



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

**Gwent ACLP
Coleg Gwent
Usk Campus
The Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1XJ**

Date of inspection: February 2015

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

The Gwent Adult Community Learning Partnership is a large partnership covering five unitary authorities in south east Wales: Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen. According to figures from StatsWales, in 2014 the total population of the five authorities was estimated to be around 582,000.

The partnership ranges over a very diverse area and includes: the city of Newport; the south Wales Valleys communities of Ebbw Vale, Blackwood, Pontypool, Tredegar and Caerphilly; the new town of Cwmbran; and the largely rural county of Monmouthshire with its population centres of Abergavenny, Monmouth and Chepstow.

Levels of deprivation vary considerably across the range of the partnership. Nearly a quarter of Blaenau Gwent's areas are within the 10% most deprived areas of Wales. Caerphilly and Newport have around 15% of their areas in the 10% most deprived areas, with Torfaen at 7%. Monmouthshire has none of its areas in the 10% most deprived areas of Wales.

The percentage of working age adults qualified to below level 2 also varies dramatically across the range of the partnership. In Blaenau Gwent, 19.5% of working age adults are not qualified to level 2 – the highest level in Wales. By contrast, Monmouthshire has one of the lowest levels at 11.2%. The Wales average is 14%.

Employment follows a similar pattern. In June 2014, the average employment rate for adults between 16 and 64 in Wales was 69.5%. Across the five authorities covered by the partnership, Monmouthshire had the highest employment rate at 74.6%, followed by Newport (70.1%), Caerphilly (68.5%), Torfaen (67.7%) and Blaenau Gwent (63.7%).

In Newport, the percentage of people from a non-white background is 11.8%. The Wales average is 4.0%. The proportion of people from a non-white background in the other four authorities is less than the Wales average.

Across all five authorities, the proportion of people aged over three who say they can speak Welsh is lower than the national average of 27%. The highest level is in Caerphilly where 21.4% of the population say they can speak Welsh.

The partnership is led by Coleg Gwent and consists of the college's franchised partners: the local authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen. In addition Caerphilly, Newport and Torfaen local authorities offer provision through their own directly funded delivery. The partnership in its current form was established in February 2013. In 2012-2013, it had 16,595 accredited enrolments, reducing to 15,223 in 2013-2014.

The partnership has not been inspected in its current form. The most recent inspection was of the previous structure of the partnership in 2009.

Summary

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

Current performance

The partnership is good because:

- Learners achieve good standards on their courses; their success rates compare well to national comparators
- Partners work well together to plan the curriculum and align provision to national priorities and local needs
- Teaching and assessment are good or better in most cases
- The quality of leadership and management is good; there is a good level of strategic planning and good arrangements in place for quality assurance and planning for improvement

Prospects for improvement

The partnership's prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- It has a track record of improving outcomes for learners
- It has a good range of provision that enables learners from priority areas to access education
- It has a strong partnership and an ethos of collaboration between partners and other agencies
- It has a strong quality assurance system in place, leading to improved outcomes for learners
- It has clear strategic leadership and plans for improvement

Recommendations

- R1 Increase the proportion of courses in which learners achieve success rates in line with the best in the sector
- R2 Review safeguarding reporting procedures and put in place an appropriate overarching strategy for monitoring safeguarding across the partnership

What happens next?

The reporting inspector will ask the partnership to provide a good practice case study to exemplify the good practice of its quality improvement work and of Blaenau Gwent local authority's adult learning service's charitable trust to deliver adult learning. The sector lead inspector for adult community learning will undertake a monitoring visit in about 12 months to check the progress the partnership has made.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

In 2012-2013, learners across the partnership completed their course and successfully achieved their qualifications at rates around the national averages for similar providers in Wales. Over the three year period from 2010 to 2013, the partnership has shown a steady increase in the rates at which learners succeed.

