



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

**Mid Wales Work Based Learning Consortium
Canolfan Rheidol
Rhodfa'r Rheidol
Aberystwyth
Ceredigion
SY23 3UE**

Date of inspection: October 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.

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Context

The Mid Wales Work Based Learning Consortium (MWWBLC) consists of two county councils (Ceredigion and Powys County Council) and two further education colleges (Coleg Ceredigion and Coleg Powys). The consortium came into existence in August 2011.

The MWWBLC operates within the geographic boundaries of Ceredigion and Powys, with learning centres located throughout. The population of Mid-Wales is approximately 208,251, approximately 7% of the overall population of Wales.

Ceredigion is one of the largest counties in Wales geographically, covering nearly 1,800 square kilometres, although it is sparsely populated and is defined as rural. Ceredigion's population is approximately 76,938. In Ceredigion 52% of the population are Welsh speakers, the third highest proportion in Wales. The main sectors of employment are agriculture, tourism and retail. Around 37% of the Ceredigion workforce is employed within the public sector, primarily within health, education, research and public administration.

Powys is the largest and most rural county in Wales. The population of Powys is approximately 131,313. Over 60% of people have Welsh language ability. The working age population in Powys numbers around 59,000. Around 30% of the workforce is employed in the public administration, education and health sectors. Other sectors that are major employers in Powys include distribution, hotels and restaurants, agriculture, construction and manufacturing. Nearly 75% of employees in Powys are micro business with fewer than five employees.

The MWWBLC core values are:

- maximising individuals' potential;
- achieving excellence; and
- contributing to economic development.

The MWWBLC delivers Foundation Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships, Traineeship Engagement, Traineeship Level 1, Bridge2Employment, Steps to Employment, Routeways to Work and Work Focused Learning.

The consortium specialises in the following learning areas:

- Agriculture
- Agriculture Mechanics
- Adult Health and Social Care
- Business Administration
- Business Administration (Accountancy)
- Children's Care, Learning and Development
- Construction (Wood Occupations)
- Electrotechnical

- Equine
- Hair and Beauty
- Hospitality
- Information and Communication Technology
- Management
- Mechanical Engineering
- Motor Vehicle
- Plumbing
- Retail and Customer
- Welding

At the time of inspection there were approximately 700 learners in training.

Summary

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

Current performance

Overall, the rate at which learners attain their qualifications and achieve their targets in their individual learning plans has been unsatisfactory. However, recent unverified data for the consortium for the period August 2011 to October 2012 shows a considerable improvement in the rates that learners achieve their training frameworks and other qualifications.

The consortium delivers a wide range of training programmes that are well suited to the needs of learners, employers and the wider community. Trainers, assessors and teachers across the consortium give learners good levels of support. This support enables learners to develop their vocational and employability skills well.

The members of the consortium are starting to work well together. However, it is too early to judge the full impact of many strategies and procedures as they have only recently been introduced.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are adequate because:

- learners' attainment rates are starting to show an upward trend;
- the consortium is developing management groups at strategic and operational level, with clearly defined responsibilities;
- key partners are developing a consortium working ethos;
- the consortium is developing an inclusive management structure; and
- there are improved communications systems across the consortium.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the rates at which learners achieve their full qualification frameworks;
- R2 embed and evaluate strategies to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills;
- R3 raise the standards of teaching, training and assessment across the consortium;
- R4 improve the collection and use of data to effectively evaluate key strands of the provision;
- R5 develop and implement a comprehensive strategic plan for the consortium; and
- R6 ensure quality systems and procedures are embedded and consistently applied across the consortium.

What happens next?

Estyn requires the provider to address the recommendations from its inspection in its improvement plan to DfES as part of its regular improvement planning cycle. Estyn will monitor the progress of the consortium. Four inspectors will visit the consortium for two days in approximately one year from the date of the inspection to review the progress made against the recommendations from the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

Overall, in the period 2008 to 2011, the rates at which learners gain their qualification have been unsatisfactory. However, unverified data from August 2011 to date shows that learners' success rates have improved considerably. The consortium is on target this year to reach success rates that are slightly above last years' national comparators.

Overall, the number of Skill Build learners achieving all elements of their learning plan is inconsistent across consortium partners.

Nearly all current learners make at least reasonable progress in their training programmes. In a few cases, learners make good progress against their target assessments and complete ahead of the target timescale. Most learners are clear about the progress they have made and what they need to do to complete their training programme.

Learners' National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) portfolios are generally of a satisfactory standard. They contain an appropriate range of diverse evidence, including witness testimony and photographic evidence.

