



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

**A report on the work based learning provision of
Cambrian Training Company**

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by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Cambrian Training Company

Cambrian Training Company is a long standing private-sector training provider based in mid Wales. The provider has apprentices across the whole of Wales in partnership with its ten subcontractors: Apprenticeship Group Wales (AGW), Call of the Wild, Clybiau Plant Cymru, Inspiro, Lifetime Training, NTG Training, Portal Training, Progression Training, Sirius Skills and Work Based Training Agency (WBTA).

As part of its Welsh Government funded apprenticeships contract, the provider and its subcontractor partners support around 2,100 apprentices. The majority of the provider's apprentices work in the hospitality and catering and health, public services and care sectors. The provider delivers apprenticeships from Level 2 to Level 5 across the following range of sectors:

- Hospitality
- Food and drink manufacture
- Butchery
- Health and social care
- Children's early years
- Leadership and management
- Engineering and manufacturing technologies
- Hair and beauty
- Digital marketing
- Leisure and sport
- Business administration
- Retail and customer service
- Sustainable resource management

Summary

Senior leaders at Cambrian Training have established a clear vision and strategic objectives to meet the needs of its learners and employers. A particular strength of leadership within this provider is the influence and support that senior leaders have made in the food, drink and hospitality sectors. They have long-standing relationships with a wide range of employers across Wales and work with industry representative bodies to address current and future skills gaps and training needs. As a result, the provider develops its provision well to meet these skills needs for the food, drink and hospitality sector across Wales.

Senior and middle managers undertake regular, risk-based contract reviews with subcontractors, which focus on key performance aspects, supplemented by frequent communication. The provider's self-assessment processes are systematic. However, they do not identify key strengths and improvement areas explicitly enough and quality improvement planning lacks sharp target-setting that measures impact clearly.

Learner attainment across the provision is variable and remains particularly low in hospitality and catering. This learning area remains the slowest across the apprenticeships sector to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most learners develop practical skills relevant to their job role and use these to become productive and valued members of their workplace. This is particularly strong in the hospitality, food and drink sector where the provider encourages learners of all abilities to participate in regional and national skills competitions.

Most learners are motivated and enthusiastic about their programmes and know what assessments and tasks they need to complete. As a result, they make sound progress towards completion of their apprenticeships. Many learners are ambitious to progress within their careers and to higher level apprenticeship programmes.

Most training officers are experienced industry practitioners who integrate real workplace contexts into learners' training and assessment plans well. They skilfully use questioning techniques to develop learners' knowledge and understanding and they support and encourage those aiming to progress to higher levels. Most training officers use a wide range of innovative resources and digital technologies to engage learners. They provide effective written and verbal feedback to help learners understand their progress and improve. Most training officers conduct meaningful progress reviews for learners, though the targets they set for learners are too short-term in the majority of cases.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve framework success rates and timely completion rates in areas of underperformance
- R2 Improve the quality of short, medium and long-term targetsetting when planning for learners' progress towards framework completion
- R3 Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning to make sure actions are clearly identified and improvement planning targets are precise and robust to drive improvement

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 senior leaders and their engagement and influence within the hospitality, food and drink sectors, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Learning

Nearly all learners are motivated to achieve their apprenticeship and are enthusiastic about their learning. Most are ambitious and are keen to progress within their chosen sector.

Many learners are aware of the progress they are making towards completion of their overall framework. Most understand the targets relating to the completion of key tasks required to successfully achieve these goals.

Most learners are developing skills relevant to their job role and use these skills in the workplace well and to the required standard. For example, a level 2 hospitality and catering apprentice who showed exceptional skills, motivation and capability has been promoted to be the manager of their employer's restaurant with rooms. Another learner on a level 4 management programme used a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis to evaluate the suitability of a proposed change to a maintenance process, collaborating with his employer to determine the best course of action.

The provider is particularly strong at encouraging learners of all levels and ability to participate in regional, national and international skills competitions, which further enhances their motivation and skills development. For example, in preparation for a forthcoming skills competition, a level 3 professional cookery apprentice skilfully fillets different types of flat and round fish and understands the associated health and safety considerations in doing so.