The partnership's unpublished data for 2013-2014 is robust and shows that the trend of increasing success has continued, with a distinct rise in the rate at which learners complete and attain their qualifications in the most recent year. All five counties within the partnership show a consistent improving trend. This pattern of rising success rates notably includes learners from the most deprived areas of the partnership who are successfully completing their qualifications at rates comparable to those from the most wealthy.

Men and women and learners from different ethnic groups complete their courses and attain their qualifications at rates comparable to the national averages for their groups.

However, while the overall pattern of rising success rates is consistent across most courses, in a few programmes, such as Essential Skills Wales Qualifications at a few partners, learners still succeed at rates below national averages.

Overall, learners across the partnership engage well with their lessons and nearly all make good progress. Nearly all learners are aware of their starting points and their learning goals. They respond well to the tasks they are set and are confident to ask questions, listen carefully and engage in discussions with their fellow learners and their tutors. Learners across a range of subjects develop their literacy and numeracy skills. For example, learners in hairdressing classes that engage disadvantaged learners use dictionaries to check the spelling of their written work.

Learners in woodturning classes develop their practical skills effectively and produce objects of increasing complexity as they move through the course. Learners in art classes enjoy learning new techniques and skills and challenge themselves to produce original work. Most learners on independent living skills courses can use the computer well to write simple documents with correct spelling and sentence construction.

Learners taking literacy classes make good progress in their lessons, and improve their reading, writing and use of spoken language. They make good use of a range of written material, images and electronic media to develop their understanding of language. In numeracy classes, learners develop their skills in prediction and deduction well, and learn new techniques for calculation. In many cases, learners use the new skills they have learnt to enhance their lives outside the classroom, for example through helping their children with homework.

Learners taking English as a second language make good progress and develop their English language skills well. Many learners successfully complete their course and a majority progress to further courses at the same or higher level.

Learners in a few classes develop their understanding of Welsh language and aspects of Welsh life appropriately.

Wellbeing: Good

Most learners engage well with learning and enjoy their classes. They show respect for other learners and their tutors. They feel well supported by their tutors and their peers to achieve their learning goals. They work well together and support each other to progress. As a result attendance is good in most sessions, and completion rates are high. Learners are proud of their achievements and annual adult learning awards celebrate their success.

Staff at learning centres are welcoming and learners feel safe in their learning environments. Learners know whom to contact if they have safety concerns and are confident that the partnership would address their concerns.

Many learners grow in confidence whilst learning and are positive about the benefits they gain from participating. They use the skills they have gained very well in other settings, including volunteering, supporting other learners or promoting adult learning. One learner, who has herself flourished since learning to read in adult literacy classes, volunteers as a companion to a visually and hearing impaired local resident, reading and talking to her to brighten her life.

Others volunteer as centre learning representatives and participate in the running of their learning centres. A few young learners have progressed to mentoring and advocating for other young learners. Learners also promote courses through social media and help recruit new learners.

Many learners report that their health and wellbeing have improved through the social contact they have in class and the process of learning new skills together.

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

The partnership works very well to address national and local priorities for adult learning. It takes good account of a range of information to plan the curriculum, including labour market intelligence and demographic information. As a result the partnership is able to tailor the curriculum effectively to meet the needs of learners at a local level. It has increased enrolments from priority areas and in priority subjects over the last three years.

The partnership works well to help learners raise their level of qualification and improve their employability. Many courses provide opportunities for learners to achieve qualifications or credit. These courses include GCSE courses in English and mathematics, City and Guilds courses and British Computer Society qualifications, as

well as Agored credits. The partnership also delivers courses that lead to vocationally specific qualifications such as the Construction Skills Certification Scheme, CACHE teaching assistants' qualifications, courses for taxi drivers and qualifications in food safety and hygiene. The partnership also delivers courses and organises job clubs, which help learners improve their CVs and their interview and personal presentation skills.

