

Section 2

Sector summaries: Work-based learning

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Context

In January 2019, there were 19 contract holders commissioned by the Welsh Government to deliver work based learning in Wales. By August 2019, this has reduced to 18 contract holders. The majority of these providers work in consortia or use sub-contracted training providers. Approximately 100 sub-contracted providers deliver work-based learning. This is similar to January 2018. The latest published information shows that, in 2017-2018, 63,120 learners undertook work based learning programmes (Welsh Government, 2019i, p.15). Of these, approximately 20,515 enrolled on level 2 foundation apprenticeships and almost 35,305 on level 3 apprenticeships or level 4 higher apprenticeships. Around 7,300 learners undertook other training, including level 1 traineeship and employability programmes (Welsh Government, 2019i).

Between September 2018 and July 2019, we inspected two work based learning providers. The findings from these inspections have informed this report.

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Standards

Standards are good in the two providers inspected this year. Most learners on apprenticeship programmes develop a wide range of vocational skills and theory knowledge that are closely matched to their work roles. They make useful and relevant connections between the theory they learn and their job roles. Most make sound progress and are confident in applying their vocational skills in their workplaces.

In traineeship engagement programmes, most learners develop a good range of relevant skills for employability. Many traineeship learners improve their confidence and self-esteem and overcome significant barriers to learning and employment.

Many apprenticeship learners are clear about their own progress and use relevant targets to focus their efforts and to improve their work. However, a few learners rely too much on support from their assessors when setting assessment targets or they complete their frameworks later than expected.

Many learners make positive progress in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills development through effective use of the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit. A few learners achieve essential skills qualifications at a higher level than their framework requirements. A few Welsh language speakers choose to undertake some assessments through the medium of Welsh, although many learners do not recognise the benefits of Welsh as a workplace skill.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good in the two providers inspected this year. Most learners enjoy their learning, show a positive work ethic, and build a good rapport with their teachers, assessors and employers.

Many learners, including those who start from a low base, improve their confidence, self-awareness, resilience and social skills. They develop independent learning and thinking skills and use these well, such as when carrying out daily tasks in the workplace. Many collaborate with each other, manage their time effectively and work well under pressure. They respond willingly to questions and group discussion, although in one provider a few learners do not contribute enough.

Many traineeship learners who have significant barriers to learning, such as mental health issues, special educational needs or unsettled home lives, are attentive in classes and participate well. Most attend regularly, although in one provider a minority of learners do not attend regularly or do not sustain attendance throughout the day.

In traineeship classes and in progress reviews, learners discuss the benefits of healthy eating and positive lifestyle choices. For example, they discuss the benefits of physical activity, the dangers of drugs and over indulgence in alcohol. In one provider, a few learners do not develop an understanding of radicalisation and extremism.

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Most learners have a secure understanding of health and safety in the workplace and know whom to contact should problems, such as bullying or harassment, arise at work, in the training centre or at college. Most learners improve their understanding of equality and diversity. They understand how to stay safe online and in one provider use a range of innovative online resources to help improve their wellbeing. This provider developed a variety of useful 'apps' to access information and guidance on a variety of safety and safeguarding issues.

Many learners take part in worthwhile projects and charitable activities, often linked to their learning pathways. For example, hair and beauty learners provide treatments in care homes and construction learners build outdoor facilities in a local school. Other activities, such as volunteering in food banks, working with the homeless and tidying up outdoor spaces, help learners appreciate environmental sustainability and develop social awareness.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teaching and learning experiences are good in the two providers inspected this year. Most teachers and assessors deliver well-planned and structured sessions that develop learners' theory knowledge, technical competence and life skills. Most have relevant and up-to-date subject expertise and vocational experience, which they draw on well to help learners make good progress in both practical and theory work. For example, in hospitality, an assessor helps a trainee chef prepare complex dishes and, in electro-technical engineering, another draws on up-to-date knowledge of wiring regulations when discussing a learner's electrical plant maintenance plan.

Most teachers who deliver traineeship engagement programmes adapt their teaching to meet the needs of learners. For example, they plan a good balance of theory and practical outdoor activities for learners involved in a military preparation course. In off the job sessions, many teachers use high-quality resources to engage learners and create stimulating sessions. For example, in one provider, they use tablet computers and web-based tools to create interactive quizzes and tasks as well as using industry standard equipment, such as robotic arms and computer aided design technologies, to develop vocational skills.

Many teachers and assessors set high expectations for learners and use questioning to extend learners' understanding and challenge them to reflect on their learning. In a very few cases, assessors ask questions that are too leading or teachers allow one or two learners to dominate discussions, preventing other learners from contributing.

