



Estyn

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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Area inspection report on the quality and standard of provision for 14 to 19-year-old learners in Flintshire

June 2011



INVESTORS | BUDDSODDWYR
IN PEOPLE | MEWN POBL

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities;
- primary schools;
- secondary schools;
- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community-based learning;
- youth support services;
- youth and community work training;
- local authority education services;
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- careers companies;
- offender learning; and
- the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

Estyn also:

- provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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Introduction

Estyn carries out area inspections under section 83 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. This states that, if asked to do so by the National Assembly, the Chief Inspector for Education and Training for Wales must inspect:

- the quality and availability of a specified description of education or training, in a specified area in Wales, for persons who are aged 15¹ or over;
- the standards achieved by those receiving that education or training; and
- whether the financial resources made available to those providing that education and training are managed efficiently and used in a way which provides value for money.

The Chief Inspector may, without being asked to, conduct such an inspection.

Section 84 of the Act empowers the National Assembly to direct a local authority (LA) whose area is wholly or partly in the area covered by the report to prepare a written statement of the action it proposes to take in the light of an area inspection report published by the Chief Inspector. In preparing such a statement, the LA must consult with such persons as the National Assembly may direct. The action plan must be published within 50 days. Estyn will evaluate the action plan and approve it if it clearly addresses the issues identified in the report and indicates how improvement is to be achieved. Estyn may also ask specific providers to prepare action plans in relation to matters that lie within their responsibility. The LA must copy action plans to the Welsh Assembly Government.

Her Majesty's Inspectors for Education and Training in Wales and/or additional inspectors conduct inspections. A nominee representing the providers is also a member of the inspection team, but the nominee does not take part in discussions about grading.

The inspection team used the common inspection framework for the area inspection, supported by handbooks of guidance for area inspections and for each sector inspected. These documents are available on the Estyn website at www.estyn.gov.uk.

Estyn applies one of the following judgements to each key question of the common inspection framework:

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

¹ Section 83 (11) provides that 'persons who are aged 15' includes persons for whom education is being provided at a school who will attain that age in the current school year.

About the area

Social and economic features

Flintshire has a population of about 148,900, which is projected to increase to over 152,000 by 2033. Two-thirds of the population lives in the major settlements of Deeside, Buckley, Flint, Holywell, Mold and Saltney. In 2001, 14.1% of the population spoke Welsh, compared to the Wales figure of 20.5%.

Flintshire has a very low level of minority ethnic population, with just over 1% of pupils in Flintshire schools from minority ethnic backgrounds. There has been a recent increase in the number of people coming from Poland and other European countries to live and work in Flintshire.

Levels of deprivation in Flintshire are lower than those in two-thirds of other areas in Wales according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. However, Higher Shotton and Greenfield are among the 10% most deprived wards in Wales. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in secondary schools Flintshire in 2010 was 11.0%, compared with the Wales figure of 17.1%.

Flintshire has the highest employment rate of any authority in Wales. It has a significant and prosperous industrial heartland and the area is known for its internet companies. However, 16% of residents are in low-skilled, low-paid occupations and the area has a low number of people with degree or equivalent qualifications.

Pattern of provision

Flintshire has 13 secondary schools, including one specialist school and one Welsh-medium school. One of the secondary schools, Argoed High School in Mynydd Isa, caters for 11 to 16-year-old learners only. The Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit comprises of seven bases which combine to provide provision for key stage 3 and key stage 4 learners with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Deeside College delivers further education provision from two sites in Flintshire. Following the recent reconfiguration, Coleg Llysfasi in Denbighshire is now part of Deeside College. Almost all work-based learning provision is delivered by Deeside College and North Wales Training.

There is extensive collaborative working between providers to extend the range of courses on offer at key stage 4. Learners from all Flintshire secondary schools have access to this collaborative provision. At post-16, four schools are involved in the long established Deeside Consortium in the north of the county. In the south, schools are working collaboratively with the college to deliver a post-16 local curriculum for 2011-2012. This will include courses delivered on the Deeside Llysfasi campus.

The Welsh-medium secondary school, Ysgol Maes Garmon, works in partnership with Ysgol Morgan Llwyd in Wrexham and Deeside College to extend Welsh-medium

provision. It is also involved with the forum that is working to extend Welsh-medium provision across northern Wales.

In 2009, the percentage of unfilled places in Flintshire secondary schools was 11.6%, compared with the Wales figure of 15.9%.