Local authority partners work well to organise and deliver learning activities that address local priorities and needs. In Caerphilly, the local authority delivers an extensive range of subjects such as arts, music, textiles, and cooking on a full cost recovery basis. The local authority in Torfaen gives very good support to learners to set up and run their own learning clubs for arts, crafts and languages, and provides advice regarding health and safety, insurance, and how to manage finance and budgets. In Blaenau Gwent, the local authority's adult learning service has recently joined a charitable trust to deliver adult learning. As a result, staff can raise funds for adult learning that were previously not available to the local authority and deliver learning opportunities that are important for adults in Blaenau Gwent.

The partnership has a useful essential skills strategic plan with smart targets. This informs action plans at local authority level. Providers monitor progress against their own action plans and report termly to the partnership's operational group, which produces a twice-yearly progress report to the strategic group. Very good partnership work between essential skills providers and engagement agencies (for example, housing associations, Job Centre Plus and Communities First) improves learners' access to essential skills courses and helps them make good progress. Engagement agencies referred 569 learners to essential skills provision in the autumn term 2014-2015. Many of these learners took part in literacy and numeracy classes. They also made progress to GCSE classes, first aid courses and job clubs.

The partnership works well to organise and promote Welsh medium and bilingual courses. It has set up and organised a range of Welsh medium classes in partnership with local Mentrau Iaith. It has also trained Welsh speaking tutors to teach bilingually. Welsh speaking learners have found this useful. The partnership has also helped all tutors develop Welsh language materials and curriculum activities. It has produced a useful curriculum pack for tutors. However, the partnership does not check the quality of tutors' own Welsh language materials well enough.

Tutors provide a range of useful opportunities for learners to improve their understanding of ESDGC issues. For example learners in a dress making class learn about organic textile production, employee welfare, and recycling materials. Haircare learners recycle products and learn how to use waste material in hairdressing.

Teaching: Good

Nearly all tutors have good subject knowledge. They keep well-ordered files in which they effectively record teaching and assessment. Most tutors have high expectations for learners and they plan and deliver challenging sessions that enable learners to make very good progress. Nearly all tutors take good account of national priorities,

such as literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, and embed them in their teaching where appropriate. A few tutors include Welsh and explore Welsh heritage effectively in sessions. Most tutors work collaboratively and effectively with teaching support assistants to support learners with additional learning needs.

Most tutors use a wide range of teaching and learning activities, discussion and debate, research, problem-solving and creative thinking, which are well sequenced and help learners to build their understanding and skills in the subject coherently. In most sessions, tutors use a range of effective questioning techniques that help learners to explore ideas, as well as challenging and developing their thinking. In a very few less effective sessions, the pace of sessions is too slow and too teacher led.

Many tutors use good quality, stimulating resources to prompt discussion and learning. However, in a few cases, resources are poorly produced and difficult to use. In a very few cases, some of the information presented is out-of-date.

Overall, tutors take very good account of the targets that learners record in individual learning plans and any additional learning needs that learners may have. This is particularly strong in the area of independent living skills and is an excellent feature. As a result, nearly all learners remain on courses and attain appropriate qualifications. Nearly all tutors have good knowledge of progression routes and encourage learners to move to higher level courses when they have completed their course.

Most tutors provide good verbal feedback to learners during sessions to help them improve. Most tutors use the assessment criteria and marking schemes effectively to provide structured written feedback to learners. However, tutors do not create enough opportunities for learners to evaluate their own work or that of peers on a regular enough basis. Tutors generally use the outcomes of assessment well to inform session planning.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The partnership's provision promotes an appropriate range of cost-recovery lifestyle courses, which contribute to learners' wellbeing, including woodturning, sugar craft, and dress making. The partnership also offers a wide range of courses that help learners who have not had good experiences of previous learning to gain literacy and computer skills.

All partners produce their own course brochures. These are variable in their information on how to enrol and what equipment is required in order to complete the course. For general enquiries, administrative staff at all learning centres have access to curriculum flow charts and can advise prospective learners on course availability across the partnership.

The partnership plans well to meet the needs of learners with additional learning needs and monitors the successful completion of these learners. The results of these learners are in line with those of their peers. Most tutors have undertaken essential skills awareness training. As a result, they are better able to identify learners with essential skills needs and refer them to the essential skills team. All

level 2 and 3 learners undertake a free writing exercise as part of their first assignment to help identify essential skills needs. Tutors discuss these with the learner and offer support as needed.

