



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on the further education provision of**

**Coleg Cambria**

**Grove Park Road  
Wrexham  
LL12 7AB**

**Date of inspection: October 2022**

**by**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education  
and Training in Wales**

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## About Coleg Cambria

Coleg Cambria is a large further education college in north-east Wales. The college was created following the merger of Deeside College and Yale College in August 2013. It has five campuses across Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire. The campuses that Coleg Cambria use are in Connah's Quay which includes the Deeside sixth form centre, Yale in Wrexham, which includes a sixth form centre, Bersham Road in Wrexham, Llysfasi and Northrop. The college offers a wide range of courses delivering programmes from pre-entry level to Level 7 across a large geographical area, with opportunities available on most courses to progress to the next level, or to progress to apprenticeships and higher education. These courses include:

- A level
- Access to higher education
- Hairdressing, beauty, spa and complementary therapies
- Business
- Health and social care and childcare
- Construction, engineering and digital technologies
- Media, sport and uniformed public services.

### Agriculture and animal care

- Foundation skills, skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages
- Creative industries
- Hospitality and catering and travel and tourism
- Independent living skills

The college has around 11,701 learner enrolments, of these 8,154 are enrolled on further education provision. The college has approximately 5,952 full-time and 2,217 part-time further education learners. Of the full-time learners, 4,541 follow vocational courses and 1,411 general education courses in the sixth form centres at Yale and Deeside. The college employs 1,294 staff.

Around 386,000 people live in Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham (96,000, 155,000 and 135,000 respectively). Of the current population, about 65,000 (17%) are aged under 15, and around 84,000 (22%) are aged 65 and over. The population of Flintshire grew by 1.6% between the 2011 and 2021 censuses, while the population of Denbighshire grew by 2.2% and Wrexham by 0.2%.

In June 2022, the employment rate in Flintshire was 80.1%, which is higher than the Wales figure of 73.7%. The employment rate in Denbighshire was 70.5 % and in Wrexham it was 71.7%, both lower than the Welsh average. In 2021, average (median) gross weekly earnings in Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham were £574, £571 and £564 respectively. They are ranked 6th, 7th and 8th highest amongst the 22 local authorities. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 shows that 20% of areas in Flintshire, 22% in Denbighshire and 28% in Wrexham are within the 30% most deprived in Wales. Most of Flintshire's, Denbighshire's and Wrexham's residents are of a white ethnic background.

The Annual Population Survey of 2021 indicates the percentage of people aged three and over who speak Welsh in the three local authorities is 29%, a four percentage points rise in 10 years. In terms of the Welsh language in the college, 7.7% of further education learners identify as having fluent Welsh language skills and 22.2% of further education learners say they have some Welsh language skills but are not fluent.

The percentage of adults in Flintshire that are qualified to level 2 or above (80.1%), to level 3 or above (60.8%) and to level 4 or above (40.1%) are in line or slightly below the Welsh averages. In Wrexham, those percentages (76.5%, 55.1% and 37.7%) are all substantially below the Welsh averages. In contrast, in Denbighshire, the percentages of people qualified to level 2 or above (82.4%), to level 3 or above (62.5%) and to level 4 or above (43.1%) are in line or slightly above the Welsh averages.

## Summary

Most learners are enthusiastic about their courses and motivated to achieve their qualifications, with many ambitious to progress to the next level. Learners feel safe and well supported by their teachers and other staff when attending the college. Most learners feel that the college is an inclusive and welcoming place where they feel valued. Nearly all learners work well together and with their teachers and other staff.

Most learners are aware of and benefit from a wide range of support for their mental health and emotional well-being. They recognise that the college places a high priority on their mental health. Across the college, learners value the culture that promotes their independence and supports them for progression to the next level and the world of work.

Many vocational learners develop a wide range of practical skills that helps them to develop the skills that industry needs. Academic and vocational learners across a wide range of abilities consistently achieve good grades relative to their individual starting points. Across the college, learners' numeracy skills are less well developed than similar cohorts prior to the pandemic. Many learners have a clear understanding of their next steps, including progression to a higher level course at college or into employment including apprenticeships. Many learners show a clear understanding of extremism and radicalisation.

