



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

**Gower College Swansea
Ty Coch Road
Ty Coch
Swansea
SA2 9EB**

Date of inspection: January 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.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW

or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2012: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Context

Gower College Swansea was formed in August 2010 by the merger of Gorseinon College and Swansea College. The college mission is to bring together two complementary, successful organisations to create an institution that will provide outstanding learning opportunities and experiences for young people, adults and employers in Swansea. There are main campuses at Tycoch and Gorseinon and smaller centres at Gorseinon Centre, Broadway, Kingsway, Llwyn Y Bryn, Sketty Hall and Sandringham Park.

Gower College Swansea provides a wide range of courses to around 4,660 full-time and 7,400 part-time learners. The majority of enrolments at Gorseinon in 2009-2010 were on level 3 programmes, with a high proportion of learners following programmes in Science and Mathematics, Performing Arts, Art and Design or Health, Public Services and Care. At Swansea, the majority of enrolments in 2009-2010 were at levels 2 and 3 with a high proportion of learners on programmes in Health, Public Services and Care, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies or Preparation for Life and Work.

At Gorseinon, around 40% of all learners in 2009-2010 were male and, at Swansea, around 46% of all learners were male. Around 7% of learners at Swansea and around 4% at Gorseinon are from ethnic minority groups.

The City and County of Swansea has a number of areas of multiple deprivation as defined by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. Swansea has 17 areas in the top 10% of the most deprived areas in Wales. The unemployment rate at 3.2% is slightly below the Wales rate of 4%. However, the economic activity rate for Swansea at 67% is below the rate for Wales at 72.6%. Swansea has a disproportionately large share of jobs in the public administration, hospitality, financial services and retail when compared to the rest of Wales. Around 90% of people are employed in service industries in Swansea compared to 78% in the rest of Wales.

Around 16% of the population of the City and County of Swansea speak Welsh and around 22% understand spoken Welsh.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance of the college is good because:

- standards achieved by learners in their main qualifications are good overall and have shown an upward trend in improvement over the past three years;
- college unverified data for the first year of the merged college shows that the good standards of the legacy colleges have been maintained;
- the proportion of learners achieving high grades on vocational programmes and A2 subjects is good;
- learners develop good literacy skills, particularly oracy skills, and most learners use a good range of reading skills to extract information from texts;
- learners feel safe at the college, enjoy their learning and contribute well in class sessions;
- the quality of teaching is good; and
- the quality of support and guidance is good and helps learners to make good progress on their programmes.

Prospects for improvement

The college's prospects for improvement are good because:

- leaders and managers have made good progress in establishing a single institution with common values and aims;
- the new college has made significant financial savings, particularly in staff management costs, without making any compulsory redundancies;
- the merger has had minimal negative impact on learners' progress and standards;
- leaders and managers consult staff, learners and stakeholders widely in relation to proposed changes;
- leaders and managers have clear priorities and targets for improvement in their strategic plans and have a good track record in managing change and securing improvements in important areas; and
- there has been strong support and challenge from governors, particularly over the establishment of the merged college.

Recommendations

The college needs to:

- R1 improve outcomes in all learning areas in line with strategic aims;
- R2 identify and address the individual skills needs of all learners, particularly at Level 1 and above;
- R3 increase opportunities for learners to improve their spoken and written Welsh;
- R4 provide the governors with information on learners' outcomes in a format that enables them to challenge the college's performance in relation to that of other colleges in Wales; and
- R5 improve the use of data at all levels to evaluate college performance critically in comparison to that of other providers; and use this information to drive further improvements.

What happens next?

The college will include the recommendations from the inspection into its quality development plans. The college link inspector will monitor progress on addressing the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Overall, success rates for all courses at the two legacy colleges have improved steadily over the past three years (2007-2010). The rates of improvement for all courses have been greater at the Tycoch campus. The rates of improvement are in line with those of other colleges in Wales. Similarly, success rates for key skills qualifications are good overall and have improved steadily over the last three years. Unverified data supplied by the college for 2010-2011 shows that the upward trend in success rates has been maintained in the first year of the merged college. Success rates for vocational and A Level programmes are good overall and the merger has not had a negative impact on standards.

Learners generally attain near to expected levels compared to predictions based on their previous GCSE attainment in schools.

Learners from relatively deprived socio-economic backgrounds attain well. For example, learners on programmes at Tycoch who are in receipt of the educational maintenance allowance have an overall success rate above that achieved by those who do not receive the allowance.

