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Dear Mr Liles

Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on Coleg Sir Gâr

Following the Annual Review of Performance visit to your institution on 23 to 25 June 2014, this letter forms an annual report based on the outcomes of that visit. The letter is published on the Estyn website.

Mark Evans HMI and Alun Connick HMI evaluated the current performance of the institution and reviewed the progress made against the recommendations arising from earlier inspections. They held discussions with the principal and senior managers, tutors, learners and members of the governing body. They scrutinised documentation and other evidence. They also considered the quality of teaching and learning through learning walks and scrutiny of the provider's classroom observation process.

At the end of the visit the inspectors reported their findings to the principal of the institution and other members of the senior leadership team.

Outcome of the link inspector visit

Since the inspection in May 2013, the college has worked well to address the recommendations made by the inspection team. The positive impact of development work undertaken can be seen in key aspects of the college's work and improvements in some areas.

1 Outcomes and standards

The college recruits learners from an area that includes many disadvantaged wards and almost a half of its learners are drawn from areas with a high index of deprivation. Many of these learners have poor basic skills on entry. The college has

a policy of inclusivity and encourages learners to progress to higher level courses and offer many learners on A level and other Level 3 courses additional support to help them succeed. The college has maintained its performance trends over the last three years and has succeeded in improving completion rates by five percentage points. However, attainment has slipped slightly over the same period. Success rates in about a third of learning areas are below national comparators.

Across the college, approximately 44% of the enrolments are on long courses. Overall, the college's performance in 2012-2013 in the key performance indicators, for completion, attainment and overall success, matches the sector average. This represents an improvement in success and completion rates on the previous year. However, there remains too much variation in performance between different learning and subject areas.

Overall, most learners on short courses successfully complete their learning programmes.

2 Essential skills

The college uses initial assessment outcomes well to identify those learners who require further diagnostic testing and delivers appropriate support. The college enrolls a number of learners with relatively poor literacy and numeracy skills. There are good strategies to support these learners, including discrete sessions, specialist basic skills support classes and integrated support for targeted learners within vocational and academic classes. There are also good Drop-in facilities for learners who need help in developing essential skills and learners are well informed about how they can access additional help.

Learners' success rates in Essential Skills Wales qualifications are generally good, having improved between 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. The rates are now above the sector average at Levels 1 and 2. At Level 3, essential skills success rates still lag nine percentage points behind the national comparator, despite being delivered by the same tutors. This is a result of the inclusive admissions policy to offer open access entry to Level 3 courses.

The college measures learners' achievements in developing their basic and essential skills. It is in the process of implementing a strategy to enable it to analyse college-wide data and evaluate the progress that learners make in achieving literacy and numeracy objectives within their individual learning plans.

3 Teaching and assessment

The college has strengthened its focus on improving the quality of teaching and assessment. This was recently recognised when the college received the annual Colleges Wales award for teaching and learning for its 'innovate' project. This involved using a comprehensive range of strategies and initiatives to develop and improve teaching across the college. There is an appropriate structure of accountability to improve and support teaching and assessment. College staff, including senior managers and learning mentors, have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for challenging and supporting teaching staff to improve their practice.

Across the college, the identification and sharing of good teaching practice are improving. Curriculum leaders have a clear focus on improving teaching and assessment within their learning areas. The quality of teaching and the impact of mentoring and support are routinely monitored across the college through teaching observation assessments.

4 Curriculum

The college delivers a wide range of courses that meet the needs of learners, employers and the wider community. It uses labour market information well to inform the planning of the curriculum. The merger with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David Group has enabled a wider curriculum for learners and has considerably extended the progression opportunities available to them. The college works effectively with local secondary schools to offer joint A level courses and a good range of vocational programmes. It also works well with local industry to offer an appropriate range of training programmes to meet their needs. Good use is made of these links to secure work experience placements for learners and to gain information relating to the training needs of industry.

5 Leadership and management

The principal has set a clear strategic direction for the college. He has led the college into group working with a clear vision and aims while still retaining the established college identity. He is well supported by senior leaders and governors. The senior management team are a coherent group who work effectively as a team. The board of governors is well informed, has a clear vision and provides good levels of strategic support and challenge. Strategic planning across the college is comprehensive and detailed. The senior team has worked effectively to merge the college with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David Group. Senior managers have ensured that staff at all levels across the college understand the benefits of group working. Middle managers also work well together to implement the college's aims. They have clear performance targets with an emphasis on the need to improve learner standards and the quality of teaching and assessment.

Communication at all levels across the college is good with staff being well informed about developments and receiving a wide range of information. Robust performance data is accessed by all managers and staff and is routinely monitored and reviewed against targets. The college has an ambitious estates development strategy based on a clear vision to develop a college learning environment that is appropriate to the needs of future learners.

6 Leadership and management (quality assurance)

The college has a detailed and comprehensive quality assurance process. It has clear improvement plans and strategies for key areas of provision. It has continued to develop its quality assurance procedures to meet its aims including, for example, improving the rates at which learners achieve their qualifications and continuing to improve the standard of teaching and assessment. The college has a clear management structure to oversee all aspects of the quality assurance of courses and has robust procedures in place to secure improvements at course level. Curriculum

managers have a good understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement in the subject areas for which they are responsible. They have clear targets and, where necessary, action plans for improvement. The quality of teaching and learning is routinely monitored and there are systems to identify underperformance. Overall, the college's quality assurance procedures have a clear focus on tracking the progress of learners, raising attainment and improving the quality of teaching and assessment.

