



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

**Skills Academy Wales@Neath Port Talbot College
Dwr y Felin Road
Neath
SA10 7RF**

Date of inspection: May 2014

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

Established in October 2009 Skills Academy Wales NPTC (SAW) was the first Work-Based Learning (WBL) Consortium in Wales.

The consortium brings together 10 previously independent WBL providers as equal partners. The partner organisations include: Neath Port Talbot College Group; Pathways Training; Learn-kit Ltd; Gwendraeth Valley Community Enterprise Ltd (Job force Wales); Llanelli Rural Council (LRC Training); ACO Training; Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (Skills & Training); Swansea ITeC Ltd; The College Merthyr; Coleg y Cymoedd (formerly Coleg Morgannwg); and Tydfil Training Ltd.

Since 1st August 2010, the consortium has been operating with a single contract from the Welsh Government, held by the Neath Port Talbot College Group, for the delivery of WBL programmes. The consortium offers WBL training programmes in traineeships, STEPS to employment, Foundation and Modern Apprenticeships, Modern Skills diploma, Higher Apprenticeships and Flexible learning across a range of skills sectors.

SAW operates throughout South Wales and parts of Mid-Wales, including areas in Powys and Ceredigion. A number of these have high areas of deprivation, for example Merthyr Tydfil and the Valleys. More recently; one partner has begun operating in North Wales via a sub-contracting arrangement.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance of the provider is good because:

- current learners are demonstrating good progress in their training programmes;
- all learners receive a robust initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills;
- the majority of training programmes closely match the needs of learners and their employers;
- learners are well supported and feel safe in their learning environment; and
- good strategic management is provided by the provider's Executive Board.

However:

- outcomes for learners, whilst continuing to see a three year upward trend, are still around the national average for the work-based learning sector;
- recent changes in the structure and remit for some of the provider's working groups are still to have an impact on provision; and
- not all recommendations from previous inspection reports have been addressed.

Prospects for improvement

The provider's overall prospects for improvement are judged good because:

- the provider has already taken positive action to improve outcomes for learners;
- good partnership working is a strong feature of the consortium;
- the provider has identified weaknesses in working groups and appropriate action has been taken to improve their performance and effectiveness; and
- the provider's self-assessment judgements closely matched the outcomes of the inspection.

However:

- there is still inconsistency across the consortium in the integration of literacy, numeracy, Welsh language and culture and ESDGC into learning programmes;
- the effective use of good questioning techniques by tutors and assessors with learners is variable across the consortium; and
- overall there is inconsistency in the delivery of provision across the consortium.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the rates at which all learners complete their training programmes
- R2 Make sure that the marking scheme is used consistently across the consortium
- R3 Improve the use of effective questioning techniques of learners across the consortium
- R4 Improve the performance of the Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Group
- R5 Improve the effectiveness of the Sector Working Groups
- R6 Ensure that the recommendations from previous Estyn inspection reports are completed

What happens next?

Given the adequate judgement for Key Question 2.4, the link inspector will undertake a monitoring visit to assess the progress made by the provider with the issues identified by the inspection with the Equality Integration and Diversity group and disability access at two of the partners' premises.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Overall, the rate at which learners successfully complete their qualifications and programmes of study is around the average for work-based learning providers in Wales.

The latest published data (2012-2013) shows that with the exception of learners on Traineeship programmes, whose success rates are just below the national average, the success rates for learners on nearly all other programmes are around the national average. Work Focused Learning success rates are above the national average.

The three year trend from 2010-2013 shows an upward trend in success rates. The provider's own unpublished data from the current year shows that this upward trend is continuing.

Most learners complete their qualifications by their target date. They achieve their Essential Skills Wales (ESW) qualifications at expected levels. However, only a few learners achieve ESW qualifications at level 3. Nearly all learners of different ages, those with disabilities and those from ethnic minority groups achieve at similar rates to the consortium average. However, in the consortium's South West Region females complete at a lower rate than males.