The college curriculum offers a wide range of courses ranging from school link to higher education. Courses are developed using a wide range of information to identify need and, as a result, they support the needs of learners and employers across the region. The college has worked to streamline the curriculum and reduce duplication across sites. However, where provision exists across sites the college does not systematically share information relating to teaching and learning and the identification of best practice.

Most teachers know their learners well and plan activities which effectively engage them to achieve their full potential. In a minority of cases, teachers do not consistently identify the best teaching and learning strategies to enable all learners to progress and produce work of a high standard. Although the setting of targets for learners to complete work is a strong feature of academic courses and a few vocational areas, the practice is inconsistent across the college. Across the college many teachers do not plan well enough to develop learners' literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills. Teachers responsible for the delivery of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and vocational teachers do not always work well enough together to give learners the support they need.

The chief executive officer, supported by her senior leadership team, governors and staff have established a strategic direction for the college based on a shared vision, mission and strategic goals. Underpinning these aims is the desire to develop a culture of openness and transparency and a 'people-centred' ethos. Many staff feel valued, included and positive about the strategic direction and they appreciate the strong focus on well-being and support.

The college serves the needs of its communities well. It has well-developed partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders including local authorities, schools, further education colleges, public service boards, the regional skills partnership and employers. The college senior management team have a clear focus on improving the learning experiences for learners to make sure that all learners reach their full potential. They use comprehensive quality improvement procedures and collect a wide range of information to inform their practices. Currently, several key initiatives are new, and managers do not always measure the progress and impact of actions well enough.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Refine the improvement planning, evaluation and impact measurement of key initiatives
- R2 Improve the planning and delivery of teaching and learning activities to ensure that all learners achieve their potential across their full programme of study
- R3 Improve the planning and teaching of literacy and numeracy skills to ensure that learners develop their skills and address any skills gaps

## **What happens next**

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the provider to prepare a case study on its work in relation to trauma informed practice and work experience, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Learning

Most learners engage well with their work and show strong commitment to their studies. Many recall prior learning well and the majority can apply their knowledge and skills to new contexts effectively. For example, in AS film studies, learners successfully apply their knowledge of camera angles when discussing gender representation in a classic film. In lessons, most learners make strong progress whilst working independently, they listen attentively to their teachers and peers and can maintain their focus on a range of tasks. A few learners ask insightful questions to their teachers to develop their understanding further. In a few cases, particularly in dedicated literacy and numeracy lessons, learners make limited progress, are easily distracted by their peers and do not engage in the range of learning activities.

Many learners helpfully support each other when working on tasks, they discuss the more challenging aspects of their work and agree on the best way to proceed. When working in small groups, many learners collaborate effectively. They collectively develop their ideas and views by consulting with each other and sharing their opinions. The majority know how and when to challenge each other to help them make progress as a group. For example, level 3 performing arts learners discuss and debate local and national issues related to homelessness and level 2 cabin crew learners enthusiastically frame their learning conversations in the context of a recent college visit to Manchester airport. Most learners work together well in pairs, explaining their ideas and communicating clearly. A minority correct each other's misconceptions and address gaps in each other's knowledge sensitively. For example, AS business studies learners test one another on the features of private and public limited companies in a supportive and developmental way.

A minority of learners across the college are hesitant to contribute in front of their peers and need regular prompting from teachers to respond to questions and to take part in whole-group discussions. These learners are uncertain of themselves and are overly reliant on their teachers. They wait for teachers to present solutions to tasks and problems rather than being prepared to learn by making mistakes. When responding to teachers' direct questions, these learners provide limited responses, make too little use of subject specific terminology and, in a few instances, struggle to recall important aspects of prior learning.

Across the college many learners take suitable lesson notes. Many of those on higher level programmes make detailed notes and process and synthesise important information effectively. Many higher level learners present their work clearly and file their work logically so that it can be used when preparing for formal assessments. Learners following academic courses review their assessment outcomes regularly and many subsequently correct or add to their assessment work before setting themselves worthwhile targets for improvement. Across level 1 and level 2 vocational programmes, as well as in English and mathematics lessons, a minority of learners usefully reflect on their assessments in this way.

