



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Torfaen Training
Unit 25
Springvale Industrial Estate
Cwmbran
NP44 5BA**

Date of inspection: May 2012

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

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Context

Torfaen Training is part of Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) Community Services department. Torfaen County Borough has a population of approximately 93,000. The proportion of people who are available for and actively seeking work is approximately 4.9%. Much of the population of Torfaen have low or very low levels of literacy and numeracy (Basic Skills Agency information).

Torfaen Training provides learning opportunities for people in South East and South Wales. The current Department for Education and Skills (DfES) contract is valued at £4.9m. Torfaen Training sub-contracts provision to 12 other providers.

The provider and sub-contractors deliver training in the following learning areas:

- Health, Public Services and Care;
- Engineering and Manufacturing;
- Construction, Planning and the Built Environment;
- Retailing and Customer Service;
- Hospitality and Catering;
- Business Administration and Law; and
- Traineeships and Steps to Employment.

At the time of the inspection there were approximately 2,029 learners on Welsh Government funded programmes.

Summary

The provider's current performance	Good
The provider's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

Overall performance of the provider is judged to be good because:

- the attainment rates for nearly all learning areas are good and show an upward trend over the past three years;
- the standards in key skills are exceptionally good, with approximately 24% of learners gaining higher level key skills than are required for their qualification;
- the provider is ranked in the top six work-based learning providers in Wales;
- almost all learners feel safe and are very satisfied with their learning experience in the workplace and with the providers;
- the provider gives very good guidance and support for learners;
- leadership and management are very strong, with a continuous focus on making sure that learners have a high quality experience; and
- the provider has excellent partnership arrangements with its sub-contractors.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are judged to be good because:

- the provider has a good track record of making and maintaining improvements and addressing the recommendations from previous Estyn inspections;
- the senior management team demonstrate clear and effective leadership;
- staff understand their roles and responsibilities and how they impact on the overall success of the provision; and
- effective procedures and processes are in place, inclusive of learners, staff, managers and sub-contractors, to help them strive for excellence.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, the provider must:

- R1 challenge fully all learners to achieve higher standards of vocational skills at work and in off-the-job training sessions;
- R2 share best practice between training staff and assessors, particularly with regard to marking learners' work and the delivery of education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC);
- R3 extend the good practice in Welsh language and culture across all sub-contractors; and
- R4 ensure that the self-assessment report is more evaluative and clearly identifies good practice within the organisation.

What happens next?

The provider will include the recommendations from the inspection into its quality development plans. The work-based learning link inspector will monitor progress on addressing the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Overall, the rate at which learners complete their programme and gain their full framework qualification is good. In many of the training programmes, the success rates are very good. In 2009-2010, the rate for all learners on all programmes was at 93%, which compares very well with the national comparator of 82% and represents a 10 percentage point improvement from 2008-2009. Trends in improvement continue to increase. Data available for 2010-2011 and unverified data for 2011-2012 show that further improvements have been made and remain well above the national comparators.

The standards achieved in key skills on apprenticeships programmes are good and follow the rates of at which learners complete their programmes and attain their full framework qualifications. In 2009-2010, the average key skills attainments for apprenticeship programmes were at 97% with approximately 24% of learners gaining higher key skills than is required by their programme.

In 2009-2010, the average key skills attainment on Skillbuild programme was 89%. Fourteen per cent of learners achieved key skills at a level higher than the target contained within their individual learning plan. These standards represent a significant overall improvement from 2008-2009.

Generally, learners demonstrate a good understanding of their work and training and gain very good vocational skills. Many learners show good and sometimes very good skills in a wide area of vocational skills. The progression of learners onto higher level training programmes and into work is good and has been consistently maintained at a higher level than the national comparators. Most learners understand exactly what they have to do to progress and improve. In a minority of cases, learners produce work above what is required by their programme and make quicker progress to higher level programmes.

Most learners are very enthusiastic about their work and are well motivated. Learners are very polite, have good interpersonal skills and freely discuss their ambitions for improvement and careers after the completion of their programme.

A high proportion of learners take up the offer given by the providers to undertake at least some of their work using the Welsh language. However, this tends to be concentrated in a small number of the provider network. As part of their induction, learners benefit well from visits to local cultural sites such as Big Pit and the Museum of Welsh Life. They have easy access to the provider's Welsh Language Champion, who is the main link between the Welsh Language Board, Strategy and Welsh Language department. The provider has a very good variety of Welsh language and cultural posters displayed within the centres.

Most learners improve their spelling and use punctuation correctly during the production of their portfolios. Generally, portfolios are neat and well presented. However, in a very few cases learners did not benefit from detailed feedback from assessors. In most cases, learners show good and developing literacy and numeracy skills.