In the majority of learning areas, learners gain additional qualifications that improve their job choice and employability.

Nearly all learners develop good levels of practical skills and theory knowledge. They work well independently and in teams and many develop a good understanding of how they meet customers' needs. They give clear explanations about their work and show confidence in using the skills they learn. A few show a good awareness of sustainable development.

However, overall, the standard of learners' written work varies too much. Many demonstrate good literacy and verbal communication skills, but in a minority of portfolios there are examples of poor spelling or grammar. Engineering, accountancy and agriculture learners showed good levels of numeracy, which they apply well in their work. A minority of learners gain key skills above the level of their framework requirements. Learners with limited basic skills benefit from effective help from tutors, which helps them to progress.

Many Welsh speaking learners have reasonable opportunities to use Welsh in their workplace or when undertaking assessments. However, learners do not consistently understand the value of Welsh as an employment skill.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all learners feel safe and well supported in their training. They are confident in the way that consortium members deal with sensitive issues and incidents such as bullying or poor conduct. They are knowledgeable about policies and procedures

that support their wellbeing, and understand the importance of feeling safe and well supported when in the workplace.

Nearly all learners demonstrate good behaviour both on and off-the-job. Most demonstrate a positive and mature attitude to their training. They develop their personal and social skills well through their training experiences. Most improve their confidence and self-esteem, both in their workplaces and when attending off-the-job training. Most learners demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety issues that are important to their work roles.

Overall, learners are positive about their learning experiences and nearly all enjoy their time in training. Most develop good working relationships with their peers, assessors, teachers and employers. The majority of learners accept more responsibility in their workplaces as they progress in their training.

Learners regularly contribute to fund-raising events that support local charities. They develop a good awareness of the needs of others in their community and beyond, and develop a good understanding of the wider community and citizenship.

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

Overall, training programmes meet the needs of employers, learners and the wider community well. In many cases employers give learners good levels of support on-the-job. Employers are kept well informed of the progress their learners are making. However, employers are not always involved in learner progress reviews.

Most learners benefit from good opportunities to gain additional qualifications to enhance their employability prospects. A significant minority of learners are involved in charity work, including making products to sell for charity. This helps to broaden their experience and skills.

All learners undertake initial assessments for literacy and numeracy when starting their training. Results are recorded in learners' Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). However, assessors do not always agree challenging written targets with learners for the improvement of their literacy and numeracy skills.

The consortium routinely collects data relating to the level of learners' essential skills and the need for individual learning support when they start their training. In most cases this information helps assessors give appropriate, timely support. However, the consortium does not make enough use of this information to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of the support and to inform future planning and decision-making. Overall, learners who access basic skills support make good progress.

Welsh language provision is promoted appropriately and in most cases training and assessment are available in the medium of Welsh. The consortium has recently established a Welsh Champions Group, which is beginning to develop the needs of Welsh speakers. However, due to the recent introduction of the group its full potential is yet to be realised. The promotional use of Welsh in displays and teaching resources is inconsistent across the consortium.

In a few programmes there are good examples of contextualising ESDGC into learning programmes. However, across the consortium ESDGC is not consistently embedded across all learning areas.

Teaching: Adequate

Overall, teaching and training across the consortium are adequate. Training staff and assessors have good up-to-date knowledge and experience in their vocational area. A very few staff continue to work in industry on a part-time basis to keep their skills up-to-date so that they are able to inform learners of current practice.

Training and teaching staff plan and deliver taught sessions well. Most sessions have clear aims and objectives. Many staff use a suitable range of teaching methods that interest and engage learners. Hand-outs and other training resources are generally of a suitable quality. However, in a few off-the-job training sessions staff do not always challenge learners well enough and the pace of learning is too slow.

Overall, the assessment of learners is satisfactory. Training staff and assessors plan work place assessments well and assessment practice meets the awarding body criteria. Most assessors set learners realistic targets to collect evidence for their NVQ portfolio. The standard of work in learners' portfolios is generally of a satisfactory standard and contains a wide range of evidence. Assessors mark learners' written work and portfolio assignments regularly. However, written feedback is not always detailed enough to help learners improve. In a few portfolios, assessors do not always correct spelling and grammatical errors.

Assessors visit learners regularly in the workplace to monitor their progress. In a few cases, employers are not actively involved in the review process and are not fully informed of the progress their learners are making towards their qualification aims. Target setting is not always detailed enough to make sure that learners know what they need to do next.