Participation of 16 to 19-year-olds in education and training

In 2009, 83.6% of Year 11 learners continued in full-time education, compared with 82.2% in Wales as a whole. The proportion of Year 11 leavers in 2009 not in education employment or training was 3.7% compared with the Wales figure of 5.7%, Flintshire's figure ranking as the third lowest of those for Wales local authorities. Unverified data indicates that there was a further reduction in the proportion of young people not in education employment or training in 2010 to 2.8%.

Summary

The area provision's current performance	Good
The area provision's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance is good because of:

- good attainment of 14 to 19-year-old learners;
- high levels of learner participation, attendance rates, and the high proportion of 16-year-olds continuing in education and training or moving on to employment;
- developing collaboration between schools and other sectors to widen the range of courses on offer to learners;
- well-developed partnership working to provide a wide range of non-formal and informal learning activities; and
- good quality support for learners, targeted to meet specific needs and providing learners with informative advice on the options available to them.

Prospects for improvement are good because of:

- a strong commitment by partners and stakeholders to partnership working, built on firm foundations through extensive consultation and engagement;
- a clear understanding of the challenges that lie ahead and a strong commitment to changing the current pattern of provision at post-16;
- a good track record in developing collaboration between providers and sectors;
- well-developed quality assurance procedures, resulting in a clear and accurate understanding of current performance and areas in need of improvement; and
- the way self-evaluation processes inform improvement planning.

Recommendations

In order to improve standards and the quality of provision for 14 to 19-year-old learners in Flintshire further, the local authority and providers of education and training need to work together to:

- R1 rationalise provision for 16 to 19-year-old learners to eradicate unnecessary small classes and duplication;
- R2 secure further improvements in the attainment of learners in schools at key stage 4 and especially post-16;
- R3 continue to extend post-16 Welsh-medium provision in Deeside College and North Wales Training, and increase participation levels, so that more learners continue with Welsh-medium learning and assessment at post-16;
- R4 extend across all providers the good practice in the quality assurance of collaborative provision; and
- R5 develop further the way the network centrally collates and uses data and other information to inform strategic planning and to facilitate the evaluation of impact and progress.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?	Good
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Over the last three years there has been a significant trend of improvement in the performance of Flintshire secondary schools at key stage 4. The proportion of learners that attained the level 2 threshold² including English or Welsh and mathematics was the second highest in Wales in 2009 and the best in Wales in 2010. Flintshire was also the highest performing local authority in Wales in the core subject indicator³ and the level 1 threshold⁴ in 2010. Performance in the average wider points score⁵ has also improved but remains below the average for Wales. Not enough learners attain A* and A grades in GCSE at key stage 4.

The general improvement in attainment is reflected in better performance when comparing Flintshire secondary schools with similar schools across Wales in terms of levels of free school meals. In 2010, around two-thirds of Flintshire schools were in the top half of similar schools in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics. However, the proportion of learners achieving the level 2 threshold and the average wider points score has been below expectations for the three-year period up to 2009⁶.

In schools, the proportion of post-16 learners achieving the level 3 threshold⁷ has been around the Wales average over the past three years. The average wider points score⁸ has improved, but is still well below the Wales average. Not enough learners gain A* and A grades in A level.

Outcomes in Deeside College are consistently well above national comparators and expectations. In 2010, attainment in Deeside College was the second highest in Wales and the highest of all general further education colleges. Learners studying A levels at Deeside College achieve good outcomes, with many learners attaining higher than expected grades. Across work-based learning provision, the rates at which learners gain their full qualification frameworks and other qualifications compare well with national comparators and benchmark data.

In 2010, there was an increase in the number of Flintshire learners in schools gaining key skills qualifications, particularly at post-16. However, there are still too few learners gaining key skills qualifications in schools. Entry levels and outcomes in key skills qualifications at Deeside College are good.

² Equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grade A* to C

³ The expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science in combination, the core subjects of the National Curriculum

⁴ Equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grade A* to G

⁵ Comprising all externally approved qualifications at age 16

⁶ Data on performance against expectations for 2010 was not available at the time of the inspection.

⁷ Equivalent to passes in two A levels.