Wellbeing: Good

Learners feel safe and confident in their training and learning environments. They show a good understanding of the health and safety requirements of their work, both in the workplace and at the centres. Learners are happy with their training programme and feel that they are using their time effectively. They enjoy their discussions with their tutor and assessors and feel that they are developing the skills they need for employment and future personal development.

The provider has recently set up gym training facilities at their centre and these are available for learners and staff. There is a trained gym instructor on the provider's staff. It is too early to judge the impact for learners.

Learners discuss bullying and harassment effectively during induction and during reviews. They know what to do and whom to contact if they feel they need help or support. Learners contribute very well to feedback questionnaires and discussion groups.

Learners participate well in various community activities that support the skills developed on their programmes. They benefit from the close links with the local County Borough Council. Learners gain good work experience and team work with local voluntary organisations and other work such as gardening services. In the best cases, this provides learners with additional qualifications, allowing them to progress quicker and into employment or higher level programmes.

Generally, learners participate well in their training and learning sessions and develop very good working relationships with their assessors and employers.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

Overall, learning experiences are good and meet the needs of learners, employers and the community very well. Torfaen Training, partners and sub-contractors provide a good focus on learners' needs and experience.

The provider has very close involvement with Torfaen County Borough Council and other stakeholders, which are effective and flexible in meeting the needs of learners and employers. The provider works well with the local community. Learners undertake work placements and voluntary work in a good variety of settings.

The provider's staff encourage learners to develop skills and achieve qualifications that will support them with career aspirations in line with employer needs. The provider offers a wide range of progression opportunities across a variety of routes.

Learners benefit from good opportunities to gain additional qualifications to enhance employability. The provider works well with employers to maximise employment opportunities for learners. Torfaen Training and its sub-contractors offer learners a good variety of support to meet their individual needs.

Initial assessment is conducted effectively and most learners are encouraged to undertake Essential Skills at a level that will challenge them appropriately, often at a higher level than they have been assessed at. SkillBuild learners undertake wider key skills to support the development of the softer skills.

Overall, staff develop good working relationships with learners.

Training Officers use individual learning plans (ILP) effectively to establish learners' individual training and support needs. They set realistic and often challenging targets for the completion of work. ILPs are used well as a working document between the assessor, employer and learner and are updated to accommodate individual learner needs and progression.

Essential Skills are effectively integrated, embedded and contextualised into National Vocational Qualification evidence portfolios and training programmes. Wider key skills are delivered through the Foundation Level 1 Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ).

Learners are offered teaching and assessment in Welsh at induction, and free Welsh language classes as part of their training programme. The provider arranges cultural visits to museums and the Big Pit. However, this is not consistent across all of the sub-contracted provision.

The provider has a strong commitment to environmental issues, and training staff discuss these issues on most learning programmes. However, global citizenship is not always promoted well enough across all areas.

Teaching: Good

Overall, the quality of training and assessment is good. The majority of assessors and training officers plan a good range of off-the-job training experiences for learners. Most assessors use a good range of on-the-job assessment strategies that meet the needs of learners well. Assessors use their industrial experience well to give learners good levels of support.

In the majority of off-the-job sessions, assessors set a good pace for the range of activities. In these sessions, assessors challenge learners well to develop their theory knowledge, practical competence and other work related skills, such as working with others, literacy and numeracy.

In a few off-the-job sessions, the pace is too slow and learners are not challenged enough to develop their theory knowledge and practical skills. Hand-outs and other teaching resources are generally of a suitable quality.

Overall, the assessment of learners is good. Most assessors set learners realistic, but challenging targets for the collection of National Vocation Qualification (NVQ) portfolio evidence and the completion of on-the-job assessments. The majority of assessors provide learners with good verbal feedback after on-the-job assessment. Most assessors involve learners well in setting and agreeing assessment targets.

Learners' written work is usually marked and in the best cases contains useful written feedback on how to improve the standard of their work. However, written feedback is not always consistently detailed enough to help learners improve. Most assessors use verbal questions to check learners' understanding and theory knowledge. In the best cases, assessors use questioning well to further develop learners' understanding of environmental issues and equality and diversity. Overall, assessors track the progress of learners appropriately. They keep up-to-date records of the progress learners are making towards completing their training.

Training officers and assessors work hard to develop and foster very good working relationships with their learners and a wide range of employers. These relationships are effective in helping learners to complete their training programmes.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Torfaen Training has an effective support structure that contributes successfully to learners' care, support and guidance.

The provider promotes the health and wellbeing of learners well. It has clear, easily understood policies and guidelines that focus on issues relevant to learners' wellbeing such as bullying and harassment, health and safety and safeguarding. These help to raise learners' awareness and understanding of a wide range of topics important for their general welfare. The provider deals with instances of unacceptable behaviour quickly, effectively and sensitively.