In line with their ability and level of study, the majority of learners write proficiently and demonstrate effective extended writing skills. For example, AS psychology

learners make effective use of established writing strategies to structure their work when evaluating the behaviourist approach. Level 3 animal care learners demonstrate good levels of literacy, confidently writing about the methodologies they are intending to apply as part of their skills challenge certificate work. Overall, a minority of learners in vocational areas, particularly at level 1 and 2, have literacy skills that are weaker than would be expected for their level of study. These learners make frequent errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Learners' numeracy skills across the college are less well developed than would be expected of similar cohorts prior to the pandemic. A minority of learners are not focused on their numeracy targets and in dedicated numeracy or mathematics lessons, progress and engagement is too inconsistent. In a few examples, learners develop valuable numeracy skills in technical vocational sessions, for example by producing graphs to display how the electromagnetic force induced in a generator varies with the rotation of the coil. However, across the college, lower-level learners do not develop their numeracy skills as part of their vocational studies often enough.

Nearly all learners make effective use of digital platforms to produce and organise their work. Engagement with the college's digital learning resources has become a well-established and integral part of learning at the college. In relevant lessons, learners make beneficial use of specialist software. For example, independent living skills learners use digital calendars to schedule their activities and in more technical areas, such as engineering, learners independently develop valuable computer-aided design skills using industry standard software.

In vocational areas, nearly all learners develop valuable practical skills and a few exhibit higher level practical ability. For example, in level 3 catering sessions, learners demonstrate dexterous skills while preparing vegetables using a range of different chopping techniques, and in brickwork sessions learners demonstrate how to add complex decorative features to the structures that they are building.

Nearly all learners following independent living skills courses develop valuable life skills during their time at the college. They acquire a sound understanding of important areas of independence and self-care, for example, they are able to select which products to use as part of personal care routines and identify the purpose of each product. Most learn how to cook meals and undertake domestic activities, with many also learning how to manage their finances. They happily interact with each other in lessons and socially, playing games with each other at lunchtime. Many learners demonstrate an understanding of their future destinations and the skills they are developing in preparation for progression. Learners question staff members about employability options and work-life experiences. They role-play social situations to support them in making the transitions to new working and social environments.

Learners joining the college with fluency or strong competence in the Welsh language regularly take advantage of opportunities to speak the language in the context of their studies where possible. Welsh-speaking A level learners undertake their Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate through the medium of Welsh. A small number of learners, identified as strong Welsh second language speakers, take part in fast-stream AS Welsh second language lessons in addition to their main subjects of study. Welsh speakers undertaking agriculture courses participate in

bilingual lessons, as do learners in health and social care and childcare for parts of their courses. Learners undertaking courses across the nationally identified priority vocational areas engage suitably with the dedicated lessons the college has provided to help them develop their competence and confidence in using Welsh. However, across the college, very few learners develop their Welsh as part of their main subject lessons or vocational sessions.

Overall, learners at the college make strong progress towards their vocational and academic qualifications. Higher ability learners engage enthusiastically with the college's 'improving programme' to stretch and support them in realising their potential. Level 3 learners at risk of underachieving, together with those who want to achieve higher grades, engage well with the college's extensive subject specific support classes and sessions. A level and level 3 vocational learners of a wide range of abilities consistently achieve good grades relative to their individual starting points.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Most learners feel that the college is an inclusive and welcoming place where they feel valued. They feel safe and free from harassment. They wear Coleg Cambria lanyards and recognise the importance of this in relation to safety and a sense of belonging to the college.

Nearly all learners show respect to each other. They are courteous and considerate. They respect staff and feel respected and supported by staff. A very few learners have seriously or repeatedly breached the college's code of conduct, resulting in a small number of suspensions.

Most learners are aware of and benefit from a wide range of support for their mental health and emotional well-being. They recognise that the college places a high priority on their mental health. For example, learners benefit from well-being assistants that are visible around campuses in social areas, resilience coaches that assist with barriers to learning, progress coaches that provide tutorials and personal support, as well as counselling and multi-faith chaplaincy services. Learners value the 'well-being hubs' that offer calming zones with low-level lighting, comfortable seating and gentle music that help them to relax and take time out from the pressures they face. Despite the wide range of support on offer, a few learners are either unaware of support services or unable to benefit from them at the time of need because of staff capacity issues.