Many learners demonstrate strong problem-solving capabilities, both during practical sessions and when presented with scenario-based problems. For example, a learner on a level 2 vehicle maintenance and repair apprenticeship confidently discusses the various approaches taken to solve a connectivity error on a vehicle repair.

Nearly all learners are happy with their programme and are clear on how it will benefit them. Most are valued members of the workplace, and in the best cases learners have developed and subsequently been promoted or progressed to a higher level of training.

Most learners show sound communication skills, for example when confidently answering questions, giving accurate answers and explaining how they relate and apply knowledge and understanding to their work context.

Nearly all learners attend their scheduled sessions well and are ready to engage with the tasks set. They demonstrate respectful and professional working relationships with their training officer or essential skills tutor.

Where learners have the opportunity to benefit from opportunities to participate in group teaching and learning activities, they develop their teamworking skills and helpful peer support networks.

Most learners make at least expected progress in achieving the literacy and numeracy qualification requirements of their framework. For a few learners, this represents particularly strong progress from their initial starting points. A few learners achieve literacy or numeracy qualifications at a level above that required for their framework. This is particularly beneficial for those progressing to higher level qualifications.

A majority of learners develop their use and understanding of the Welsh language throughout their apprenticeship. For example, in an online exam preparation session the training officer and learners seamlessly integrate the use of Welsh language throughout the session.

In hospitality and catering, despite learners demonstrating particularly strong practical skills and making sound progress in learning, over the two years following the COVID-19 pandemic, only around half of learners successfully completed their full apprenticeship programme. This reflects a sector-wide issue for employers in retaining staff in this industry. Attainment rates for foundation and higher apprentices improved from 2021/22 to 2022/23 whilst rates for learners on apprenticeships declined during the same period. Attainment rates were below the sector average across all levels in 2022/23.

In health, public services and care, attainment rates for apprentices on foundation apprenticeships and apprenticeships improved substantially in 2022/23 and were significantly above national averages in both 2021/22 and 2022/23. Attainment rates for higher apprentices in this sector declined substantially in 2022/23 to be below the sector average.

There is substantial variation in learner outcomes between and within delivery partners. Some established subcontractors perform very well, particularly in health, public services and care. However, there is weaker performance across other partners, particularly in hospitality and catering.

Around half of framework achievers during 2022-2023 took longer than expected to complete their framework, especially in hospitality and catering. Many learners achieving later than their expected end date do so within three months of this date.

Well-being, support and guidance

Cambrian Training and its subcontractors have a very strong ethos of care and support for their learners and staff. Most learners develop a positive and trusting rapport with their training officers and this fosters a caring and supportive environment for learning. The provider has a comprehensive induction programme, which familiarises learners with all aspects of support and guidance available to them. Most learners value the useful information they receive before joining their apprenticeship and say they receive good advice and guidance during their programme on their potential progression opportunities.

There is a clear structure in place for the wrap-around care and support service offered by the provider. Training officers receive professional development on all aspects of mental health and well-being, making them more equipped to support their learners.

The provider uses training opportunities from external partnerships effectively in order to broaden staff knowledge and understanding of well-being and safeguarding. For example, recent online mental health training from an external support agency was shared across the provider.

Training officers meet regularly with their learners and use their own knowledge and understanding to generate conversations around mental health and well-being at each visit. When agreeing targets for future work, training officers encourage learners to consider aspects of well-being, such as their work-life balance. Within the hospitality sector, a training session was contextualised to highlight the risk of substance misuse and challenged learners to suggest prevention strategies. As a result, most learners say their learning programme has helped improve their attitudes to keeping healthy and safe.

All subcontractors have policies and procedures covering mental health and well-being. Within the provider's in-house provision, a number of initiatives have been put in place in the last few years, including a cause for concern procedure, a designated well-being email address, mental health first-aiders and well-being champions, and all are used well by staff to guide their learners, so that they know how and who to contact for support at any stage within the time on programme. The mental health champions have also delivered professional development days across all subcontractors.