Most current learners make good progress and show good practical and theory skills. They understand the requirements of their programme and take responsibility for their learning. They benefit from regular reviews and most have individual learning plans that set appropriate targets to complete their programmes.

Most learners' work is generally well presented and accurate. Nearly all learners are aware of the outcomes of their initial assessment for literacy and numeracy skills. Most have appropriate specific and short-term targets to help them further develop these skills. Whilst nearly all learners benefit from assessors' feedback on their literacy, the quality of the feedback is inconsistent across the consortium. Nearly all learners demonstrate good speaking and listening skills.

A few Welsh speaking learners take the opportunity to use their language skills and have their assessments through the medium of Welsh. Very few non-Welsh speaking learners improve their Welsh language skills whilst on programme.

Wellbeing: Good

All learners feel safe in the workplace and in their training environment. All go through a good induction programme, which pays particular attention to health, safety and wellbeing matters. The programme also ensures that learners are aware of the

support and guidance that is available to help them, including whom to contact if an issue arises.

The majority of learners are regularly encouraged, by consortium staff, to eat healthily and to lead a healthy lifestyle. As a result, a very few learners have seen a marked improvement in the amount of exercise they undertake as well as in their eating habits.

Nearly all learners have a positive attitude to and are happy with their training programme. They are keen to learn and work well with each other. Nearly all learners show respect for each other and to their tutors/assessors in both their training venue and in the workplace. A few learners are encouraged to make choices about their training and to suggest future themes for their training programmes such as topics of the month as well as which units to complete and in which order.

Nearly all of Traineeship learners' attendance is good. Most learners have individual training needs, which often mean choosing the appropriate class to attend from a selection of classes available. The majority of learners make good use of this flexibility to help them progress well in their class work and work placements.

A few learners regularly participate in charity and community based projects. This includes apprenticeship learners working with their employers to raise money for charity and learners on Traineeship programmes working with the Prince's Trust. The Princes Trust programme involves learners working with local community centres and homes, visiting primary schools, and building stage sets for a local amateur dramatic society and dance class.

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

The consortium's Executive Board agrees the breadth of the curriculum with the consortium partners. This reduces the historical duplication of provision by partners who joined the consortium. Overall, the consortium provides a good range of provision, which meets the needs of learners, employers and the local economy well. The provider works well with small businesses and national employers, customising training to suit individual companies' needs and where appropriate complementing their existing training programmes.

Consortium partners also adapt training programmes well to meet individual learners' needs. A few partners in the consortium offer useful motivational programmes that help prepare learners to respond positively to opportunities with employers.

Nearly all employer placements offer learners very good opportunities to develop their skills. There is generally a good match between work placements and off-the-job training. The majority of provider staff involve employers closely in the planning of learners' assessments. There are numerous examples of employers retaining traineeship learners as employed apprentices.

Most of the consortium's staff take good account of learners' initial assessments. The consortium has recently invested in developing a rigorous and flexible on-line initial assessment tool. Early indications are that, by using this resource, learners are making good progress in improving their literacy and numeracy skills.

The consortium has effectively mapped its staff's Welsh language skills and involves staff from all partners in awareness-raising for basic Welsh. The consortium has produced a useful Welsh in the Workplace resource to encourage learners to develop their Welsh language skills. Its Welsh Focus Group is developing useful Welsh language applications for skills diagnosis. Many learners undertake projects that help improve their awareness of Welsh culture, economy and language.

A majority of tutors use topical subjects well to discuss and improve learners' awareness of sustainability and global citizenship. However, in a few sessions there is a lack of focus on integrating Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) into training and assessment sessions.

Teaching: Good

Overall, teaching, training and assessment are good. Most trainers and assessors across the consortium demonstrate good subject knowledge. They use their industrial experience and technical knowledge well to train and support their learners. The relationship between learners, trainers, assessors, and many employers is good. This helps to develop learners' knowledge and confidence.