Learners generally make good progress on their programmes. They work well in the classes observed and contribute well in whole-class, small group and individual tasks. Learners understand what is expected of them and achieve the learning objectives set in their classes.

All learners on Care and Hairdressing programmes attain Agored Cymru Welsh language units. Learners on other programmes make very little use of Welsh in their classes.

Most learners have appropriate oracy skills and offer clear explanations when questioned. A majority support their views and opinions well. A few learners demonstrate good thinking skills and are able to explore concepts effectively.

Most learners use a good range of reading skills to extract information from texts. A majority of learners use this information well to develop their responses in written assignments. A very few learners demonstrate higher reading skills and are able to give a personal interpretation of texts.

Most learners have suitable strategies for planning writing. A majority write at length and a few develop their ideas effectively through extended writing. Many learners use punctuation correctly and improve their spelling in the context of their courses. However, a few learners make too many errors in grammar and sentence structure and a minority of learners at higher levels do not use more advanced writing skills well enough, particularly in their range of vocabulary. A few learners write well for specific purposes and audiences.

Wellbeing: Good

Learners feel safe and comfortable in college and have confidence in the way their welfare is promoted. They are aware of policies on bullying, safe working and cyber safety. Their attitude towards healthy living and eating has improved through a well-structured tutorial programme and other sporting and recreational enrichment activities.

Most learners thrive in the college's supportive environment and develop in confidence and self-esteem. The ENGAGE project funds four Student Support Officers to provide additional support to help learners. They helped 93 'at risk' learners to stay on their courses last year.

Learners generally enjoy their learning, are enthusiastic about their experiences and would recommend the college to others. They participate well in class activities and enrichment activities. These include Santes Dwywnwen activities, broadcasting on a campus radio station, charity fundraising and the Kenya project. Learners demonstrate good behaviour in class, treat others with respect and conform to the college's code of conduct. Most learners are punctual and attendance is satisfactory overall at 83%.

Learners are aware that they can voice their opinions and influence change through learner voice surveys. Class representatives meet as a Student Council twice a year. Learners are given feedback on actions taken by the Council by means of posters distributed around the college and tailored to each faculty or campus. Grant bids can be submitted to the Student Council to develop projects or buy equipment that will benefit learners. Learner governors have been particularly effective in their contributions during the merger process.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
---	-------------

Learning experiences: Good

The merged college offers a very wide range of programmes for learners and local communities including most vocational areas and almost 50 A Level subjects. It offers a wide range of programmes to meet the needs of industry, business and public sector organisations. These range from pre-entry level to programmes at higher education level. Programmes are delivered through full-time, part-time and other flexible methods, including e-learning and bespoke delivery.

Following merger, the college has embarked on a rigorous review of the curriculum. At the same time, the college continues to meet the needs of learners and the wider communities well. Plans are in place for the curriculum to develop over the next three years. Phase 1 of the planned two phases of the curriculum review has just been completed.

Structured and well planned work experience is available to all full-time learners. Work experience is a well-integrated part of full-time programmes. In some areas, such as Hair and Beauty Therapy and Hospitality and Catering, this is supplemented with realistic working environments within the college.

The college has strong links with schools in the area including primary schools and most local comprehensives. Around 500 school pupils attend the college on a weekly basis.

There are over 500 learners studying the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ). This qualification is well integrated into learners' main qualifications in vocational programmes. In the A Level provision, the qualification is a voluntary option. The fast-track provision is available to learners and this has helped to improve the number of A Level learners completing the WBQ. Overall, the qualification is expanding year-on-year across the college.

All learners undertake initial assessment at the start of their programme. Learners assessed as being at entry level 3 and below receive good in-class support. However, in too many classes teachers do not have or make the best use of this assessment information at other levels.

Following initial assessment, learners at lower ability levels undertake diagnostic tests to identify whether they require additional learning support. When appropriate, those identified receive good one-to-one support in their classes and in practical sessions.

The college successfully bid for Quality Improvement Funding to develop a literacy toolkit. Teachers are beginning to use the toolkit to embed literacy skills into teaching, training and assessment across all learning areas. This commenced in September 2011 and is starting to impact on learners' experience in the classroom.

Essential skills are typically matched to the level of learners' programmes, but not necessarily to learners' specific abilities. Essential skills are well embedded and contextualised in the majority of programmes.

The college is in the process of merging the Welsh language schemes of the legacy colleges. A new Welsh co-ordinator has recently been appointed. The college has a developing programme of including the Welsh dimension into sessions by signposting opportunities in all schemes of work.