Learners are supported to live healthily, and they take part in a range of organised and informal physical activities. For example, learners benefit from the college's Active Cambria team's input to the tutorial programme and peripatetic yoga during lessons that promotes the benefits of physical movement for the brain. Learners play table tennis at break times as the college has recently installed tables indoors and outdoors after learners requested them.

Where appropriate, learners receive considerable support for the costs associated with studying at college that helps them to participate fully and alleviates stress associated with the cost of living. Learners from low-income households can access free lunches and additional support to help them have the resources they need for



their course or to participate in an off-site activity. Learners can take part in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and loan equipment for expeditions for free.

Learners value the culture in the college that promotes their independence and responsibility for their learning and life in college. This prepares learners well for progression to the next level of learning and the world of work. For example, learners self-report absences and self-refer to support services when they have a need. They take on various roles within a simulated motor vehicle garage and they take on real work roles within the college's commercial enterprises such as the florist shop, hair and beauty salon and restaurant that are open to the public. Although the opportunities are limited, when given the opportunity, learners make mature choices in their learning, such as choosing their preferred extension task or deciding whether to work individually, in pairs or small groups on a task.

Learners who are interested access various opportunities to take on formal and informal leadership roles in the college that develop not only their leadership skills, but also their employability skills and self-confidence. For example, the Active Cambria Trusted Leaders programme supports learners to lead sports activities and learners help staff to run sports competitions against other colleges. Learners act as ambassadors in several areas. For example, they help run open evenings and share their experiences with prospective learners and their parents, and informally act as ambassadors for the Welsh language within a class.

Many learners feel that the college values their views and that any concerns are listened to and acted upon. Most learners who take on representative roles for their class, campus or college take their roles seriously. They engage enthusiastically with their peers and college staff in supporting improvements in their experience at the college. These learners have influenced the provision of more water fountains, chairs being replaced in classrooms, a change of location of the gender-neutral toilet in Deeside sixth form centre and the introduction of pronoun badges that are freely available to all learners and staff.

## **Teaching and learning experiences**

The college curriculum is well considered, using a structured planning process and involving staff at all levels. It offers a wide range of courses ranging from school link through to level 4 and onwards to higher education and supports the needs of learners and employers across the region. Courses are developed using labour market intelligence and regional skills priorities. These are refined using the knowledge of an extensive range of stakeholders, including employer advisory boards, local schools and sector skills councils. For example, the college has developed a level 2 diploma in dairy production, to support skills shortages identified in discussions with the local farming community.

Senior and middle managers work well with all stakeholders and use the curriculum planning system to streamline the curriculum offer and reduce duplication across sites. However, where provision exists on more than one site, information relating to the learners' experiences, teaching and learning and best practice is not always shared systematically. Progression opportunities are available for many qualifications, and where this is not possible learners are supported well by their teachers to move into another area of learning, further training or employment.

The college has developed a new curriculum for those learners following independent living skills courses. There are several pathways, ensuring that learners follow a meaningful programme of activities and develop relevant skills to support their future lives. For example, learners on the employability pathway create their own resources to help prepare themselves for interviews. There is a strong focus on the development of independent living skills, and the curriculum provides valuable opportunities to practise shopping, cooking and personal care.

The college offers learners a range of additional timetabled learning opportunities in a majority of curriculum areas, to enhance learning opportunities and raise learners' aspirations and employability skills. Examples of these include tractor driving, safe use of pesticides, safe use of veterinary medicine in agriculture, trauma first aid in forestry, 3D printing and augmented reality in construction. In addition, nearly all level 3 academic and vocational learners who have previously achieved their GCSE English and mathematics study the skills challenge certificate.

Learners' vocational experiences are enhanced through the college's programme of employer engagement activities, such as guest speakers from national industries and national and world skills competitions. In performing arts, there are strong links with the National Theatre of Wales, and learners can work with professional artists to develop their performance and production skills. Curriculum managers have also used their links to adapt provisions to meet employer needs, such as the introduction of robotics in enhanced engineering courses.