The provider recently appointed an additional learning needs co-ordinator, who has provided useful professional learning for the provider's internal training officers in order to increase their knowledge of the resources available to help support learners. It is the provider's intention to implement the function across all subcontractors once an internal pilot has been evaluated and refined.

All subcontractors ensure that their learners receive comprehensive information on safeguarding including about radicalisation and extremism and conversations on these subjects happen regularly during reviews of progress. However, in a minority of cases, learners do not develop this knowledge early enough in their apprenticeship programme.

Many employers offer safeguarding training to their staff and give advice on how to be aware of the potential risks of radicalisation and extremism within their own lives and their chosen profession. For example, a level 2 health and social care learner was able to talk confidently about how the training received has enhanced their knowledge and ability to safeguard vulnerable adults within their work environment.

The provider has robust procedures for checking the suitability of all staff that have contact with learners and any changes in workforce are suitably recorded. Nearly all learners feel safe in their workplace and training environments and know how to report any concerns. The provider has robust procedures for handling safeguarding incidents. The provider's arrangements for safeguarding learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Teaching, training, assessment and learning experiences

The provider plans its provision carefully to take account of progression pathways and clear apprenticeship routes allow learners to progress in their learning and job roles. There is a good balance of provision at foundation, apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship levels. The breadth of provision is particularly strong in hospitality and catering and food and drink where almost all occupations have an associated apprenticeship pathway.

The provider has partnered with external supported employment agencies to deliver a supported apprenticeship programme for learners with additional learning needs (ALN). The provider's ALN Co-ordinator works well with its own internal training officers and support agencies to implement support plans, which help these learners progress in their learning and improve their confidence and self-esteem.

Training officers are experienced industry practitioners who have a sound understanding of the employers they work with. They draw on their own experiences to put their learning programmes into real workplace contexts for learners and skilfully identify aspects of learners' workplace activities that meet assessment criteria.

Nearly all training officers know their learners well. They maintain regular contact with their learners and they are flexible in meeting learners' personal support needs both inside and outside planned sessions.

Many training officers support learners to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills well. In the best cases, training officers and essential skills delivery staff work together to plan and deliver all elements of the apprenticeship framework. Learners who have previously completed essential skills are encouraged to further develop their skills through the use of the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit. However, in a few cases, learners who need to complete essential skills qualifications are unclear on how or when they will be delivered.

Most training officers use questioning particularly skilfully to check and develop learners' knowledge and understanding throughout sessions. They question learners to explain their responses and consider how they relate to their own workplaces.

Where learners demonstrate a desire to progress to higher level learning, training officers support them with higher level tasks and units.

Most training officers use a variety of resources and digital technologies effectively to engage and stimulate learners. A training officer in professional cookery uses a range of innovative methods well to reinforce learning such as an interactive platform game to check learners' theory knowledge and a building blocks activity to help learners' understanding when building chocolate structures.

Most interactions between learners and training officers are face to face. Where online sessions are delivered, they are generally well planned and structured, and training officers use interactive activities to keep learners engaged and check their understanding. Learners who attend off-the-job sessions, such as cookery

masterclasses, benefit from the opportunity to build their knowledge and develop skills alongside their peers.

The provider advocates the participation of learners in a wide range of local, national and international skills competitions. Training officers encourage and support learners of all abilities to enter competitions and plan effective demonstration and practise exercises to help learners prepare.

Most training officers offer learners effective feedback throughout their programmes. Verbal feedback within sessions is supportive and constructive, helping learners understand their progress. Written feedback is comprehensive and balanced, identifying where learners' work meets requirements and where aspects could be improved. As a result, the standard of most learners' work improves as their learning programme progresses.

Nearly all training officers carry out purposeful progress reviews with their learners. In the best cases, training officers set out short, medium and long term goals for their learners, giving an overview of progress and plans to complete their frameworks. However, in a majority of cases, target-setting is led by training officers and too short term, only covering what learners need to do from one review to the next.