The provider encourages learners to think about their personal wellbeing through participation in curriculum activities; it has arrangements for learners to borrow bicycles from the centre's 'bike pool' and has secured reduced entry fees to a local leisure facility. The provider works closely with groups such as the local authority's health and wellbeing team to advise learners on a wide range of health-related subjects.

The provider gives learners detailed and appropriate advice and guidance before they start their training, and during their induction. This helps them to understand the requirements of their programmes and their responsibilities and fosters a positive attitude to learning.

Training officers and support staff use the results of learners' initial assessment, together with referral and other detailed educational and personal information, effectively. This helps to identify potential barriers to learning that learners may have. Training officers plan personalised and targeted support programmes that meet learners' specific training, learning and development needs.

The learning support team, learning coaches, counsellor and training officers work closely with learners to help them overcome personal, domestic, work or learning obstacles that may occur. The provider also works very closely and effectively with the local authority's adult learning team and a wide range of support agencies, such as Samaritans and the Youth Offending Team, to give learners specialist support.

Learners who have additional learning needs receive good and timely support that helps them to manage their learning and remain on programme.

The provider has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Good

The provider has a very inclusive approach to learners. Its ethos and culture makes sure that the skills and potential of each learner are valued. The provider has comprehensive policies and procedures in place that promote equality and diversity. All staff apply these principles well when they are working with learners. Staff understand the diversity of learners' backgrounds and work hard with them to reduce any barriers that may prevent them from succeeding in life and learning.

Overall, the provider has enough good quality resources to meet learners' needs, for example textbooks and workbooks, the training centre's library service, spellcheckers, calculators and workshop equipment. The provider has appropriate resources to support information and communication technology. All of the training rooms at the centre have interactive whiteboards and laptop computers. However, these are not always used to their best effect.

The provider has good quality accommodation for practical and theory training at the training centre. Accommodation in the workplace is generally of a good standard, and gives learners good opportunities to develop their vocational and practical skills.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

The Head of Adult Education and Training and senior managers have a clear vision for the direction of the company. They have clear aims, strategic objectives and plans that are focused on improving the performance of the company and the performance and wellbeing of learners. Senior managers receive regular reports on performance and have a clear overview of how learners are performing.

The Head of Adult Education and Training reports regularly to the Assistant Chief Executive (Communities) of Torfaen County Borough Council.

Senior managers take good account of Welsh Government priorities. The organisation has very good links with a wide range of partners, networks and employers.

Since the last inspection there is a greater sense of focus within the organisation. Torfaen Training staff and sub-contractors feel that the provider has a culture of

openness and transparency. This has improved staff morale, given them a greater sense of ownership and had a significant impact on improving the quality and standards of the organisation.

Staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. All staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities and how they impact on the successful operation of the organisation.

The provider has regular corporate 'away days' for staff, managers and sub-contractors. These are used well to disseminate information on organisational performance and provide opportunities for staff training and team building activities.

A wide range of monthly team meetings, together with regular one-to-one meetings between staff and managers, provide good lines of communication throughout the organisation. Internal communication is supported well by an intranet site.

The organisation monitors the performance of its staff well. There is a robust performance management system in place that links well to the provider's training and development programme. Outcomes from appraisals and the peer observation process are used well to identify training and development needs of staff and the strategic needs of the organisation.

Data analysis is used well to monitor and challenge performance, demonstrate trends, compare data against other providers and national benchmarks, identify best practice, inform the self-assessment process and inform planning processes for the organisation's continuous development.

The provider works very well with its sub-contractors and other stakeholders to promote the organisation's strategic direction.

The chief executive and senior managers are actively involved in local and national bodies that include the local 14-19 network and the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW).

Improving quality: Good

The provider has effective self-assessment procedures and processes, which are inclusive of learners, staff, sub-contractors and other stakeholders. However, the self-assessment report is too descriptive and not evaluative enough. The provider effectively benchmarks data against national standards.

Self-evaluation is supported through peer observations, quality visits and progress reviews, which allow for monitoring of systems, processes and progress towards targets. Lines of communication are well developed and support quality cycles.

Learners and stakeholders are provided with good opportunities to give feedback, voice their opinions and make suggestions through a variety of methods, including paper based, face to face and electronically. Provider staff evaluate feedback well and act upon it promptly. Results and actions from the evaluation process are communicated electronically and displayed within the centre on a 'You said, we did' board.

The Deputy Centre Manager and quality team have clearly defined responsibility for monitoring and improving quality and performance across the organisation. The quality team carry out frequent audit visits and monthly one-to-one meetings with all the sub-contractors. These meetings help to identify issues and examples of good practice, allowing the provider to implement timely interventions to improve quality. Sub-contractors demonstrate a commitment to quality improvement equal to that of the provider.