Although work experience is not available across all courses, the college has developed particularly effective partnerships with a local health board that enables health and social care level 3 learners to undertake work placements in hospitals during their first year of study. Learners in land-based pathways at level 2 and 3 complete work experience that gives them a beneficial insight into working in the industry.

The college is continuing to develop and extend its bilingual vocational provision in line with its action plan. It has identified priority areas in childcare, health and social care and public services, and nearly all level 2 and level 3 learners in these areas receive dedicated Welsh language lessons, focusing on improving their language skills that are a beneficial employability skill.

The college offers its learners clear skills development pathways, based on their prior attainment and initial assessment. As a result of a recent quality review, the college has taken the decision this year to keep its foundation and level 1 learners together for their essential skills classes. However, many teachers across the college do not plan well enough to develop learners' skills of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy from their individual starting points as they move through their vocational and academic courses. Skills and vocational teachers do not work well enough together to support the development of learners' skills within their courses.

The college has introduced the role of the progress coach to focus on providing learners with pastoral support, helping them to identify the next steps for progression and supporting their well-being. This has created a more cohesive and consistent approach to monitoring and developing learners' well-being, whilst allowing subject teachers to focus on learners' academic and vocational skills development.

Teachers' verbal feedback gives most learners confidence and aspirations to progress. Variations in the quality of written feedback and inconsistency in the annotation of literacy errors mean that learners do not always know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

The use of questioning techniques to check learners' understanding and reinforce previous learning varies across the college. In the best cases, teachers use follow-up questions well to encourage learners to build upon their answers and directed questioning draws useful contributions from learners. However, in most lessons, teachers' questioning is underdeveloped, and teachers have an over reliance on using questions that do not probe learners' answers.

In the best cases, teachers use their knowledge of learners' skills, abilities and aspirations to plan activities which stretch and challenge them effectively to achieve their full potential. However, in the minority of cases, teachers do not carefully identify the best teaching and learning activities to enable all learners to progress and produce work of a high standard. The pace of a few lessons is slow and activities do not stimulate learners' interests. In these sessions, learner engagement is limited with learners passive for extended periods of time. In a few technology classes, teachers do not make best use of the high-quality practical resources they have available to fully engage and support learners' progress.

Target setting is a strong feature of academic courses and a few vocational areas, such as in business, public services and sport where teachers support learners to know their progress and assessment targets and what they need to do to improve. However, this is inconsistent across the college, and many teachers do not set meaningful targets for their learners to inform the planning and assessment of learning. Teachers do not routinely use formative assessment to judge the progress of their learners and inform future planning.

Teachers at Llysfasi move seamlessly between speaking Welsh and English and in GCSE mathematics at Llysfasi learners benefit from Welsh-medium teaching and learning opportunities.

### **Care, support and guidance**

Coleg Cambria provides an inclusive and caring environment for its learners and staff. The college has successfully developed an ethos with a very strong focus on well-being, support and mutual respect. As a result, most learners feel safe and supported during their time at the college.

The college recognised a significant increase in the well-being needs of learners, particularly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, there has been a strategic focus on learner well-being, with the development of beneficial facilities to support this. For example, each campus has dedicated well-being areas, prayer rooms and gender-neutral toilets. Learners value these resources and make regular use of well-being areas.

The college offers a wide range of support services to enable learners to overcome barriers to education. All learners benefit from access to free breakfasts and the college provides free transport where required. Further, the college provides care

packages, food vouchers, childcare and financial support for learners who require these services. Extra individualised support is available for those learners who are homeless or refugees.

Equality and diversity are at the heart of the college's work. Most learners learn how to understand and respect those from different backgrounds. The college delivers a range of events to support this, for example chaplaincy tutorial sessions, debates on current events and transgender awareness training.

There is an extensive range of well-being support available at the college. Learners benefit from a comprehensive range of services. These includes progress coaches, well-being assistants, student services advisers, resilience coaches and mental health co-ordinators as well as comprehensive procedures to refer learners to more specialist support. Staff use newly implemented systems to track and monitor the impact of this support. However, these systems are recently established and it is too soon to fully evaluate their impact.