Training staff and assessors demonstrate good relationships with learners and employers. These relationships are effective in helping learners to develop a wide range of practical skills for the world of work, and they help them to complete their training programme.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Overall, the consortium provides a caring, supportive and safe environment for learners.

Consortium members give learners appropriate advice and guidance before they start their training, during their induction and throughout their time in training. This helps learners to understand the requirements of their programmes and raises their awareness of the services and support available to them.

All learners have a learner handbook. This is a useful point of reference for learners to remind them of topics important to their overall welfare such as learning support, keeping healthy and safe, and procedures to follow if they have concerns.

The consortium has appropriate arrangements in place to support the health and wellbeing of learners. Consortium members have policies and procedures that focus on issues important for the health and safety of learners. These include information on harassment and bullying, confidentiality and on-line safety. Each consortium member has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding.

Assessors know their learners well and work closely with them to provide appropriate one-to-one support that meets their personal and welfare needs, as well as any additional learning needs they may have. Learning coaches support learners well when they have particular difficulties. The consortium has good links with a wide range of agencies and services whose expertise they draw on to support learners' specialist needs.

Consortium members routinely collect data on the level of learners' functional skills when they enter training and on any learning disability/difficulty that they may have. In most cases this information helps assessors to give learners appropriate, timely support. However, the consortium does not make enough use of this information to analyse and evaluate objectively the effectiveness of the support it provides and to inform future planning and decision-making.

The consortium has started to produce a number of consortium-led strategies and policy statements related to learners' care, support and guidance. These help to ensure equal entitlement for learners and consistency of approach across the consortium. The policy statements give consortium members guidance and direction on consortium expectations regarding minimum service requirements. They include a learner and recruitment strategy, learner review strategy, safeguarding policy statement and a 'your wellbeing' handbook for learners. This approach is proving effective in sharing good practice across the partner organisations. However, the development of these documents is at a very early stage and it is too soon to judge their impact on the quality of learner support.

Learning environment: Adequate

The consortium is committed to, and encourages, an ethos of inclusivity and respect between all staff and learners. The consortium uses detailed Equality and Diversity policies and action plans across its four providers. However, the consortium does not effectively evaluate the equality data it collects. Data is not used effectively to monitor how learners from minority groups are progressing in their occupational area or how their attainment compares to that of other learner groups.

Learners are informed about equality and diversity during their induction. Most learners demonstrate a satisfactory awareness of equality and diversity and bullying and harassment issues. They demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of whom to inform in the event of an issue or complaint. Overall, learners treat each other and their tutors, teachers and assessors with respect. However, during learner progress reviews assessors do not give enough attention to the reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality and diversity.

Overall, the consortium has good quality learning resources for its learners. Almost all training rooms are clean and welcoming and appropriate for the number of learners. Work placements provide good opportunities for learners to develop their vocational skills and to complete a wide range of assessments.

In a few theory sessions observed, there were good examples of bilingual material being used. However, overall displays in classrooms and workshops do not promote the Welsh language enough. In many areas they are only available in the English language. In one classroom there were inspirational statements, in English, from many international educators, but none from Wales.

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

The consortium has put in place steering management and operational management groups. The steering group, although recently formed, provides direction and sets a clear vision for the consortium. The group consists of senior managers from the two further education colleges and cabinet members from the two county councils. The group is chaired by the council member for Education and Lifelong Learning. Both councils take a close interest in the consortium's performance and scrutiny will be undertaken regularly to review progress.

The operational management group has a comprehensive vision of what the consortium needs to do to secure improvement in the quality of training. Members of the group have been allocated responsibility for key aspects. For example, managers take leading roles on strategies and procedures related to improving quality, ESDGC and equality and diversity. Managers across the consortium share a common understanding of the importance of accurate and timely data relating to learners' performance. They have developed improved systems for the collection and analysis of data relating to learners' performance. However, it is too early to evaluate the full impact of many developments and strategies on the full range of training activities.

Since the consortium was established there has been a stronger focus on key aspects of provision such as quality and the need to improve the delivery of training and assessment. This is starting to have a positive impact on improving the rates at which learners achieve their frameworks and qualifications.

Communication across the consortium is improving. Regular meetings are becoming established. The provider is starting to place minutes on its MOODLE intranet to ensure that more staff across the consortium have access. However, action points are not always addressed in a timely manner. As a result, the consortium has been slow in addressing areas for improvement, for example peer observations across the consortium and the development of consortium-wide policies and procedures.

The provider has responded well to local and national priorities for education and training. The consortium contributes to a wide range of local and national initiatives. Senior managers are actively involved in local and national bodies, which include the local 14-19 network and the National Training Federation for Wales (NTFW).