Almost all assessors use tracking documentation and monthly meetings with team leaders well to monitor progress against targets and identify any issues.

The provider holds regular standardisation and team meetings with its own and sub-contractor staff. This helps to promote a culture of continual improvement.

The provider's performance management system provides good opportunities for the continuous professional development of its own staff and the staff of sub-contractors.

The provider networks well with many local authority, community and charitable organisations and participates in several forums. Provider managers and staff have a strong involvement with NTfW. The Centre Manager currently holds the position of Vice Chair. Through the NTfW, the provider is involved in good practice fora and quality development initiatives.

The benefit of wider community involvement is demonstrated well, with learners having access to activities that they might not otherwise be aware of, for example the opportunity to try the horizontal climbing wall, which is promoting the 2012 Olympics.

The provider's judgements contained within the self-assessment report are a close match to the findings of the inspection team.

The provider has made good progress against the recommendations in the last Estyn inspection report.

Partnership working: Excellent

The provider has developed excellent partnership arrangements based on mutual trust and co-operation, particularly with its sub-contractors. These partnerships have a clear focus on the needs of all learners. The provider works very effectively with a wide range of local authority partners and networks, including schools, social services and others such as the Careers service and Jobcentre Plus.

The provider plays a major role in ensuring that the needs of all learners and the community are fully met. The level of its involvement also helps the provider not only to address its own corporate objectives but also to contribute fully to those of the local authority.

The provider's senior staff and managers are fully involved in all partnerships. In some instances, they take the lead and at other times they are proactive members of partnership working groups. This ensures that the provider has the knowledge and understanding of issues such as learners not in education or training (NEETS),

disadvantaged young people, vulnerable children and adults, the homeless and those with personal issues. This enables them to identify the most appropriate type of support either to provide or facilitate.

The provider's openness, reliability and consistency in working and attending partnership meetings and their flexibility in addressing issues that arise are key factors in the success of these partnerships.

The provider has excellent partnerships with a number of organisations, including the Gwent Police Force. Provider staff work with police staff, enabling them to match their existing skills to nationally recognised qualifications. The police force reciprocate by providing training and guidance to the provider's staff in their dealing with the general public, particularly making staff aware of the problems and issues that young people and adults have.

The provider's management and working relationship with its sub-contractors is excellent, with the learner at the core of its delivery. The provider has planned its contracting with new sub-contractors very effectively to allow the more experienced sub-contractors to support them in their development. The sub-contractors are treated as equals by the provider and enjoy an open and transparent relationship with them. Sub-contractors feel that the provider has removed 'the sub-contractor stigma' as a result of this partnership approach.

The provider has a robust sub-contractor quality management system in place. This includes excellent support arrangements, including regular meetings with sub-contractors as a group and on a one-to-one basis. The provider takes effective action with sub-contractors that do not meet the standards set, and if necessary has good contingency plans in place to move learners to another provider.

Resource management: Good

The provider manages its resources well. Managers use financial information very effectively to ensure that its expenditure is clearly aligned to the needs of learners. The provider employs an appropriate number of qualified and experienced staff. It deploys these well and ensures that learners are well supported.

The provider has effective procedures for managing staff through a performance management system. Managers identify staff training needs and encourage continuous development for its staff through a good staff training programme. Sub-contractor staff also participate in this training.

The provider holds regular meetings with staff at all levels. These meetings are valuable in ensuring that resources are used effectively and deployed and directed to support strategic priorities that focus fully on learners' requirements.

The provider is active in trying to improve efficiency. It has recently invested in digital pens for all training officers. These pens capture hand written notes and transfer them back to the head office, saving time and transport costs. However, it is too soon to judge how successful this initiative will be.

The provider has set targets for investment of resources within the self-assessment report. However, a few of these are not always 'Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely' (SMART) enough to measure progress accurately.

The provider has good systems in place within the organisation to enable Welsh speaking staff to work with learners wishing to study through the medium of Welsh across a range of occupational areas.

Learners benefit from good accommodation and resources at the provider's, partners', sub-contractors' and employers' workplace premises.

Overall, outcomes for learners are good, and the quality of training and teaching is good. The provider manages its finances and resources very well and therefore provides good value for money for its learners.

Appendix 1

Learner Satisfaction

Responses from the learner questionnaires completed before the inspection were generally positive. Learners are very satisfied with their experiences with the provider. Almost all learners would recommend the provider to other people. Many learners agree that training officers show them respect and listen to their concerns. Almost all learners enjoy their learning and feel safe at work and in the training centre.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Sandra Barnard HMI	Reporting Inspector
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