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Dear Ms Lusher

Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on Pembrokeshire College

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

HMIs Liam Kealy, Sandra Barnard and Steve Bell evaluated the current performance of the institution and reviewed the progress made against the recommendations arising from earlier inspections.

Inspectors held discussions with the principal and senior managers, tutors, learners and members of the governing body. They scrutinised documentation, including evidence on the progress made against each of the previous inspection recommendations and undertook two learning walks.

Inspectors reported their findings to the principal of the institution and other members of the senior leadership team.

Outcome of the link inspector visits

1 Outcomes and standards

Since the inspection of Pembrokeshire College in February 2011, the college has worked well to address the four recommendations left by the inspection team. The college has carried forward any outstanding issues they have identified into the quality improvement plan. These issues are reviewed regularly with senior management staff and curriculum area managers as part of the quality review procedures.

Course data for 2012-2013 shows that, in nearly all sector subject areas, most learners attained their qualifications. The overall attainment rate was closely in line with the national comparator at 93%. Overall, completion rates were slightly below the national comparator (90% against a national comparator of 92%). Completion rates were below 90% in 10 sector subject areas. The college's overall success rate has remained constant at 83% for the last three years; however, the national comparator improved over the same period to 84%. The college's weighted success rate was 75%, three percentage points below the average for the sector.

Eight-six per cent of college enrolments were on long courses in 2012/2013 and most learners completed their studies. However, completion declined in just under half of the sector subject areas and was below 90% in almost half of these. The college improved its overall attainment rate for long courses by two percentage points over the two-year period. Most learners (94%) on long courses achieved their qualification in 2012/2013. Attainment was below 90% in only three sector subject areas affecting 12% of enrolments. The college improved attainment in 10 sector subject areas and had one of the highest attainment rates in the sector for its long courses over the last two years. Three-year trends in attainment have remained steady between 92% and 94%, with completion rates steady or slightly rising between 89% and 90%.

2 Essential Skills

Success rates in Essential Skills Wales qualifications have improved over a three-year period and since the last inspection. However, there is significant variation in the success rates for the different Essential Skills. Success rates in Application of Number and Communication were close to the national comparator; however, the remaining four Essential Skills Wales qualifications had success rates slightly or significantly below the national comparator.

The college has addressed the variation in success rates for Essential Skills by reorganising their delivery and bringing all its essential skills specialists into one team. This team will work with subject specialists to make sure that the teaching of essential skills is contextualised in the subjects studied by learners. The college has also used the outcomes of learners' initial assessments to group learners by level within their subject area to ensure that they are taught according to their level and needs. In addition, the college has also increased tutorial time for learners to help them to improve their wider key skills. The college is also to appoint three full-time support staff to provide further help to learners through surgeries and one-to-one workshops.

The college has implemented a strategy to support learners and help them to achieve their goals. It has appointed learner coaches, invested in learner involvement activities, and organised pre-enrolment taster courses. As a result, learners feel well supported and valued. They have a high level of confidence that their tutors and the learning coaches are able to help them resolve any personal problems that hinder their learning. Learners are very aware of the support and help available to them to catch up on any work they miss through absence. The college has improved its retention rates on full-time course by 1.1% compared to the same period last year and by 0.4% on part-time courses.

3 Teaching and assessment

The college has a mature programme for observing teaching and learning. Curriculum managers regularly observe staff and produce graded observations of teaching and learning. Managers use the results effectively to inform the college's appraisal process, staff development programme and self-evaluation systems.

Managers and the observation team moderate their evaluations. However, the college has not yet extended its observation and moderation process to include partners from other colleges to get a wider standardisation, as it does within its work-based learning consortium.

The college uses teachers whose classes are 'Excellent' to share their good practice with colleagues at 'open learning sessions'. Learning and teaching mentors give effective support to teachers identified as having areas for improvement in their practice. As a result the college has increased the proportion of teachers awarded 'good or better' in classroom observations over the last three years.