Many trainers and assessors plan and prepare on and off-the-job training sessions well. They use a comprehensive range of teaching and training methods at on and off-the-job sessions. Most trainers and assessors have high expectations of their learners and are committed to improving their practical competence and theory knowledge.

Most trainers and assessors use an appropriate range of questioning techniques. However, across the consortium they do not consistently use questioning effectively to test learners' understanding and higher level knowledge. Off-the-job sessions have a good mix of learner activity and trainer input.

Most trainers and assessors review learners' work frequently. They use a good range of assessment methods in the workplace and off-the-job. Many assessors provide learners with comprehensive verbal feedback that enables them to improve their future performance.

Across the consortium most trainers and assessors use appropriate strategies to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills. They regularly mark learner portfolios and written work. In the best examples, they correct spelling and grammatical errors and give constructive written feedback to learners. However, this is not consistent across the consortia.

Trainers and assessors review learners' progress regularly. In most cases, they discuss and agree appropriate targets for learners to complete assessments or collect portfolio evidence. Where learners are in employment, this often involves the

employer who is able to facilitate opportunities for learners to complete their evidence portfolio. However, in a few cases these targets are not always specific enough with clear deadlines for the completion of work.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Overall consortium partners provide good support for learners.

The consortium has a wide range of relevant policies covering aspects important for learners' wellbeing including bullying and harassment, equality and diversity and health and safety.

Most tutors promote health and wellbeing effectively. They use strategies and information that is relevant to the needs of different groups of learners.

Most tutors introduce a range of health and wellbeing themes into learners' programmes. They incorporate general wellbeing topics such as healthy eating, personal hygiene, safe drinking and positive attitudes and thinking into classroom activities. They discuss important health issues with learners during their reviews, which are particularly in related to learners' work roles and occupational areas.

Nearly all learners receive appropriate advice and guidance, from their provider, before they start, and during their time on programme. All learners have a comprehensive induction, which helps them to understand their programme, their responsibilities and the support the consortium can give them.

Nearly all tutors match learners to programmes that suit their specific personal and learning needs including, where appropriate, the needs of their employer.

All consortium partners make use of a comprehensive range of support mechanisms to help learners. Specialists within the consortium work with learners to support them through their programmes when they need extra encouragement and assistance. Partners network successfully with a very wide range of external agencies and services to provide specialist support for learners who may be experiencing particular difficulties in their lives.

Nearly all tutors use the results of initial assessment effectively to provide targeted and flexible support for those learners with additional learning needs. They skilfully identify learners', often very diverse, needs as they arise during their time in training and ensure that learners receive appropriate and timely support.

The consortium has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Adequate

The consortium consistently promotes equality and diversity (E&D) across its provision. Learners receive information on this topic during their induction and subsequent reviews. There is a range of useful resources to promote E&D to learners. Each partner has an appropriate policy on E&D and there is an overarching policy for the consortium.

The consortium's Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Group (EID) is responsible for the consistent approach to E&D across the partnership. Whilst the group meets regularly, the consortium does not effectively collect, analyse and evaluate data on equality to monitor how well learners from vulnerable or minority groups progress in their learning. The consortium has recognised this shortcoming and work is beginning to use equality data to inform its work more effectively. There is not enough evaluation of the impact that the work of this group has had on learners. There is no clear link between the consortium's self-assessment report (SAR) and the priorities of the EID group.

Most tutors promote diversity well. However in a very few cases they use language that reinforces stereotyping. For example, in a discussion on transferable skills a tutor used an example of a football coach in asking what else could "he" do?

The consortium has made some progress in addressing previously identified issues in inspection recommendations about access to training accommodation for learners with disabilities. However, a very few issues are still outstanding and they are not included in the consortium's current development plans.

Most workplaces and training facilities provide a good learning environment. Most classrooms are very well equipped with a good range of learning resources. There is good access to information and communication technology (ICT) in many classrooms, which enables tutors and learners to access research and animated learning materials. Most classrooms have topical displays that celebrate learners' work and many tutors refer to these during sessions. Most workplaces are very well equipped and give learners a good opportunity to develop up-to-date workplace skills and to learn to use good quality modern workplace technology.

