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August 2014

Dear Mr Dacey

Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on Neath Port Talbot Group

Following the Annual Review of Performance visit to your institution on 2nd July 2014, this letter forms an annual report based on the outcomes of that visit. The letter is published on the Estyn website.

The Neath Port Talbot Group was formed in August 2013 from a merger of the former Neath Port Talbot College and Powys College.

Liam Kealy HMI visited the college for one day and met senior managers and the college's quality manager. He evaluated the current performance of the institution and the outcomes of the Learner Voice Survey and reviewed the progress made against the recommendations arising from the inspection of Neath Port Talbot College in November 2012.

Outcome of the link inspector visit

1 Outcomes and standards

The group had the highest unweighted success rate in the sector in 2012-2013 at 89%, an improvement of seven percentage points on 2011-2012. The group's weighted success rate was 79%. This was one percentage point above the national comparator and near the top of the sector. The group improved success rates in 12 sector subject areas between 2011-2012 and 2013-2013.

However, success rates on Level 3 long courses are lower than at other levels and a number of sector subject areas with small learning volumes achieve success rates lower than 80%.

Almost half of learners come from economically deprived areas. The group makes good use of data about these learners in its self-assessment process to identify how well they achieve in comparison to other learners. Those in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) comprise 43% of learners on the Neath Campuses. These learners have generally achieved at a higher rate than learners who do not receive the allowance over the last two years. This would suggest that the college provides effective support for these learners. On the Powys campuses, 40% of learners are in receipt of EMAs but there is no significant difference in success trends of their performance.

Long courses comprise 95% of the group's provision. The overall success rate for long courses is 87%, which was the highest in the sector for 2012-2013. Seven sector subject areas are amongst the highest performers in the sector. However, five areas are in the bottom half of the sector. Learners' attainment in 12 sector subject areas is 90% or above. Completion is also 90% or above in 15 sector subject areas. The highest performing long courses are in the following learning areas: construction; leisure, travel and tourism; and languages, literature and culture.

Short courses account for 5% of provision. The college had one of the highest success rates in the sector for these at 99%, a six percentage point increase on 2011-2012. However, the volume of short courses as a percentage of total provision decreased by 3.5 percentage points from 2011-2012.

The college has some of the highest success rates for key skills at all levels, and across all aspects of key skills.

The group has effective processes in place for evaluating its performance across all sector subject areas. Course staff and heads of schools analyse performance at course level well to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Heads of school agree actions plans with course staff for underperforming courses. Course and subject teams take responsibility for improving performance.

Senior managers provide useful analytical reports to the group's learning and performance committee and for the governing body. This enables these bodies to understand how the group is performing in relation to other colleges in the sector, to identify good practice and agree action plans for underperforming areas.

2 Teaching and assessment

The group is addressing appropriately the recommendation from the inspection of Neath Port Talbot College in 2012 to improve the standards of teaching and assessment in all learning areas. It has introduced a new process of classroom observations that identifies how well teachers deliver against a set of criteria covering a range of features such as planning, teaching and assessment activities and how well learners engage with the lesson. The group carries out observations of all teaching staff annually. It has also trained staff to undertake lesson observations in order to standardise practice.

As a result of these developments, senior managers say they have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and assessment and a detailed understanding of the

strengths and areas for improvement of their teaching staff. Managers use this information to improve the performance of individual teachers and to plan relevant staff development activities. Heads of school and course leaders also use this information to inform course and curriculum reviews and quality improvement plans.

3 Summary on progress on the recommendations outlined in the report of November 2012

The group has successfully addressed most of the recommendations from the inspection of Neath Port Talbot College in 2012. It recognises it still has work to do to meet the recommendation to promote the Welsh language and extend learners' knowledge and understanding of Wales.

The group has also addressed the recommendations from the inspection of Coleg Powys in 2009 to improve the quality of teaching and to improve learning area reviews. Recommendations to review and update college policies and monitor agreed actions systematically have been integrated into the work of the new group. The recommendations to improve learners' literacy and numeracy skills and the level at which learners take key skills courses and work to promote the Welsh language have also been integrated into the group's current quality development plan

4 Learner voice

DfES undertook the 2014 learner voice survey separately at the Neath Port Talbot and Powys campuses. Just under 2,700 learners completed the survey across all campuses.

The group's results were at or below the sector averages for overall satisfaction and expectations of the course. Similarly, the group scored at or below the sector average across all five key themes and in many sector subject areas. Older learners were more satisfied than their peers in the sector and, at the Powys campuses, female part-time learners were more satisfied than other learners and their peers in the sector.

Learners rated a few learning areas as being above the sector benchmark for overall satisfaction. These were: leisure, travel and tourism and history, philosophy and theology on the Neath campuses, and business, administration, and law, which were well above the sector in the Powys campuses.

Learners across the group rated teaching and training at well below the sector average. They rated agriculture, horticulture and animal care above the group's average but rated teaching and learning in engineering and manufacturing technologies, arts, media and publishing below the group's average.

The group has responded positively to these learner voice outcomes and has included actions for improvement in its quality development plan. The governing body has recently considered a learner involvement report and agreed key actions for 2014-2015. These will include producing a new learner involvement strategy for the group, setting out impact measures and involving students more in the day to day

running of the group. The group also includes actions to improve learner involvement in its quality improvement plan.

The group has a variety of other learner involvement activities in place in order to engage learners in improving their learning experience. The group uses a system of class and course representatives to canvas learners' views. Two learner representatives from each school contribute to campus and group meetings to express learners' views and opinions to heads of school and senior managers. Currently the group operates a Student Parliament on its Neath Port Talbot Campuses and there is a Student Association on its Powys campuses. The group works with National Union of Students Wales to train all school and learner governor representatives and support them to fulfil their role.

5 Recommendations

Due to the timing of the visit, the inspector was only able to undertake a limited range of activities. Estyn plans to carry out further activities to evaluate the work of the group before the end of the 2014-2015 financial year.

In the meantime the group should continue work to:

- R1 improve learner satisfaction and expectations
- R2 address inconsistencies in success rates between SSAs
- R3 continue to meet recommendations regarding the promotion of Welsh language and culture

Next steps

Your link inspectors Steve Bell HMI and Gill Sims HMI will continue to monitor overall progress through their link role with the institution.

Yours sincerely

Lin Howells
Assistant Director