Many vocational programmes include aspects of sustainable development in their curriculum, such as the safe disposal of materials after use, reducing energy use and eliminating harmful emissions. Learners across the college have recently developed a 10-point plan to improve environmental standards at the college. Staff and senior managers have responded well to the learners' suggestions where this has been possible.

Global diversity and citizenship are included in all tutorial programmes. An increasing number of learners are involved in the Kenya Project, including the Kenya day. These learners gain an excellent understanding of global diversity as they support the Kenyan school. The project is designed to offer the school opportunities to help themselves, rather than receive direct financial aid. In the most recent development of the project, learners built the school library and stocked it with donated books.

Teaching: Good

Overall, the quality of teaching is good. The majority of teachers plan their sessions effectively and use a good range of learning experiences to meet the needs of learners. Many teachers use an appropriate range of teaching strategies. These include effective use of whole-class, group, paired and individual tasks to engage learners and to maintain their interest.

In the best sessions, teachers set a good pace for teaching and assessment activities. In these sessions, teachers challenge learners well to achieve higher grades in their assignments and coursework. However, in a small number of sessions observed, the pace is sometimes too slow and learners are not given clear enough timescales for the completion of tasks.

Hand-outs and other teaching resources are generally of a good quality. Teachers use interactive white boards and ICT equipment well in their classes to access the internet, Moodle resources and to prepare assignments and tasks. Teachers use these resources well to challenge and stimulate learners in a wide range of tasks.

The majority of teachers provide learners with good verbal and helpful written feedback on how to improve the standard of their work. However, written feedback is not always detailed enough to help learners improve all areas of their work. Most teachers use a wide range of question and answer techniques well to test learners' knowledge and understanding of their work. These include good use of individual and whole-class questions and extended questioning to stretch the more able learners.

Overall, the assessment of learners' work is good. Teachers make sure that learners complete theory-based assessments to a good standard. In practical sessions, teachers assess learners' practical competence to a good standard.

Teachers track the progress of learners well. They keep detailed up-to-date records of the progress learners are making towards completing their qualifications. They give learners good verbal feedback on their progress. In the majority of classes, learners are fully aware of what they need to do to gain their qualifications.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Overall, the college has effective arrangements to care for, support and guide learners. Learners are well informed about the services available to them and whom they can approach if they have concerns about any issues. They speak very positively about the high level of support they receive from all college staff.

The college promotes the health and wellbeing of learners well. The Learner Services department organises a wide range of cross-college activities and events that help learners improve their understanding of wellbeing and encourages them to participate in health-related activities. The college has effective and well-understood procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour that may affect learners' wellbeing and progress, such as bullying and poor attendance.

Most learners are well informed about what the college can offer them before they start their programmes. This helps them to make appropriate choices about their future studies. The college admissions process includes staff visits to schools to talk to pupils, college open days and interviews with subject specialists.

When they start their programmes, learners have a good introduction to college services and their course that helps them to settle quickly into college life.

The college has extensive specialist support services and several specialist support staff, including a student liaison officer, student support officers and learning advisers. It has very effective links with outside agencies, for example the Ethnic Youth Support Team and Swansea Young Single Homeless. These organisations support the college's work well and are particularly effective in supporting 'at risk' and more vulnerable learners.

All full-time learners benefit from regular contact with a personal tutor and a weekly tutorial session. The college has a good cross-college tutorial framework that personal tutors adapt successfully to meet the specific academic and personal needs of different learner groups. Tutorials include one-to-one guidance and progress reviews, group tutorials, sessions on topics relevant to young adults, such as drug and alcohol awareness, budgeting and 'next steps'. The tutorial programme contributes well to the development of learners' health and wellbeing.

The college supports learners with additional learning needs very well. Staff identify those learners who have specific learning needs when they first contact the college. They provide tailored and often very specialised support, which meets learners' individual needs effectively and enables them to participate successfully in college life.

The college has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Good

The college promotes a positive ethos of equality and diversity and provides an inclusive learning environment. The Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan has clear objectives that are monitored and reviewed appropriately by the Equality and Diversity Group. The College holds a wide range of activities and events during the year to raise awareness of equality and diversity issues. These include an annual Diversity Fayre and a planned day of session swaps between learners in areas that are traditionally dominated by one gender, such as hairdressing and motor vehicle. The college provides good role models to challenge stereotyping such as qualified female support staff in motor vehicle maintenance.