⁸ Comprising all externally approved qualifications at age 18

The college has had the best Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification outcomes for any college in Wales for most of the past three years.⁹

The proportion of learners gaining a recognised qualification in Welsh at key stage 4 has been higher than the Wales average over the last three years. In 2009, the proportion of learners attaining level 2 in Welsh second language had improved and was similar to the Wales average. Not enough learners opt to continue with Welsh-medium provision and assessment at transition to Deeside College at post-16. Few work-based learners undertake part or all of their training in Welsh or bilingually.

A higher proportion of Year 11 pupils in Flintshire continue in full-time education than the Wales average. The proportion of Year 11 leavers not in education, employment or training has fallen and continues to be well below the Wales figure. Participation rates at Deeside College are good. Few learners leave the college with no qualifications.

In three of the last four years, attendance in Flintshire secondary schools has been the best in Wales. Attendance rates in Deeside College and North Wales Training are good.

The rates of permanent and fixed-term exclusions in Flintshire schools are around the Wales average. Local authority unverified data indicates that exclusion rates for key stage 4 learners are lower than the Wales figure. Exclusion rates at Deeside College are very low.

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

All Flintshire secondary schools exceed the minimum requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure¹⁰ for 14 to 16-year-old learners. There is a good range of general and applied courses and generally good opportunities for learners to progress to courses at higher levels.

Collaborative arrangements for provision at key stage 4 between schools and between schools and Deeside College are developing well. This year around a quarter of the key stage 4 learners in Flintshire are involved in a wide range of collaborative courses. Nearly all of these courses take place at the high-quality Learning Core Centre at Deeside College and they are well received by learners.

Post-16 learners generally have access to a wide range of courses that cover all domains¹¹ and provide good opportunities for progression between levels. A total of eight secondary schools have recently introduced the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification for 14 to 16-year-old learners. Deeside College and around two-thirds

⁹ As many schools have only recently introduced the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification, the proportion of learners that have gained accreditation is small.

¹⁰ The Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure specifies the number and type of options that should be made available to 14 to 16-year-olds and to 16 to 18-year-olds.

¹¹ There are five domains: mathematics, science and all aspects of technology, business and management, services to people, creative arts and culture, and humanities and languages.

of the schools offer the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification at post-16. The college offers a very wide range of applied courses from entry level to level 3 and a few courses at level 4.

Learners in Ysgol Maes Hyfryd special school have good access to a range of courses at both key stage 4 and post-16. Learners have many opportunities to follow courses in mainstream classes. Deeside College offers entry level learners provision to develop their skills for life and work. Foundation courses at the college provide programmes to help promote independent living skills. The local authority works in close collaboration with other agencies and partners to provide courses and opportunities for learners of lower ability. The network supports a curriculum enrichment programme for learners who follow ASDAN¹² programmes in schools.

Partnership working with Ysgol Morgan Llwyd in Wrexham and Deeside College has enhanced the curriculum in Ysgol Maes Garmon and provided progression routes for Welsh-medium learners.

There are extensive opportunities in all providers for learners to access non-formal and informal learning activities. These include activities related to sports, volunteering, healthy living, personal development, entrepreneurship, employability and recreation. There are also many opportunities for learners to take part in community, cultural, sporting, aesthetic and creative activities. A wide range of partners contribute effectively to deliver and support these activities.

The work-related skills of learners are suitably developed through a range of activities. Nearly all 14 to 19-year-old learners, including those from the special school, access a good range of work-focused experiences. This includes activities such as enterprise challenges, 'Girls into Engineering' and business mentor initiatives.

All providers make appropriate provision for developing knowledge and understanding of Wales, Europe and the World. They provide well-planned personal and social education or tutorial programmes to develop knowledge and understanding of personal, social, sustainability and health issues.

The network provides support for an extensive collaborative programme of over 30 enrichment activities for more able and talented learners. Participation levels are high.

Support for learners: Good

The 14-19 network has made extensive use of funding to support the accredited training of learning coaching. The number of staff in Flintshire completing accredited learning coach training is well above the Wales average. Providers make effective use of learning coaching by targeting support on the needs of individual learners.

Learners have access to personal support through well-established pastoral care and personal welfare arrangements. Providers work well with the local authority and a

¹² ASDAN is a curriculum development organisation and awarding body offering programmes and qualifications that promote skills for learning, employment and life.

range of agencies to ensure that all learners have access to support. This has had a beneficial impact on the wellbeing of learners.