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

The Skills Academy Wales (SAW) Executive Board has set a clear strategic direction for the consortium. It has developed and established clear values, strategic goals and a mission statement for the delivery of its work-based learning contract and the evaluation of its performance.

All consortium members have a shared ethos of trust and collaboration. They work well together, as equal partners, providing each other with high levels of support. The strategies and actions developed and implemented by the consortium's senior and middle managers are beginning to have a positive impact on improving the rates at which learners achieve their qualifications.

All staff, across all partners, are fully aware of and clear about their individual roles and responsibilities in improving the experience and outcomes for learners.

The governing body and senior management of the Neath Port Talbot College Group, who are the DfES WBL contract holder for the consortium, work well with the SAW Executive Board to review the performance of the consortium and to help set

targets for improvement. However, the targets set are not always challenging enough.

The consortium's Performance Management Group (PMG) and Quality Management Group (QMG) meet regularly to monitor and review the consortium's performance and quality of provision. Both groups demonstrate a very strong commitment to continually improving standards and quality of provision of the consortium.

The consortium's Sector Working Groups keep partners up to date with the latest developments in their sectors and share good practice amongst partners. They regularly report to QMG and PMG on their progress. However, with the remit of the groups recently reviewed it is too early to evaluate the impact on learners.

Communication across the consortium is good. Data and information are shared effectively.

The consortium has a robust staff appraisal system. It identifies staff's professional development requirements and any additional training they might require. Where under-performance is identified, staff are supported well.

The consortium contributes well to a wide range of Welsh Government (WG) local and national initiatives.

Improving quality: Good

The consortium makes good use of annual quality assurance checklists to assure itself that all partners implement appropriate quality systems and procedures.

All partners prepare their own self-assessment report (SAR) and submit their SAR to the consortium's Quality group for inclusion in the consortium's overall SAR. Senior consortium managers give useful feedback to partners and share examples of best practice in partners' individual self-assessment reports across the consortium.

The consortium's self-assessment report critically evaluates outcomes but does not make sufficient use of data to support its evaluations. Its quality development plan is detailed and accurately links actions to areas for improvement in the SAR. However a few of the actions are not specific enough.

The consortium use a two-day quality review to moderate observations partners have made of their training and assessments and to test the judgements made. There is a close match between the judgements agreed and those made during this inspection.

The consortium uses the outcomes from the Learner Voice survey, together with a range of other mechanisms, to obtain the views of learners. These include lunch and listen, blogs, surveys and a learner conference. The consortium responds well to the suggestions made by learners. However, the results of the Learner Voice survey 2014 show a 2% percentage points reduction in learners' views on how good the provider is and a 1% percentage points reduction in learners' evaluation of how good their course was.

The consortium's Quality and Performance groups ensure that all consortium members regularly review outcomes and make sure that all partners receive the necessary support needed to improve quality, for example by the pairing of partners to share good practice where there is a significant variation in outcomes for learners.

The consortium has established sector groups to focus on quality improvement by learning area. However, the groups have not been effective enough and it is too early to tell if the recent change to the remit of these groups has had a positive impact on learner outcomes.

The consortium has made good progress in addressing nearly all recommendations from partners' previous inspections. However, a few issues relating to access for learners with disabilities to centres are still outstanding.

Partnership working: Good

Establishing the consortium has involved bringing together 10 previously independent WBL providers as equal partners. The process is continuously evolving but progress to date is good and is providing wider and better learning opportunities for learners in the local areas.

High levels of respect and close working relationships exist between all partners. A variety of working groups set benchmarks, formulate strategies and develop resources for important areas of provision such as bilingualism, literacy, numeracy, equality and diversity.

Best practice, peer reviews and staff development activities are shared across the consortium with the aim of raising learners' standards.