Each individual partner has appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place. All staff have attended safeguarding training. There is a useful flowchart in tutor handbooks, which explains safeguarding reporting procedures well. However, disclosures and the way in which they are processed at this initial stage are not formally noted. This affects the partnership's ability to monitor and track outcomes of reports or to identify staff safeguarding training needs. The Community Education Manager at Coleg Gwent is a member of Coleg Gwent's safeguarding committee and disseminates the work of the committee to all partnership members at operational level. However, there is no formal reporting mechanism of safeguarding issues to the partnership's strategic board.

Learning environment: Good

The partnership actively promotes an ethos of equality and diversity, both through its curriculum offer and through the range, quality and location of its accommodation. The ethos of the partnership is supportive and equitable at all levels and enables learners from all backgrounds to access high quality accommodation and resources.

The partnership as a whole has a useful learner induction handbook with a customisable section that each partner can tailor for their own specific requirements. Each partner has their own appropriate equality and diversity policy.

The partnership uses questionnaires effectively to monitor learners' perceptions of their courses and the learning environment. Nearly all students feel safe and free from harassment at centres.

The partnership is active in supporting learners to develop clubs and societies to continue their interests outside of the partnerships' formal provision. Where lifestyle courses are offered by the partnership on a cost-recovery basis, learners with lower incomes are able to pay in instalments, reducing the burden of the course enrolment fee.

There is a good ESOL provision across the partnership, supporting a diverse range of ethnic groups living in the area. The partnership uses its centres very effectively to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners; including provision of women only classes and locating classes at centres near schools so that mothers can attend classes after dropping off their children.

There is a wide variety of good quality accommodation across the partnership, from purpose built community education centres to older institutes. A few centres are of exceptionally high quality. Centres are well placed to meet the needs of their communities and provide a very good environment for learning. Buildings are well maintained, furnished and decorated, with good disability access. Most rooms are well resourced, and many have interactive whiteboards and other useful teaching and learning technologies, such as tablet computers. Computers are up-to-date and have appropriate course specific software.

All venues have consistently welcoming, knowledgeable and helpful staff. Most centres have posters relating to equality and diversity on display as well as information about programs and courses available. Student work is on public display in many centres.

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

The partnership strategic board demonstrates a sound knowledge and understanding of the adult community learning partnership. The board has a strong focus on recruiting learners from the priority areas, on learner outcomes and on meeting the national priorities of the Welsh Government. The board balances this focus with a realistic recognition of the financial implications of the current economic climate.

The strategic board is fully representative of all of the partners within the provision. Each strategic board member brings a relevant perspective of their county's single integrated plan to the partnership. This helps the board to maintain a single identity while allowing for the individual profiles and characteristics of the five counties involved.

The strategic board provides a clear leadership for the partnership. The board presents a suitable level of challenge and is responsible for setting targets for the priority areas. Board members set a suitable tone for the partnership and their enthusiasm and realistic approach sets a sound ethos of collaboration.

The board endorses a comprehensive structure of groups, sub groups and task groups. The roles of these groups are clear and there are well-defined lines of communication between them. This ensures that information is shared appropriately. All board and group members are aware of their roles and responsibilities and also of the lines of accountability.

Operational group members have a thorough understanding of the needs of the learners and the quality of courses delivered in their counties. They bring this information together to form a cohesive partnership approach to planning the curriculum and for improvements to course delivery.

Meetings for all groups are frequent and are planned appropriately. Minutes of all meetings are distributed to all relevant parties. However, most groups have a variable agenda at each meeting. While this allows them to address current issues easily, it also hinders the recording and tracking of how, where and when actions arising from minutes have been addressed.

Leaders at all levels have a keen focus on improving the standards achieved by all learners. They make effective use of the partnership's data to evaluate the performance of the individual providers and to set strategic and operational priorities for improving learner success rates.