In on-the-job training, nearly all assessors maintain regular contact with learners. They use individual learning plans and contact logs in progress reviews to help learners plan their progress towards achieving their learning goals. In a few cases, one provider sets targets that are either too generic or overly focused on assessment outcomes. This results in learners being unclear as to what they need to do to improve their learning. In a very few cases, in one provider, assessors do not make sure that employers are kept fully apprised of their employees' progress.



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Providers have well-established and strong relationships with a wide range of employers and are particularly responsive to learners' aspirations, the needs of employers and the regional economy. They deliver a wide range of vocational pathways, such as advanced manufacturing, health and social care, digital marketing and professional cookery. On most training programmes, learners participate in realistic or simulated work related activities. Providers offer clear progression routes for traineeship learners and between apprenticeship programmes.

Most teachers and assessors encourage learners to use the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. In a few cases, assessors do not take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to develop these skills through learners' job roles or do not give learners enough feedback on what they need to do to improve their literacy or numeracy skills.

One provider offers useful Welsh language classes tailored to the learners' vocational needs, such as for business administration apprentices in a local council. However, only a few assessors encourage learners to develop or improve their use of Welsh as a workplace skill. Overall, although providers offer learners the option to be assessed through the medium of Welsh, too few Welsh speaking learners complete assessments or undertake aspects of their programme through the medium of Welsh.

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are good in the two providers inspected this year. The providers' arrangements for identifying learners who require additional support for learning are suitable. Learning support teams offer learners a range of valuable services, including learning support, counselling, advice and guidance. Providers work well with appropriate external agencies to support learners who face personal, financial or health challenges. In a few cases, identification of learning support needs comes too late in the programme to allow learners to progress at the pace they are capable of.

Providers' support arrangements for learners on traineeship programmes are particularly effective. For example, providers use attendance and wellbeing officers and resilience coaches to provide timely and useful support to learners who are at risk of disengaging from learning. Providers also promote healthy lifestyles and support personal development well. Support arrangements in a few delivery partners are less effective because they do not engage well with the relatively few apprenticeship learners who require extra support.

Providers are successful in providing opportunities for learners to take part in a range of community and fundraising activities. For example, one group of learners built an outdoor learning environment for a local school using materials donated by their employers, and traineeship learners interviewed local business owners about how they interact with their communities.



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Many staff support learners well to develop their appreciation of key equality and diversity issues. For example, they routinely discuss equality, diversity, values of tolerance and respect as well as encouraging learners to develop empathy and challenge stereotypes.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in one provider inspected this year and good in the other. Senior leaders provide clear direction to staff and partners. In one provider, leadership is guided by a well-established set of behaviours and, in the other, leaders have established a supportive and positive culture that promotes the wellbeing of learners and staff well.

Leaders in both providers respond well to regional and national priorities, for example by delivering growth in higher and degree apprenticeships and in Welsh Government priority areas. Both providers develop customised, responsive provision that meets employer needs and benefits learners. In one provider, there are outstanding and highly effective links with a broad range of employers.

Governors play an important role in setting strategic priorities and are well informed on providers' strengths and areas for improvement. Providers make very good use of data and first-hand evidence as part of quality monitoring and improvement processes. Senior leaders, partners and governors are fully involved in self evaluation. Providers make effective use of learner and employer surveys, due diligence checks, teaching and learning observations, best practice sharing sessions, and face-to-face meetings with delivery partners to help inform quality improvement strategies. In one provider, self-evaluation and improvement planning is too heavily based on the performance of a few large delivery partners.

Both providers use staff performance appraisals well to plan useful professional development activities for staff. Partner organisations have appropriate access to training programmes. In one provider, nearly all assessors undertake highly beneficial annual vocational placements, ensuring that their expertise is current.

Providers monitor financial performance and compliance well. Leaders ensure investment in a useful range of capital developments that enable learners to access high quality, modern learning resources.

Follow-up activity

Neither of the providers inspected this year requires follow-up activity. This year, follow-up activities have been undertaken with three providers. One provider is judged to have made at least sufficient progress in respect of the key issues for action following previous Estyn visits and has been removed from the list of providers requiring Estyn monitoring. A further two providers are judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following their most recent Estyn inspection and have been removed from the list of providers requiring re-inspection.

Coleg Cambria

One of Coleg Cambria's strategic objectives is to provide employer-led learning. The provider develops many and varied opportunities to engage all types of employers, from micro-businesses to large multinational organisations. By cultivating long-lasting mutually beneficial partnerships it provides valuable opportunities for learners and contributes to economic growth for the region.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)