Learning coaches provide additional support to individual learners. They are a key part of the college's strategy to increase attendance and retention. They monitor learners' attendance and provide additional pastoral, tutorial, or learning support as required. However, the college does not monitor or observe learning coaches as part of its programme of observing teaching.

4 Curriculum

The college uses labour market intelligence well to plan the curriculum. Senior staff make good use of the national learning skills observatory to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of learners and employers in the area.

The college has particularly strong links with a wide range of local and national employers. College staff hold regular meetings and forums with employers to involve them in the design and delivery of the curriculum and discuss their training needs. Many college tutors have good personal links with employers and this enables them to seek and establish a wide range of work placements and learning opportunities to enhance the learning experience. Curriculum managers have good links to key industries in the area as a result, and use this knowledge to inform teaching.

Staff organise a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as taking part in skills competitions, visits to historical sites and fashion houses. The college also runs a 'What's on Wednesday' (WOW) initiative that involves activities and guest speakers. These events enrich the learning experience and widen learners' knowledge of curriculum, employment and university-entrance opportunities and thus help them to progress in their chosen careers.

5 Leadership and management

The college has maintained the good performance identified in the last inspection. It has maintained its outcomes for main qualifications and has effective arrangements

to evaluate the standards achieved by learners and the quality of its provision and to identify areas for improvement.

Since the inspection in 2011, the college has appointed a new principal and reduced the size of its senior leadership team. The college has reduced its operating costs to re-deploy resources to teaching and learning and to help learners improve their outcomes. The college is led well by the Principal, senior leadership team and governing body. It has a clear strategic direction. Staff have a good understanding of the college's priorities. Senior managers have a thorough understanding of the nature of the Pembrokeshire economy and use this well to plan the curriculum.

The college has also responded appropriately to national priorities and reorganised its governing body structure in line with new legislation. It has created a board that focuses on the business and strategic direction of the college and an advisory body that enables the college to consult with a wide range of stakeholders regarding its strategic direction and curriculum. The board has a good understanding of the performance of the college and works appropriately to analyse performance at sector subject level.

6 Leadership and management (quality assurance)

The college has robust procedures in place to measure its own performance and to support improvement. The college's self-assessment report is detailed and draws on a good range of information, including individual curriculum area and faculty self-assessment reports.

As a result, curriculum area managers have a detailed grasp of the performance of their areas. Senior managers have an accurate understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. The college's quality improvement plan has a strong focus on areas for improvement and makes good use of measurable targets to monitor and evaluate progress. It has identified what it needs to do to improve outcomes for learners and has put in place a range of strategies designed to achieve this.

Notably, the college has identified learner attendance and completion rates as key areas for improvement. This focus is evident in all aspects of the college's quality procedures. The college corporation holds senior managers and curriculum area managers to account for the performance of the college and challenges them to improve

Staff at all levels in the college use data to monitor performance and respond quickly and appropriately where key indicators show concerns. Teaching staff work with the four learning coaches to monitor learners' attendance and put in place support for those whose attendance is beginning to dip. Weekly retention meetings monitor attendance and retention at a whole college, curriculum area and course level, and these meetings ensure that managers at all levels are aware of their current performance against their targets. In the first year of the use of learning coaches there is some evidence to indicate an improvement in attendance and retention rates but it is too early to know what their full impact is likely to be.

The college is in the process of rationalising its provision to reduce the quantity of courses with very low learner numbers or poor success rates and to prepare for the change to Learning Area Programmes. Senior managers base their decisions on the agreed college strategy, taking account of information about demand for courses and successful or unsuccessful course outcomes.

7 Partnerships

The college has forged working links with Pembrokeshire County Council in order to review and reorganise post-16 learning in Pembrokeshire. The two partners commissioned a review of post-16 learning and are currently working to implement its recommendations. They have jointly appointed a transformation manager responsible for implementing the recommendations of the review and an estates manager. The estates manager has responsibility for developing the college estate and the local authority's 21st Century Schools programme.

The plan involves establishing a single sixth form centre in the north of the county, based on the college grounds, and a vocational centre in the south of the county. Additionally, all post-16 funding will be routed through the college, which will also take responsibility for all 14-16 vocational learning.