The college collects valuable information about learner well-being and experience through questionnaires, such as the 'life survey'. However, this is newly established and is not currently available in formats accessible to all learners. The college has recently introduced a new tutorial programme, including a range of mandatory and optional modules. This provides important information to learners about a range of topics including safeguarding, Prevent, equality and diversity, and resilience. As a result of this work, most learners demonstrate a clear understanding of these important topics.

The college has introduced the 'Active Cambria' offer for all staff and learners. This scheme encourages the college community to remain active and make healthy lifestyle choices. For example, the college provides learners on independent living skills courses with gym induction and membership.

The college provides information, advice and guidance to learners before application and then throughout their learning journey. A team of staff, including tutors, careers advisors, progress coaches and external partners offer learners a range of helpful information. In a few cases, this support has been adversely affected by changes within the staff team. Further, learners benefit from 'swap don't drop' at the beginning of the academic year, which provides flexibility to those who are unsure about their course choices. The college has a strong focus on ensuring that learners remain in education.

The college is using and developing purposeful transition processes for its most vulnerable learners. Staff provide a range of activities, including accessible open events and transition days. These processes are individualised to the specific needs of each learner. Learners appreciate these opportunities and the sensitive sharing of information to make the transition process as smooth as possible.

For those learners with more complex needs, such as those following independent living skills courses, the college has recently supplemented its transition work with the addition of an assessment period at the beginning of the academic year. This provides staff with the opportunity to get to know their learners and ensure that they are following a relevant pathway.

The additional learning need team have developed useful systems and processes for ensuring that learners' needs are met. For example, each learner with an identified need has an individual support plan, which contains helpful information about their requirements. Staff have a flexible approach to meeting the needs of each learner and provide relevant support to the wider staff team. Further, the college has comprehensive processes in place to offer learners opportunities for additional learning need screening.

The additional learning need team deliver worthwhile training for staff in a range of formats, including online, face-to-face and through podcasts. For example, they provided recent training on behaviour de-escalation. In addition, the college offers access to a range of external relevant training opportunities to all staff to meet the needs of learners with an additional learning need.

The college uses partnership working to support learners to develop a good understanding of their local community and the wider world. For example, learners fundraise for local charities, volunteer to run 'dance for Parkinson's' courses and benefit from Urdd activities such as gorge walking.

As a result of the positive college ethos, nearly all staff have a strong understanding of safeguarding processes and procedures. Learners demonstrate a clear understanding of how to report concerns and issues that may affect them, such as extremism and radicalisation. The college has invested in its safeguarding provision. The college provides 24-hour helplines to learners, as well as live chat functions, which were available during periods of lockdown.

The college has appropriate policies and procedures for safeguarding. All staff benefit from regular safeguarding training and the college follows safer recruitment procedures. There are a range of easily accessible ways in which staff and learners can raise concerns.

Leaders at the college work with partners in the wider community to keep learners safe. For example, after gathering information about local issues the college was able to respond with a focus on educating learners about the risks posed by 'county lines'.

## **Leadership and management**

The chief executive officer took up her post at Coleg Cambria in January 2020. Despite the difficulties of the pandemic, the chief executive officer, her senior leadership team, governors and staff have successfully established a strategic direction based on a shared vision, mission and strategic goals. The college has set high expectations and aspirations for its learners and staff. Underpinning these aims is the desire to develop a culture of openness and transparency and a 'people-centred' ethos. Many staff feel valued, included and positive about the strategic direction and they appreciate the strong focus on well-being and support.

The governing body comprises of members with a wide range of professional experience and expertise which helps support the development of the college. Governors have a beneficial understanding of the areas of strength and those that require improvement. They have a clear understanding of the vision, mission and

strategic goals and they provide support and challenge to the chief executive and senior leaders. The full governing body meets regularly and there are appropriate sub-committees to scrutinise key areas of the college including quality, finance and estates. Each governor is linked on a rotational basis to a particular department and its leader so that they develop operational experience of all areas of the college.