Most accommodation at all of the college sites provides a welcoming learning environment. The majority of classrooms and workshops provide good quality accommodation. However, in a few learning areas, accommodation does not meet the high standards of the majority of the college accommodation. A few classrooms are too small and learners have a restricted space in which to work. The college has comprehensive plans in place for the refurbishment and rebuilding of these areas.

Many classrooms and workshops are well resourced and most classrooms have interactive white boards. Information and communication technology equipment available for use by learners is of a workable quality.

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

Leadership: Good

Since the formation of Gower College Swansea in 2010, leaders and managers have made good progress in establishing a single institution with common values and aims. The establishment of the college demonstrates a strong commitment to meeting the Welsh Government's agenda for the transformation of education. The new college has made significant financial savings, particularly in staff management costs and has maintained all learner-centred services well. The changes due to the merger have had minimal negative impact on learners. Leaders and managers consult staff widely in relation to proposed changes and this has helped to maintain staff morale, which is generally good.

The establishment of the new college has been managed carefully and managers have generally responded well to their new roles. The management development programme has been particularly effective in developing skills and understanding amongst staff with management responsibilities. Leaders and managers work together well in teams, share a common purpose and enjoy the challenges that their new roles bring. However, there are aspects of the structure where pressures are too great, especially in the workloads and staff management responsibilities of the learning area managers.

Communication is generally good across the merged college. This is helped by the regular programme of meetings that enable information to flow appropriately. Overall, managers are successful in pursuing the college's strategic focus while keeping the day-to-day management of the college operating smoothly.

The college has appropriate arrangements for the management of staff performance and is making good progress to match these arrangements to the needs of the new college.

The governors of the merged college provide good leadership and are very well informed about many aspects of the work of the college, particularly in relation to its strategic direction and estates strategy. They have provided managers with strong support and challenge over the establishment of the college. However, they are less well informed about the standards and quality of learners' achievements. They do not receive enough useful information in a format that enables them to challenge the college's performance, particularly in relation to benchmarks of performance in other colleges in Wales.

Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities well, and have appropriate arrangement for overseeing complaints and appeals. The student governors are effective members of the board and make valuable contributions to the board's discussions on key issues. The new board has not decided how it will self-assess its own performance.

Leaders and managers show strong commitment to national and local priorities for improving the quality of education and training. They work well with local secondary schools to provide a good choice of learning pathways and, by establishing a new college, are working together to improve opportunities for all learners in the Swansea area.

Improving quality: Good

The college is making good progress in merging two diverse quality systems, building on the strengths of the individual systems in the two legacy colleges. The senior management team is committed to developing quality processes in a way that empowers staff and secures engagement with quality improvement.

There is a clear reporting structure for quality. Learning Area Managers understand their responsibility for quality and are keen to share best practice across the college. There are regular meetings of the Curriculum and Quality Group, which are chaired by the Deputy Principal. Learner feedback is collected and the involvement of class representatives is evident across the college.

Staff are involved well in course and subject review, which feeds into faculty self-assessment. Good systems exist for developing self-assessment reports at faculty and subject level. However, there is not enough analysis of data on learners' performance, compared to published national comparators, to enable clear enough identification of specific areas of high and low performance. As a result, there is no consistent understanding across the college of the reasons why some areas perform well and others underperform on outcomes.

The college has introduced a three-year rolling programme of Internal Reviews of programme areas and the first of these has identified further areas on which to focus quality improvement. Graded teacher observations form an integral and useful part of the quality process and are used well to inform the Internal Review.

The college engages well with professional networks, including Colegau Cymru and other national professional learning communities. However, effective networking to share best practice and inform quality improvement plans with other further education providers is not evident. The college has made good use of Quality Improvement Fund initiatives to focus on teaching and learning and developing literacy, though it is too early to measure the impact of these on quality and standards.

Partnership working: Good

The merged college has developed a wide range of effective partnerships at a strategic and operational level. These partnerships include local and regional networks in the community, voluntary and business sectors. The college works closely with the local authority, other further education colleges, higher education institutions, work-based learning providers, and the Regional Learning Partnership. It has strong links with a number of outside agencies such as the Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) and the Youth Offending Team (YOT).

In the 14-19 Network, the college works closely with all local 11 to 16 secondary schools. It offers a number of vocational pathways to pupils, including engineering, motor vehicle and hairdressing. Approximately 54% of learners following these pathways progress onto post-16 education and training. The performing arts department hosts an annual collaborative project between the college and six local secondary schools, with each group performing a short musical production culminating in a shared finale. However, the college has found it difficult to establish links with local schools that have sixth forms.

