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Dear Maggi

### **Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on WEA Cymru**

Following the Annual Review of Performance visit to your institution on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2014, this letter forms an annual report based on the outcomes of that visit. This letter is published on the Estyn website.

Rachael Bubalo HMI and Alun Connick HMI evaluated the current performance of the institution and reviewed the progress made against the recommendations arising from earlier inspections. This has led to further areas for improvement being identified, which are set out at the end of the letter.

Inspectors held discussions with the principal and senior managers, tutors, learners and members of the governing body. They scrutinised documentation, including evidence on the progress made against each of the previous inspection recommendations. They also considered the quality of teaching and learning through scrutiny of the provider's lesson observation process.

At the end of the visit, Rachael Bubalo HMI and Alun Connick HMI reported their findings to the principal of the institution and other members of the senior leadership team.

### **Outcome of the link inspector visits**

Since the inspection of CHWEAN and WEA South in 2010, the pace of improvement within the institution, as well as the progress against the recommendations left by the inspection team, has been good.

### **1 Outcomes and standards**

During the period that WEA South and CHWEAN merged to form WEA Cymru, overall performance dipped. In 2012/13, success rates in the north were 81.8% and

in the south were 81.6% against a national comparator of 85.7%. In the south, this represents a fall in performance of 4.4 percentage points and in the north there has been a fall of 5.7 percentage points over a three year period. Attainment rates have fallen by a similar amount.

Unverified data for 2013/14 shows that there has been a good improvement in the south, in success rates, which have risen to 88%. In the north, they remained at 80%, influenced adversely by increased drop-out rates. This may have occurred because of learners' concerns about the future of CHWEAN last year. Nevertheless, the combined success rate of WEA learners last year was 84%.

ESOL improved particularly well in the south by 15 percentage points and is now performing above the national comparator (86% as compared with 81%). This is a good achievement, given the high volume of learners following this provision (1193). ESOL also performed well in the north (97%) but with a lower volume of learners (347). This was, in part achieved by rescheduling final assessment dates to ensure that the outcomes were captured in time for data deadlines.

In the north, Engineering and Manufacturing Technology learners performed well, (90% success compared with a national comparator of 81%). This reflects good partnerships with organisations such as the Health Service, within which much of this work took place.

There are good examples of the WEA working in partnership with trade union organisations, which has strengthened the quality of provision and improved learners' success rates in Business Administration and Law, showing success well above comparators (90% in the north and 91% in the south, compared with 81%).

There is good anecdotal evidence of learners progressing onto other education, training or employment, or of increasing their involvement in and contribution to their community. However, this is not measured or analysed rigorously and is often more difficult to track than in a traditional college. The provider has recognised the need for a more robust evaluation of this, and is undertaking research to track the impact of learning on learners' future development.

### **Essential skills**

The provider appropriately identifies essential skills as a priority in its new strategic plan. It aims to increase participation and attainment and to improve the amount and quality of teaching in this subject area. It has produced a useful, detailed action plan for this area of its work. In a few areas the plan lacks measurable targets. Data indicate that outcomes for essential skills remain below the national benchmark and are not improving well enough. It is too soon to say whether the new plans will be effective enough in tackling this underperformance.

The provider's arrangements for assessing learners' essential skills cover only a very few learners. These learners receive adequate support but more work is needed to measure the impact of this. The limited assessment arrangements mean the provider does not know the starting point for most of its learners and as a result cannot measure the improvement they make with these skills.

There is good signposting of learners to partners' provision for additional support.

A minority of tutors have useful additional ESW/ESOL qualifications. However, overall not enough tutors are confident enough to support learners with their essential skills.

There is adequate progress to embed essential skills into all programmes. For example, there is a good pilot initiative to include essential skills units into course booklets.

### **Teaching and assessment**

The provider has developed new systems to improve teaching and assessment. It has used good practice from the legacy organisations to develop and review its practice. It has developed a new lesson observation scheme and plans to train more observers. In 2013, the provider judged 76% of lessons to be excellent or good. Plans to improve the teaching that is only adequate are not yet fully developed. For example, continuing professional development is not linked well enough to the outcomes of lesson observations. The current staff development programme does not offer enough opportunity for tutors to improve their teaching skills.

There are good arrangements for observing the teaching of new staff and the provider supports these well. There are also robust but fair arrangements to tackle poor performance.

Tutors do not share good practice often enough. Although this does take place regularly at tutor days, not all tutors are able to attend. The provider has recognised this and is developing on-line resources. Tutors can access relevant training available through partner agencies, but it is not clear how many do so.

### **Curriculum**

The provider has produced a new curriculum plan that formalises its broad learning offer. The plan successfully harmonises the curriculum of the two previous organisations and supports future plans for pan Wales delivery of adult learning. The document seeks to rationalise and link curriculum areas into six learner pathways. In producing it, the provider has taken good account of the views of local learner forums.

The plan meets national and local priorities and is supported well by comprehensive analysis of key national statistics and local labour market information. The provider usefully analyses this at both individual authority and regional levels.

The plan identifies clearly the key priorities for development such as digital learning, improving learners' essential skills and increasing opportunities to learn through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. There are good local and regional targets for curriculum pathways and the provider monitors these well. The plan has still to be evaluated and so it is too soon to say how well the provider meets these targets.

There are many good examples of the provider offering relevant provision that meets the needs of particular target groups and individuals. There are encouraging developments in workplace learning such as that with the third sector and trade unions. The provider also works successfully with a large supermarket to deliver workforce essential skills.



