16-19 year olds remains, in some ways, disjointed and restricted, CCLL through the FL Project offers opportunities to connect some of the missing links and bridge the gap between what educational opportunities are needed and what are currently available. The educational sector needs to be defined less by

institutions than by “networks of opportunities” which help to widen access, strengthen research and increase the sectors contribution to the economic, cultural and civic life of Wales.

CCLL presented the FL Project to local 6th forms in both schools and Further Education colleges and although the presentations were well received, the take-up rate was negligible due to existing curriculum workload. CCLL, therefore, needed to further develop collaborative partnerships and networks of opportunity and in doing so encourage the students to both “want” and “need” engagement in the Project.

The Welsh Baccalaureate is an innovative qualification delivered by schools, colleges and training providers across Wales with the intention of broadening students’ existing programmes and bringing coherence to them. The Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced level is normally pursued over two years by post-16 students. The Wales, Europe and the World framework sets out what the learners should experience and is categorised under four elements: political, social, economic and cultural (Welsh Assembly Government 2009b).

Offering the four elements through FL level 4 curriculum, the students could meet the learning outcomes of the Welsh Baccalaureate, engage in Higher Education and obtain university credits, while unifying and deepening their heritage experience. Getting young people involved in learning about subjects such as heritage internationally, as well as locally, they can, in the words of Picton (2008 p.15), “explore the interconnectivity of our world on a much deeper level and make connections that would not be possible with just a local field trip”.

The WAG paper *The Learning Country* (WAG 2001) provided a clear statement on lifelong learning, seeing it as essential for the new economic and global challenges that Wales faces in the years to come. The agenda remains relevant and current, providing lifelong learning through a credit-based qualification with flexible and transferable frameworks across and between educational institutions and types of qualifications, promoting a distinctive approach to education and training for all age groups in Wales.

The FL creative curriculum will be offered at the UWN and in wider venues in and around the FL area: an innovative and flexible way of inspiring young learners. The FL curriculum is also designed to develop young people’s skills in critical thinking and an understanding of their past and present whilst alerting them to how their future changing environment will shape and influence their place in the global world in the 21st century. As Aronsson (2000 p.15) states “the concept of sustainability, interpreted in its broadest sense, has economic social and cultural, political, geographical and ecological aspects”. From a university perspective, where better to deliver this interdisciplinary approach than in an environment that is saturated with all these themes and resources?

The challenges of offering lifelong learning through the FL Project to the young people are immense but so are the opportunities. Whilst young people in this Welsh community might initially struggle to understand the relevance of an historic cultural landscape to their lives in the 21st century, they may well understand and be proud of what it represents and have the opportunity to make an impact on the Project, their

community, their life chances, Higher Educational opportunities and their heritage and leave behind their legacy for future generations as the *guardians of tomorrow*.