Improving quality: Adequate

All partner providers within the consortium have in place an adequate range of quality assurance policies and procedures. However, overarching policies and procedures for the consortium are not fully developed.

The self-evaluation process within each of the consortium's member organisations provides source information for the consortium's overall self-assessment report (SAR) and quality development plan (QDP). However, this information is not fully utilised in developing the overarching self-assessment report for the consortium.

The SAR is too descriptive and not evaluative enough. Strengths identified by the consortium are often over-stated. Shortcomings do not always contain strategies for improvement or clear targets for the monitoring of performance and are not always addressed in a timely manner.

Information in the QDP is extensive. However, it does not clearly prioritise areas for improvement. The plan does not contain enough interim targets or milestones to monitor and measure progress.

Consortium partners use an appropriate range of methods to gain the views of key stakeholders. These include learner and employer surveys and questionnaires. The results of these surveys have been analysed and shared between providers. However, action plans to address the outcomes of the surveys have not yet been developed.

The consortium's senior staff are actively involved in a number of networks of professional practice and often take the lead in 14-19 networks, NTfW board, regional and Operational Management groups.

Within the consortium, groups for sharing best practice across a wide range of activities have been set up. However, the impact of the groups has yet to be seen across the consortium.

The provider's judgements contained within the SAR match the findings of the inspection team in a minority of areas.

Partnership working: Adequate

While maintaining their own systems and procedures for the delivery of the work-based learning contract, the consortium is starting to have an impact on the standards and wellbeing of learners. There are improving outcomes for learners and increasingly a wider choice of provision for learners and employers. There has been rationalisation of training provision and sharing of premises amongst consortium members.

The consortium is beginning to have an impact on raising learner standards. However, it has been slow in establishing itself. The consortium still needs to undertake a substantial amount of work before the benefit of joint working can fully impact on the needs of learners, employers and the community in Mid-Wales. Managers and leaders have not established a clear identity for the consortium and a clear set of aims and objectives to provide added value to work-based learning delivery in Mid-Wales. Progress to date in taking developments forward has been slow.

Each of the consortium members has its own partnership links with a number of organisations and networks in its individual areas. These include: 14-19

Partnerships in Ceredigion and Powys; NTfW 14-19 partnerships; Careers Service; Job Centre Plus; Youth Services and County Councils Schools inclusion services; Youth Offending; local authorities; and voluntary organisations such as Mencap Cymru; Barnardos and Montgomery Crisis Centres.

Individual consortium members and their staff are involved in various ways in influencing the joint working of these organisations. For example the general manager of Powys training is the chair of the 14-19 partnership in Powys and works closely with individual partnership members. However, in Ceredigion the involvement of work-based learning members is less developed, although they are involved with a number of schools in delivering vocational experience for pupils. With the forthcoming regionalisation of 14-19 partnerships in Wales, the consortium is able to make a significant contribution in this area. However, the consortium has still to determine how it will manage its relationships with external organisations and networks.

Resource management: Adequate

Most staff are suitably experienced and appropriately qualified with a few working within the industry to keep subject knowledge up to date. Staff are deployed well and give learners good levels of personal support.

Most learners have good access to resources when attending off-the-job training. Most accommodation is well equipped and learners have good access to equipment and information and communication technology.

The consortium has established a MOODLE intranet for staff to access resources and has plans to give learners and employers access to these resources. The consortium has recently purchased resources to support the delivery of care programmes and is planning to include these on the intranet. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these developments.

The consortium gives staff reasonable opportunity to continue their professional development. A few joint continuous professional development (CPD) activities have taken place covering subject areas including ESDGC and Childcare. However, the consortium has not developed a consortium-wide strategy for staff CPD that clearly identifies its priorities. This means that good practice is not being effectively shared across partners.

Overall, individual consortium members manage their finances well. Plans for the overall financial scrutiny of the consortium are being developed by the Steering Group.

The consortium has made reasonable progress towards removing duplication of training programmes. Partners have withdrawn from provision where another is already delivering the same provision in the region. The consortium has ceased its partnership with a sub-contractor whose learner outcomes were poor and transferred the learners to another provider within the consortium.

Overall, learner outcomes are adequate and the consortium offers adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Learner Satisfaction

Responses to learner questionnaires completed before the inspection were generally positive. Many learners think they receive good support from their tutors, trainers and assessors throughout their training programme. Almost all learners enjoy their learning.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Mark Evans	Reporting Inspector
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