The consortium has good external partnership arrangements with a variety of organisations, for example Sector Skills Councils, local authorities, Careers Wales and Job Centres. It collaborates well with a number of initiatives such as the Carmarthenshire Employer Group and Merthyr Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) strategy group to develop joint working practices. It is also closely involved with the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW).

The consortium's involvement in local 14-19 partnerships significantly influences the opportunities on offer to learners.

The consortium has good working relationships with a range of local employers including national, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and the voluntary sector. In a minority of cases, this has resulted in guaranteed employment for learners on successful completion of their qualification.

In Maesteg, the consortium's construction training centre has entered into a partnership with 'Valleys to Coast' (Social Landlords) to provide a good range of learning and training activities in the use of new technologies and materials. This agreement contractually secures work experience opportunities for trainees, enhancing employability for learners. The impact on learners is positive and motivates them to achieve their qualifications.

Resource management: Good

Staff are appropriately deployed across the consortium and staffing meets the needs of learners well. Partners with specialist knowledge, for example safeguarding and employment law, share this knowledge effectively with other consortium members. The consortium has begun to share its staff across providers to provide staff absence cover.

All partners are responsible for their own employees' staff development needs. Some cross-consortium staff training also takes place and this year has included health and safety, literacy, safeguarding and teaching and learning. The expectation is that staff at these events disseminate the outcomes to their colleagues. However, there is no formal check that this has taken place.

The results of a recent skills audit of all consortium staff is planned, in order to establish future minimum qualifications standards for all consortium staff. The QMG plan to use these and the priorities identified during quality reviews, appraisals and the self-assessment process to set the consortium's professional development priorities for 2014-2015.

Nearly all learning environments are good. Most work environments are safe, clean and tidy and learners have access to up-to-date specialist equipment. Nearly all learners benefit from good workplace experiences and assessment opportunities. Nearly all classrooms are of a good standard, with access to interactive whiteboards and other modern technologies. Many have stimulating displays that celebrate learners' work. However, unstable network connections occasionally hamper the use of online training resources in classrooms.

The Executive Board of the consortium manages the contract well. Since January 2013, the consortium has had formal contract review meetings with all partners present, in order to identify any programme area and financial underperformance. Where this is the case, the consortium re-allocates monies within the consortium to provide the best benefit for learners. Partners who have been unable to improve their performance have had their provision withdrawn.

Smaller partners within the consortium have benefited from opportunities for bulk purchasing.

Overall, learner outcomes are good and the provider offers good value for money.

Appendix 1

Learner satisfaction

Estyn uses the outcomes of the Welsh Government Learner Voice survey to inform all inspections of post 16 education and training. Learner Voice is a learner satisfaction survey conducted by the Welsh Government between January and February 2014.

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

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

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

One thousand three hundred and sixty six learners across the consortium completed the survey. The survey sample compares well to the consortium's learner population.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents rated the consortium as very good compared to the sector average of 62%. A further 32% rated the consortium as good overall. The combined results show a 2% percentage points reduction in the results of last year's survey. Ninety per cent of respondents thought that their course was better than expected, which is the average for the sector. However, it is a reduction of 1% percentage point on last year's survey results.

Overall, learners rated the consortium's performance as below the WBL average of very good across all of the five key themes.

The consortium achieves scores for 'very good' that are below the sector average across all survey questions. However, there have been some improvements on last year's survey results including feeling safe (2% percentage points) and teaching and training where five out of the nine questions saw an increase in "very good" scores ranging from 1-4%.

The survey also analyses learners' responses by demographic information – gender, age, ethnicity and disability. In general the consortium achieves lower 'very good' scores than the sector average across all key demographics for rating the consortium overall. However, in its non-apprenticeship programmes it receives scores above the sector average. With the exception of male learners and those learners aged under 19, scores were below the sector average. Scores from minority ethnic learners were 25% percentage points below the sector average. For the question "Is this training what you expected it to be?", the demographic scores closely match the sector average.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

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