The Youth Service, in partnership with Careers Wales, makes a significant contribution to the programme of support for learners identified as being at risk of becoming young people not in employment, education or training. Effective partnership working between inclusion welfare officers and schools across Flintshire has contributed to a clear pattern of improvement in attendance and behaviour in secondary schools.

There are effective arrangements for providing learners with access to careers advice, guidance and support. Schools offer appropriate impartial advice and guidance to learners regarding choices at 14 and 16 for the courses offered in school. The college provides comprehensive information to help prospective learners choose suitable courses. Taster courses and open evenings give learners valuable opportunities to gain firsthand experience of the college courses. All learners have access to good quality online information about post-16 provision to help inform their choices.

The new options brochure developed jointly by Deeside College and schools in the south-Flintshire consortium for September 2011 reflects the increasingly collaborative approach to providing learners with clear information about the range of options available to them.

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

There has been good progress in helping providers and sectors to work together effectively to offer a wider range of courses for learners at key stage 4 and post-16. The shape of this collaborative provision reflects different approaches and partnership arrangements to meet specific needs across the network. The work of the network has focused on maximising the offer for learners and not just meeting the minimum requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure.

The network has a shared vision and a clear focus on providing the best learning experiences for young people in Flintshire through sustainable collaborative structures. It is making a significant contribution to improving provision for 14 to 19-year-old learners in Flintshire. The development of the Learning Core Centre has been particularly successful in supporting the development of partnerships.

The network engages and co-ordinates effectively the contribution of its wide range of partners. It has developed a strong sense of partnership and trust based on regular communication and extensive consultation and involvement. The monthly 'provider days' promote collaborative working and help partners to develop an understanding of their contribution to the work of the network. There are high levels of stakeholder engagement, such as in the co-ordinated approach to assuring the quality of provision and the planning for improvement.

The network has established a number of sub-groups and steering groups to take responsibility for different strands of work. Network members and providers are clear about their roles and responsibilities within formal partnerships. These are set out in the 14-19 Provision Flintshire Partnership Arrangement, which is agreed and signed by all learning settings and reviewed annually.

Regular meetings of provider curriculum leaders take place to help support the planning of collaborative activities and to develop quality assurance procedures. The group focuses well on the need to increase learner choice and improve outcomes through their own provision and through collaboration. The group also gives careful attention to the need to plan for sustainability of provision and projects.

Overall, partners share resources effectively and use these well to extend learners' choice and enrich their learning opportunities. The development of the Principal Learning route for engineering is based on a collaborative approach, with Deeside College delivering the programme and participating schools responsible for the Welsh Baccalaureate element.

Employer engagement in the network is good. This includes effective links with employers at both strategic level and operational level. The network has engaged employer representation from the start and this has proved beneficial to learners. There is strong employer support for the Principal Learning qualification in engineering.

There are effective links between the local authority's Children and Young People's Partnership and the network to ensure a coherent approach to the planning and delivery of provision for young people in Flintshire. The youth support service makes a valuable contribution to the work of the network, for example through its range of programmes to assist individuals and groups to remain within mainstream education and gain formal accreditation.

Improving quality: Good

The network has made good progress in developing effective arrangements to assure quality. The network's quality sub-group maintains a clear overview of self-evaluation systems, making good use of a wide range of information.

There is a strong commitment to evaluating the quality of collaborative provision, and responsibilities have been clearly defined. Comprehensive service level agreements for assuring quality are in place and reviewed annually. The network receives regular updates from the sub-groups about the progress they are making in the work that they are leading. The quality system has informed decision-making and promoted change in relation to the withdrawal of courses or the movement of provision within the network consortium. Consortium groups have adopted the same procedures to support consistency in the quality of delivery of collaborative provision. However, there is a degree of variability in the rigour of quality assurance at consortium level.

The network makes extensive use of learner voice to inform its quality assurance processes. The two most recent surveys of learners' views have usefully been

supplemented by discussions with focus groups of learners to fully explore the detail behind the quantitative data contained in the surveys.

The network undertakes a thorough annual self-evaluation exercise. All network members contribute fully to the self-evaluation process and have clear ownership of the self-evaluation report and the resulting development plan. The current self-evaluation report is a detailed document based on Estyn's inspection framework. It is comprehensive and evaluative and provides a realistic, self-critical view of the work and progress made by the network. The judgements awarded in the self-evaluation report match those awarded by the Estyn inspection team. The report makes extensive use of a wide range of evidence relating to all aspects of the work of the network. However, it is not informed by an overview of provision relating to the quality of teaching and progress in improving the cost-effectiveness of provision.