As part of a Local Service Board project, the Principal is the 'champion' for the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) project in the Swansea area. This project has had a significant impact on reducing the number learners who would not normally be in education or training. Student support services staff and curriculum officers effectively monitor 'at risk' learners during their time at the college to prevent them leaving college and returning to the NEET register.

The college works well with a number of overseas partners. Projects include supporting schools in Kenya and a partnership project with a number of Welsh colleges to develop exchange visits for learners and training for teachers and managers in China and Vietnam.

The college has developed good partnerships with employers and the sector skills councils. Senior staff work with many of the sector skills councils delivering the 'Skills that Work for Wales' initiative. This helps to ensure that the curriculum is meeting industry's needs and in identifying skills gaps.

Resource management: Good

Overall, the merged college manages its resources well. It is taking a pragmatic and measured approach to managing resources. Planning at a strategic level considers both curriculum planning and financial cost in parallel. This means that budgetary planning is appropriately guided by teaching and learning needs. The recent merger has achieved a £1.5m efficiency saving against an initial target of £1.1m without any compulsory staff redundancies.

The college has managed human resources carefully throughout the recent merger process. Managers are supported effectively by recently appointed Senior Human Resources advisors allocated to each faculty. This enables effective relationships to be established and specialist skills to be used in sensitive situations. However, the college is still developing its infrastructure and processes for monitoring Human Resources so that it can better target interventions to improve outcomes for learners.

Generally, there is careful management of and planning for all courses in terms of income and expenditure. Budgets are delegated appropriately. The college is currently bringing consistency to its processes and systems to improve the way useful data is collated, analysed and used to inform more effective deployment of resources.

The college has successfully merged the information technology systems from its two legacy colleges with a minimum of disruption to learners. The college has prepared

an information strategy in order to extend and improve access to information technology resources. However, it is not strategic enough and does not include clear outcome-based measures to meet current or future learner needs.

With strategic plans to develop the college estate rapidly changing due to funding constraints, the college is confidently following a second plan. This seeks to rationalise the estate to meet curriculum needs and to seek efficiencies and improvements to the accommodation on all of its campuses.

The standards achieved by learners are good and the college managed its financial and other resources well during the merger. The college provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Learner satisfaction

The learner questionnaires show a high level of satisfaction expressed by learners on a range of college provision. Almost all learners feel safe and free from harassment at the college; learners show high levels of respect and support each other well. Almost all learners would recommend the college to other people. Learners highlight the high level of support from staff and personal tutors, particularly during the first few weeks at the college.

Appendix 2

Unverified data supplied by the merged college for 2010-2011 shows that overall success rates continue an upward trend with an overall completion rate of 89% and an attainment rate of 85% for all courses. Success rates for A Level subjects are good at 89%, adequate at AS Level at 67% and good for vocational programmes at 79%. Overall success rates for essential skills qualifications are good for Communications and IT and adequate for Application of Number.

For 2010-2011, data for the merged college shows that overall success rates for A2 and AS subjects are at or near to the Joint Council averages. Overall pass rates for A2 subjects are good at 97.9% with 79% of learners achieving A* to C grades. Overall pass rates for AS subjects are good/adequate at 87.8% with 66% of learners achieving A* to C grades. Attainment of higher grades on vocational programmes is good with over one third of learners attaining three Distinctions and over 60% of learners attaining at least one Distinction grade.

Essential skills success rates for 2010-2011 are 71% overall. The success rate for Communication is 73%, Application Of Number 61% and IT 80%. A2 pass rates are good overall at 97.9% with 78.9% A*-C. This is near to the Joint Council rate of 97.2%. Pass rates for AS are at 87.8% with 65.7% at A-C. The AS success rate is near to the Joint Council rate of 86.8%.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Huw Collins HMI	Reporting Inspector
Eleanor Davies HMI	Team Inspector
Sandra Barnard HMI	Team Inspector
Bernard Hayward HMI	Team Inspector
Christine Hooper HMI	Team Inspector
Gill Sims HMI	Team Inspector
Betsan O'Connor HMI	Team Inspector
Mark Evans	Team Inspector
Nicola Gamlin	Peer Inspector
Stephen Llewellyn	Peer Inspector
Alison Evans	Peer Inspector
Dafydd Rhys	Peer Inspector
Keith Backhouse	Peer Inspector
Jeff Walters	Provider Nominee