Staff development is a high priority in improvement planning. The partnership has implemented a beneficial training plan based on a tutor needs analysis. Leaders at all levels have a high expectation for the quality of staff performance standards and of how underperformance will be addressed.

Improving quality: Excellent

The partnership uses comprehensive procedures for collecting a wide range of information relating to its work. It uses detailed processes for self-assessment and quality improvement that cover most aspects of its work. This has resulted in a significant improvement in learner success rates and improved the consistency of teaching and learning across the five partners.

The partnership has secure procedures for assessing its performance; and improving learners' success rates and the quality of teaching. The self-assessment report process involves all partners. The report uses evidence from a wide range of sources including the views of learners, teaching observations, and course reviews. The partnership's self-evaluation report is detailed but is often descriptive and in a few sections lacks clarity in its evaluation of the performance of the partnership.

The quality development plan is a clear document that supports the self-assessment report well with appropriate targets for improvement. The plan clearly identifies areas for improvement, such as making sure that tutors develop learners' literacy and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The partnership has developed and uses a robust process to support quality improvement. The Results Improvement Initiative has been particularly effective in increasing the rates at which learners achieve their qualifications and complete courses. This initiative reviews a wide range of information, such as the quality of teaching and learning, attendance and learner feedback. When underperformance is identified, appropriate support is put-in-place.

The partnership has further strengthened its quality assurance procedures by introducing five development and support co-ordinators. These co-ordinators have the responsibility of reviewing, monitoring and developing key aspects of the provision across the partnership. Their responsibilities include undertaking teaching observations across the partnership, delivering staff training, the development of on-line teaching and learning resources and providing support to courses identified through the results improvement initiative. The combination of the results improvement initiative and the development and support co-ordinators has been highly effective in reducing the number of underperforming courses and raising standards for learners.

Managers and tutors use a detailed annual course review process to analyse the performance of each course. This detailed review captures a wide range of information, including learner standards, the development of learners' literacy and the quality of teaching. The partnership has strengthened its teaching observation system. Annual observations are undertaken of all tutors across the partnership, after which they benefit from useful written and verbal feedback on their performance and how it can be improved. The partnership has further improved its observation procedures by developing in collaboration with an awarding organisation a training programme to improve the skills of observers and accredit their development.

Tutors across the partnership undertake a good range of appropriate continual professional development activities. These activities have a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching across the partnership and are planned on the basis

information received from course reviews and lesson observations. The partnership provides appropriate opportunities for the sharing of good practice, especially in teaching and learning.

The partnership takes good account of the views of learners, who complete a useful range of satisfaction questionnaires regarding their course. Managers analyse the responses to the questionnaires and learners are updated on any actions through the learner forum and by 'you said, we did' notices.

The partnership has made very good progress in addressing the recommendations made during the last Estyn inspection in 2009.

Partnership working: Good

The strategic board consists of key decision makers from Coleg Gwent and the five unitary authorities and has a shared vision for the partnership. It provides a very clear strategic lead and has high expectations of the operational group and the partnership as a whole. The partnership has a clear strategy for working with a very wide range of partners across all five counties to deliver its strategic objectives.

The partnership has an effective structure for joint planning. The operational group ensures consistency in quality assurance, resource planning and in delivering coherent programmes and support for learning.

The partnership has a clear cross county perspective at the strategic, operational and delivery level. Partners work very effectively together and have developed high levels of trust and shared responsibility. The partnership works very well with a range of engagement agencies including Communities First, Job Centre Plus and housing associations who refer learners into partnership provision. This multi-agency partnership working has resulted in increased enrolments in areas of highest deprivation and onto priority courses, such as essential skills.

The partnership also works very well with business, public sector and voluntary agencies to provide specialised vocational or engagement courses. Examples include a course on awareness of drugs misuse in collaboration with a range of partners and 'A taste of Station 32' – an engagement course developed in partnership with Torfaen Communities First, Job Centre Plus and the Fire and Rescue Service.