There are effective arrangements in place to ensure that issues emerging from quality assurance inform development planning and Area Network Development Plan objectives. Areas for development included in the self-evaluation report are clearly linked to the network's Quality Improvement Plan for 2010-2011.

Resource management: Adequate

The general pattern of provision and outcomes at key stage 4 represent good value for money. The average funding per pupil in Flintshire is the sixth lowest in Wales. Good progress has been made in widening curriculum options for learners through collaboration between providers, and outcomes have improved significantly. Provision and outcomes for post-16 learners at Deeside College and work-based learning also offer good value for money.

The long-established post-16 collaboration by the four secondary schools in the Deeside Consortium has resulted in increasing the total number of options to learners while ensuring the cost-effectiveness of the provision. In other parts of Flintshire, there is not enough flexibility to allow learners to study a combination of courses with more than one provider.

The current pattern of post-16 provision in schools is unsustainable. Around half of Flintshire secondary schools have too many small post-16 classes. In around a quarter of schools, as many as one in four post-16 classes have fewer than five learners. There is also unnecessary duplication of courses on offer in a few schools.

The network has a clear understanding of the challenges it faces in relation to improving the cost-effectiveness of post-16 provision in schools by removing duplication and small classes. The local authority's Strategic Outline Case for the transformation of post-16 provision demonstrates the need for far-reaching and radical change across the post-16 infrastructure. It takes good account of issues relating to sustainability and highlights potential efficiency gains. However, as yet, there are no firm proposals in place regarding the reorganisation of post-16 provision in schools.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources in individual providers are generally well matched to provision. Accommodation and resources within the college are very

good and good specialist resources for applied courses and work-based learning allow learners to learn in realistic work environments.

Work-based learners benefit from accessing a high standard of accommodation and a comprehensive range of suitable resources when attending off-the-job training. Many learners work in a wide range of workplaces which gives them appropriate opportunities to collect national vocational awards.

Providers have enough well-qualified and experienced staff to deliver the courses for 14 to 19-year-old learners. Teaching by non-specialists is very rare. All providers have well-planned continuing professional development opportunities for staff that support the development of the network's 14-19 strategy. These include conferences for curriculum leaders and headteacher forums.

Good use has been made of Area Network Development Plan funds to support initiatives, including providing new technology, supporting collaborative working at key stage 4, training for learning coaching and setting up a project for learners at risk of being not in employment, education or training.

All secondary schools and Deeside College have virtual learning environments and video conferencing facilities. The network has also supported the purchase of a computer suite located at the Learning Core Centre. The Learning Core Centre offers a high quality environment for the delivery of collaborative courses.

Appendix 1

Evidence base of the inspection

Seven inspectors spent a total of 54 days inspecting standards and the quality of provision of education and training for 14 to 19-year-olds in Flintshire. The inspection team included a nominee who is chair of the Flintshire 14-19 network.

The inspectors considered:

- previous Estyn inspection reports on providers;
- documents from the Welsh Assembly Government and the Wales Audit Office;
- local plans and strategies;
- data on learner outcomes provided by the Welsh Assembly Government in relation to the 14 to 19-year-olds of the area, including information on the rates at which learners complete and attain their qualifications and training frameworks;
- data from all providers on their current provision and take-up; and
- the 14-19 network's self-evaluation report.

Members of the team had meetings with:

- managers with specific responsibility for the area within the Welsh Assembly Government, representatives from the 14-19 network group and senior leaders from the local authority and Deeside College to explain the inspection process and to respond to any questions;
- senior managers in secondary schools, Deeside College and North Wales Training;
- focus groups representing 14 to 19-year-old learners;
- the local authority, Careers Wales, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council and leaders of the 14-19 networks; and
- representatives from the 14-19 network group, providers and the local authority to give feedback on the inspection's provisional findings.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Iolo Dafydd HMI	Reporting Inspector
Sue Halliwell HMI	Team Inspector
Meinir Rees HMI	Team Inspector
Janice Thomas HMI	Team Inspector
Mark Evans HMI	Team Inspector
Steve Davies HMI	Team Inspector
Ceri Jones HMI	Team Inspector
Kevin Grandfield, Flintshire local authority	Nominee