7 Summary on progress on the recommendations outlined in the report of May 2013

Overall, the college has made good progress in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection report of made in May 2013.

The college has focused strongly on the improvement of teaching and learning and this has impacted positively on quality and standards. It has good initiatives in place to further strengthen learners' abilities to use and develop their Welsh language skills.

8 Other

Partnerships

In the cluster groups, there are strong links between schools and the college. These work closely together to provide a broad range of options for school learners. For example, good partnership working within the network has led to the development of a construction unit involving a local employer. Across the area that the college covers, staff deliver vocational education to more than 1,000 school pupils who attend the college or are taught by college staff at their schools. This includes Welsh-medium provision and ranges from pre-Entry programmes to Level 3 courses.

The college is represented on a Youth Access Initiative panel where case conferences take place to consider and plan what is the most appropriate option for learners at risk of becoming NEET. There are good examples of the college enabling these learners to access tasters and vocational provision that encourage them to re-engage and make progress in education and training.

The college has undertaken helpful research into the skills that local employers want and this has been used well to inform the planning of provision with other education and training providers to reduce NEETS.

The college also participates in a 14-16 Transition Group that co-ordinates activities to help learners gain access to broader options. School-to-college information sharing is increasing and some schools, mainly 11-16 partner schools, shared useful pupil information with the college last year. This year they plan to give the college more detailed information on their learners' academic progress, Essential Skills results and CAT scores. Information about more able and talented (MAT) learners is shared and used to develop leadership training days for them. There is still scope to increase the extent to which schools provide information about learners to ensure that their transition from school to college is managed successfully.

Welsh

The college is making good progress in enabling and encouraging learners to complete more of their formal learning and assessment in Welsh or bilingually.

The learning areas of agriculture and wood trades have led in maintaining and developing Welsh-medium provision across the college. The college encourages learners in key occupational areas, such as Hair and Beauty, Business, Public Services, Care, Sport, Art, and Music Technology to undertake accredited language development courses. It has strengthened staffing resources to deliver Welsh medium courses in a few well-prioritised occupational areas where it has identified that Welsh language improves learners' employability. In a few areas, it has also improved learners' prospects for progressing into Welsh-medium higher education.

The college has strengthened its efforts to raise learners' awareness of Welsh language and culture and to improve their motivation to develop their language skills. The introduction of the 'Cymraeg yn Gyntaf' initiative has encouraged staff to engage with learners in Welsh during induction and to use the language incidentally in college. A few learners undertake initial assessment through the medium of Welsh, but the college does not have a systematic approach to assessing the level of learners' Welsh language skills, which might inform planning and enable it to target and better support language development.

Many learners use Welsh incidentally in classes, and the last five years has seen an increase in the number of learners who undertake assessment bilingually or in Welsh. Ninety-two learners completed the Communication Essential Skill in Welsh or bilingually in 2010 to 2011 and 72 in 2011 to 2012. There are many examples of learners using Welsh in informal settings across the college. Learners feel that the college encourages students to develop a pride in the language and that they have good access to support to further develop their own language skills.

In classrooms, there are many displays that celebrate and raise learners' awareness of the language, culture and economy of Wales. Many learners are aware of initiatives and events that the college holds to raise awareness and a group of learners produces a high quality Welsh language magazine.

Learner voice

The college uses an appropriate range of information from the learner voice questionnaires and other surveys to improve the learning experience and to inform the planning and development of provision.

Two thousand, three hundred and twelve learners in the college completed the learner voice survey in 2014. Of these 1,963 were full-time learners. This represents approximately 85% of the total number of learners attending the college. Thirty-four per cent of respondents rate the college as very good overall, in line with the sector average. A further 47% rate the college as good; this is above the sector average of 43%. Overall, 81% rate the college as good or better, and this is three percentage points above the sector average. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents state that their course was better than or as they expected. This is one percentage point above the

sector average. The strongest response in the learner voice survey is for the teaching and training at the college with a 45% rating, one percentage point above the sector average.

Merger with the Trinity St David Group

The college has made good progress in its merger with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David Group. It has worked well to ensure that the merger benefits learners in widening the range of courses available to them and delivering programmes from Entry Level to higher education in the local region. Senior managers and staff at all levels have a positive view of the merger and most recognise the benefits of group working.

The merger has improved the expertise available to the college and widened the resources available for teaching and learning. The college has ensured that staff at all levels are fully aware of developments and engaged in the group working process. Collaborative working has significantly improved the opportunities available for learners to progress from Level 1 to higher education programmes in the same geographical region.

The college was last inspected in May 2013 and has made good progress in meeting the recommendations in the inspection report. The college has clear plans and strategies for improvement. Inspectors endorse these priorities and inspectors will continue to monitor overall progress through their link role with the institution.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve success and attainment rates
- R2 Address the inconsistencies in performance across learning and subject areas

Next steps

Mark Evans HMI and Alun Connick HMI will continue to monitor overall progress through their link role with the college.

Yours sincerely

Lin Howells
Assistant Director