Resource management: Good

Tutors and teaching assistants are suitably experienced in the subjects they teach. Most tutors have appropriate teaching qualifications. The partnership is working well to increase the number of tutors who have specialist essential skills qualifications. Tutors update their subject knowledge and work well to improve their teaching skills. Good quality training placements are provided to students following Level 3 and the Level 5 specialist essential skills qualifications.

The quality of most course venues is very good. Partners have made good use of additional funding to improve the quality of the buildings and the resources available to support learning. Most centres are multi-use venues and provide a broad range of

learning opportunities and local authority services. Most partnership members have clear strategies in place for the regular updating of ICT resources. Although a few centres have closed, the partnership has taken care to minimise the impact on learners.

The partnership has clearly focused its strategy, provision and administrative support structure around the ACL priority areas. Each partner has clear performance targets that relate directly to the priorities.

The partnership has a position statement in place that specifies expected group sizes. Operational managers make informed decisions about which classes should run within the overall budget. Partners work well together to reduce the impact of class closures on the curriculum available to learners. Good progress has been made in converting classes in non-priority areas to full-cost-recovery courses or clubs. The approach ensures that the breadth of provision is maintained.

Operational managers from the five counties of the partnership and Coleg Gwent work effectively and collaboratively to manage the partnership's resource. The partnership has moved to a position of shared marketing and advertising and the recruitment and use of tutors across county boundaries, making better use of the resource available.

Outcomes for the partnership are good and the partnership provides good value for money for its learners.

Appendix 1

Learner satisfaction

We use the outcomes of the Welsh Government Learner Voice survey to inform all our inspections of post 16 education and training. Learner Voice is a learner satisfaction survey conducted by the Welsh Government between January and February each year.

The survey asks learners a range of questions about the following key themes:

- the information, advice and support provided to them
- provider responsiveness, learning environment and student wellbeing
- the quality of teaching and training
- overall satisfaction

Each theme contains a range of questions requiring learners to rate their provider's performance.

The survey was completed between December 2013 and February 2014 by 1,383 adult learners in the Gwent ACL partnership. There were 361 male and 953 female respondents, with a further 69 whose gender was not determined in the survey. The respondents were evenly split between those aged under 45 and those over 45. Most respondents were from white ethnic backgrounds. The largest numbers of respondents were taking courses in languages, literature and culture, information and communication technology, and arts, media and publishing.

Fifty-nine per cent of respondents rated the partnership as very good overall. This is below the sector average of 64%. A further 31% rated the partnership as good overall. Ninety-five per cent of respondents thought that their course was better than they expected. This is above the sector average of 93%.

The percentage of respondents scoring the partnership as very good was below the sector average for all of the five key themes and across the majority of the questions in the survey. Ninety-three per cent of respondents rated teaching and learning as good or very good.

A majority of respondents scored their subjects as being very good in five out of eight sector subject areas. Respondents rated only one sector subject area – languages, literature and culture – above the national average. The other seven sector subject areas were below the national average.

The survey also analyses learners' responses by demographic information – gender, age, ethnicity and disability. The partnership achieves 'very good' scores either at a rate slightly below the national averages or exactly the same as the national averages for all of the key demographics. The percentage of respondents across all key demographics who say their courses are better than what they expected is generally around the national averages, with the exception of learners aged under 25, who report that their course was better expected at a rate nine percentage points above the national average.

The partnership received about 800 verbatim comments. Generally respondents were very positive about their tutors and the standard of preparation and support they receive from them. Respondents were also positive about the accommodation, convenient location of venues, the skills they have learned and the benefits of their learning.

Generally, respondents did not think that any improvements to their class or learning were necessary. Nevertheless a few respondents suggested improvements, which included:

- the timing of classes
- parking and access to some classrooms and facilities
- improving the information and guidance about courses
- the suitability and layout of rooms
- improving quality of some equipment (eg computers and software)
- reducing the amount of admin associated with courses

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Steve Bell	Reporting Inspector
Penny Lewis	Team Inspector
Mark Evans	Team Inspector
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