To meet its strategic aims and objectives, the college has recently restructured. It has increased substantially the number of leadership roles at all levels, creating clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The new staffing structure underpins and supports the vision, mission and values of the college. However, it is too early to assess fully the impact of this new structure on the learner experience, learner outcomes and well-being.

The college has introduced a new internal communications system to connect staff from all sites and learning areas of the college and to provide easier access to key documentation and important updates. This communication tool is available through various digital devices, and it channels information through one central point. It allows all staff to read the regular blog from the chief executive officer and to give feedback on current issues, developments, discussions and key topics.

The college serves the needs of its community well and it has partnerships with local authorities, schools, colleges, public service boards, the regional skills partnership and employers. Partnership working is strong, and college leaders sit on strategic boards in the locality to ensure the college meets the needs of employers and the communities that it serves. The college plays a pivotal role in shaping local and national priorities and senior learners often chair partnership boards. The college has a productive partnership with schools and colleges across north Wales. It is part of the North Wales Transitions Partnership, established to ensure that all learners at post-16 secure education, training or employment.

There is a rigorous continuous self-assessment process in place. It is underpinned by reviews which take place three times in the academic year. The college self-assessment process covers all areas of the college, including functional, business and support areas. This process has helped the college to have a solid understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. Through their self-assessment, the college has identified its key quality improvement priorities that inform its continuous improvement plan.

The college has introduced additional strategies to improve teaching, learner outcomes and learner experience. For example, the newly introduced in-depth quality review enables departmental teams to discuss performance, identify areas for improvement and implement and accelerate actions.

Currently, it is too early to measure the impact of all recently introduced processes and procedures. In a few cases the tools are too limited to accurately measure performance and progress as challenging targets have not been set clearly enough or identified at the start of the process.

There is a beneficial Welsh language strategy in place and an action plan to increase Welsh language and bilingual provision. The Welsh language strategy has clear objectives and targets and there has been appropriate progress against actions.

The college has implemented a comprehensive professional development strategy that includes all leaders, teachers, support and administrative staff. It has clear aims and objectives, which focus well on learner outcomes and well-being. A few staff have completed the inspiring leaders programme and they have progressed onto more senior positions within the college.

The college has moved to a quarterly staff appraisal system called 'connected conversations'. These regular conversations focus on the needs of individual staff and their professional learning needs. Early evaluations suggest this approach is generating more beneficial dialogue between line managers and staff. However, it is too early to identify the full impact of this process on teaching, learning and well-being.

Many staff engage with a variety of professional development programmes to update their skills and their subject knowledge. Staff undertake regular mandatory training and updating on key strategies, such as safeguarding and digital skills with a key focus on becoming a 'trauma-informed college'.

The college provides high levels of personal, financial and academic support to staff and learners. The college has put in place additional funds to support staff and learners who may experience difficulties in the current economic climate. It has also introduced a programme that assesses the learning needs of staff. This has a positive impact on staff identifying their own specific learning needs and receiving appropriate support. All staff have access to a virtual assist programme to seek confidential, advice, guidance and support.

The college is in a strong financial position and has well considered financial plans in place for further investment in resources and learner experience. It monitors the budget diligently to meet the strategic needs and they have contingency plans in place to address any further changes in the economic climate, for example with rising energy costs.

There is a comprehensive and ambitious estate strategy in place. Most accommodation is of a high quality. The college has invested in capital developments and refurbishments to create particularly high-quality facilities for vocational and academic areas, such as engineering, construction and sport.

The college has invested well in industry standard resources and digital technology that support teaching and learning effectively and which prepare learners for the world of work. The recent creation of well-being hubs, inclusion zones and reception areas have further enhanced the accommodation, creating relaxing spaces to support learner and staff well-being.

## Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the learner questionnaires and consider the views of teachers, support staff and the governing body where appropriate through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the principal/chief executive, governors, senior and middle managers and individual teachers, instructors and support staff to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- meet learners to discuss their work, to listen to them and to gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of sessions, including classroom and workshop activities across the provision, where appropriate
- observe and speak to learners outside of sessions
- look closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- consider the provider's quality improvement plan and looked at evidence to show how well the provider had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a wide range of provider documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection



## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

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