The preferred options for post-16 learning in the county have been agreed by the college's governing body and the local authority cabinet. However, the plans are dependent upon the outcomes of the local authority's consultations about schools re-organisation. Therefore the final pattern of post-16 provision remains uncertain.

The college is also increasing the extent of collaboration with higher education partners to expand opportunities for learners to gain higher level skills. The college has formed partnerships with University of Wales Trinity St David and Swansea University, and within the wider College and University Skills Partnership programme (which includes a wider range of further education institutions including the Neath Port Talbot Group and Gower College Swansea). These are intended to extend the curriculum offer for STEM subjects, particularly for learners employed in the energy sector.

8 Learner Voice

Almost 1,400 learners completed the learner voice survey at Pembrokeshire College. Eighty per cent of respondents considered the college to be good or very good, compared to 77% nationally. This was an improvement of 6 percentage points on the previous year. Similarly, 87% thought their course was better than expected, which was at the national benchmark (no change from the previous year).

The college improved its scores across the five themes from last year, and was at or near to the national benchmark on all of them – apart from 'information and advice', where it was four percentage points below the national benchmark.

Learners' comments were generally positive about relationships with staff, support from tutors and social aspects of college life. Learners suggest a range of improvements, many of which focus on food and prices in the canteen, timetabling,

bus times, and the development of smoking shelters. A few students are concerned about bullying, disruptive behavior and noise in study areas.

Senior managers and learner representatives make good use of learner voice results to plan improvements. For example, as a result of learner concerns about disruptive behaviour, the college has appointed a disciplinary officer and is involving learners in reviewing the disciplinary policy. Learners use the survey results at course level to discuss improvements to courses with other learners and tutors.

The learner council provides a useful platform to discuss new developments with learner representatives, in order that the college can canvas opinions and tailor new developments to the needs of students. Student representatives respond positively to this. They have a high degree of confidence that the college is seriously seeking to improve the learner experience. Learners are very aware of the outcomes of learner involvement activities through the college's 'You said, We Did' initiatives. Learners are confident that the college makes changes as a result of their input.

Student representatives have a high level of personal confidence. They conduct themselves in a professional manner and offer a robust challenge to the senior management team.

Senior managers also carry out classroom visits to find out directly from students what they consider to be the stronger and weaker aspects of their courses. The college collates this information at sector subject area and whole college level and managers use the information appropriately to plan improvements.

9 Welsh

Since the last inspection, the college has increased the extent of assessment in Welsh available to learners. Learners completed 35 assessments in Welsh in 2012/13 as part of their main programme area (compared to 18 in the previous academic year).

The college has increased the number of learners who improve their Welsh language skills. In 2012-2013 learners undertook 105 assessments in Welsh as part of the WJEC 'Iaith ar Waith' units. This was mainly in beauty, hairdressing, boat-building, and child care. A further 253 students completed accredited Welsh language or language awareness courses. Overall, an extra 57 learners completed these compared to the previous year.

Most staff at the college speak English only. The college is supporting staff to improve their Welsh language skills through training and by providing resources. For example, one member of staff in ICT has created sound-files for everyday greetings and vocational terms. Other staff are currently implementing this initiative across other subject areas. The college also provides posters for staff and learners which display vocational terminology in Welsh. The college has created a Welsh language team to help staff to introduce the language and aspects of Welsh culture into the curriculum and to meet the requirements of its Welsh Language Scheme.

Recommendations:

- R1 Improve learner completion rates;
- R2 improve the variation in success rates for the different Essential Skills; and
- R3 implement changes to the scheme for observing teaching and learning.

Next steps

The college should respond to all the issues noted in this letter as part of its future planning for improvement. The college has already identified a range of areas for improvement, including retention and overall success rates and improving learners' literacy and numeracy skills.

Liam Kealy and Sandra Barnard HMI will continue to monitor overall progress through their link role with the institution.

Yours sincerely

Lin Howells
Assistant Director