The provider has implemented measures to improve the opportunities for learners to develop their Welsh language skills. In the best cases, the provider offers learners the opportunity to undertake elements of their programme through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. The majority of training officers encourage learners to develop their Welsh language skills through completion of online modules and they relate the benefit of learners developing their Welsh language skills to the context of their roles in the workplace.

Leadership and management

Cambrian Training Company is a long-established provider of apprenticeships working with a network of subcontractor partners to deliver its Welsh Government contract. As a result of the apprenticeship commission procurement in 2021, the provider expanded its network to work with two additional subcontractors and their displaced learners. At this time the number of displaced learners increased the contract size and represented about 29% of Cambrian Training's overall learner numbers. Nearly all these learners were undertaking apprenticeships within the sectors of hospitality and catering and health, public services and care. These two sectors, although improving, have been amongst the slowest to recover across Wales following the pandemic. The provider and its subcontractors engage well with long established and new employers offering apprenticeship opportunities to meet their recruitment and training needs. A particular strength of the provider is its engagement with a wide range of local and national employers including large, medium and small enterprises.

The Cambrian Training Company board of directors and senior management team have extensive experience in the work-based learning sector. Members of the board operate within defined terms of reference to maintain clear lines of responsibility, accountability, and communication. Senior leaders have established a clear vision and strategic objectives to meet the needs of employers and learners. The vision,

which has been aligned with the company's core values, clearly supports the current and future sustainability of the provider and its provision by working particularly well with key employer representative groups.

A notable strength of leadership within this provider is the influence and support that senior leaders have made in the food, drink and hospitality sectors. This allows the provider to access first-hand information on current and future training needs and to influence the development of identified needs. The senior management team has recently been strengthened by the appointment of a director of governance to oversee contract compliance with a higher focus on supporting subcontractors and improving learner outcomes.

The middle leadership team have clear roles and responsibilities to monitor and manage performance in their areas of responsibility. They have clear lines of reporting directly to the senior management team. The provider pays particularly strong attention to the recruitment of training officers. They make sure new staff are well qualified, experienced and highly skilled in their vocational specialism. For example, the provider's new internal staff are supported well by accessing a six-week comprehensive mentoring programme that introduces and helps their integration into the company and their new role.

The provider undertakes regular risk-based contract review meetings with its subcontractors. These meetings beneficially review key aspects of performance including learner attainment and progress and development actions. The provider undertakes regular communication with subcontractors to share updates and contract directives from the Welsh Government.

The provider undertakes annual self-assessment using a wide range of quality assurance processes that includes quality probes and performance indicators for most areas of performance. This systematic process uses information from subcontractors to inform overarching provider self-assessment. However, self-evaluation does not state clearly enough the provider's key strengths and areas for improvement. Self-evaluation is descriptive and not sufficiently evaluative and does not contain clear action points and targets for improvement, such as in highlighting the variations between learning area and provider performance. The provider's self-evaluation is not linked well enough to quality improvement processes.

The provider's quality improvement plan identifies useful targets for improvement in key areas such as learner outcomes. However, the plan is not always clear, precise and sharp enough in setting and monitoring challenging improvement targets and does not clearly measure the impact of all actions.

The provider undertakes a wide range of professional learning opportunities for its staff and subcontractors. These include mandatory training such as safeguarding, extremism, radicalisation and well-being. All training officers benefit from a broad range of opportunities to update their professional and occupational skills by returning to industry and undertaking specialist courses to meet their individual needs. The provider uses its existing staff and the specialisms of its subcontractors to deliver bespoke training when a need is identified. Evidence base of the report.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the learner and employer questionnaires and consider the views of teachers, trainers and assessors through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the principal/chief executive, governors (where appropriate), senior and middle managers and individual teachers, trainers and assessors 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 off-the-job, theory and practical training sessions
- visit a broad range of learners in their workplaces to observe their workplace skills, observe assessments, review their theory work and meet their employers
- 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, tracking and progress, records of meetings of managers and staff, meeting with sub-contractors and key partners and meetings with employers, 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 partnership and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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

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