The 'Women Making a Difference' courses meet the needs of specific groups of women learners very well. The courses help many to become more active in their communities, by, for example, becoming school governors.

The provider offers a good range of courses and there are a few good examples of learners progressing onto higher level qualifications such as in Digital Technologies. The provider is also extending opportunity by developing qualifications in music technology, health and social services and creative technologies at Level 3. However, on most courses there are not enough opportunities for learners to progress to these higher levels.

In the North, due to the effective partnerships developed by the legacy organisation, there are good routes into higher education. The provider is transferring this good practice to the South where there are fewer opportunities for this progression.

There has been good progress to transform unaccredited and recreational type learning into self- supporting clubs. The provider supports these effectively with a paid tutor once a month. This phased support helps to develop the clubs' sustainability.

### **Leadership and management**

Leaders and managers have driven forward the merging of the two providers well. They have encouraged important discussions that have enabled staff to work together towards common goals.

Three members of the Council plus the General Secretary sat on a Merger Steering Group which then became the Shadow Board of WEA Cymru. They ably oversaw the work of five groups who had responsibility for bringing together the key functions of the two organisations. The Chair of Council, Governors and the General Secretary maintained good communication with all staff through visits to centres and through email. This ensured that all staff were informed of the merger's progress and understood their role in supporting the new organisation to meet its goals.

The provider's strategic plan is useful, takes good account of Welsh Government priorities, and defines clearly the wider education aims of WEA Cymru. These include supporting learners to make a greater contribution to the communities from which they come. The plan defines the objectives and targets that staff need to meet in order to reach its aims. The plan is ambitious and clearly sets out its vision of the provider's role in education and community development. This vision has been shared well with staff through useful tutor days, enabling them to understand the broader context in which they now work. Leaders and managers refer closely to the plan when discussing new initiatives, which provides a useful clarity of planning. In a few areas, however, the plan's objectives and targets focus too much on activities and processes, rather than on the impact and outcomes that they aim to achieve. This makes it more difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the provider's work.

Strategic leaders and managers have recruited new members to the Governing Body, broadening the range of expertise. New members have undertaken useful induction training. Governors have also been actively involved in training days for staff.

A new operational management structure is in place, but it is too early to judge its effectiveness.

### **Leadership and management (Quality Assurance)**

There has been good progress to harmonise the quality improvement arrangements from the two legacy organisations. The provider has prioritised the establishment of a quality and learner experience committee within the new committee structure. This has usefully produced a planning and quality calendar. The calendar provides good opportunities for staff and learners to be involved in self-improvement activities.

There is a quality development plan informed appropriately by the self-assessment report of each of the legacy organisations. This plan identifies clearly the main areas for development. It is monitored effectively by the quality committee and the SMT.

There are well developed plans to produce a unified self-assessment report.

The organisation has successfully combined its MIS systems but it is too soon to say how effectively this merged data will be used to identify underperformance and set targets to improve provision.

The provider pays good attention to the views of learners and responds well to feedback. For example, where courses have poor retention rates, the provider consults well with learners to identify the reasons for this.

There are good systems for using feedback from awarding bodies to improve provision.

There are good arrangements for consulting with partners such as FE colleges and local authorities to ensure that the quality systems of these various providers are aligned well with those of the provider. Staff regularly undertake peer observations of teaching with these partners.

The provider has reviewed its procedures to identify and address underperformance. Tutors have individual performance targets that are linked effectively to the annual performance management arrangements. New policies and procedures ensure that staff are required to contribute to the self-assessment process.

The provider has appropriately prioritised continuing professional development as an important way to drive up quality. However, there has been limited evaluation of staff skills and staff development plans are not yet linked well enough to quality improvement initiatives.

The provider has usefully established a research committee to ensure that it incorporates good practice into its planning.

### **Summary on progress on the recommendations outlined in the reports of 2010**

CHWEAN and WEA South were last inspected in 2010. Both organisations appear to have made good progress with a number of the key recommendations from the previous inspection reports. They have prioritised actions well within their respective quality improvement arrangements. However, the provider's new quality development plan does not make specific reference to previous recommendations or state whether they have all been achieved.

## **Other**

The WEA Cymru has an impressive number of systems in place to capture the learner voice and encourage learner involvement. As a membership organisation, WEA Cymru has a unique governance structure where learner representatives from local branches are democratically voted onto the organisational Council. Through attendance at forums and branch meetings, learners participate very well in the dialogue that helps shape their learning provision.

The WEA Cymru has developed a Learner Involvement Action Plan that seeks to improve still further its system of learner representation to include hard to reach learners. In one area, for example, tutors have successfully involved learners with mental health problems in the feedback process.

There is an effective complaints procedure and issues arising are resolved early and at a local level. There is also work to develop a learners' charter that seeks to empower learners further.

Learners are regularly involved in self-assessment activity. However, it is not always clear how learners' feedback is used to improve teaching and learning.

In the 2014 Learner Voice Wales survey, 91% of WEA South learners rated the provider as very good/good overall. This is at the sector average. For CHWEAN, only 79% of learners rated the provider as very good/good overall. This poor response may have occurred owing to learners' concerns about the future of CHWEAN last year.

## **Welsh language provision**

Promotion of the Welsh language and improving awareness of the Welsh culture are key targets in the provider's strategic plan. It has recently strengthened its staffing resources to continue developing Welsh language and Welsh medium provision and to further support staff to embed Welsh cultural learning into their work with learners.

The provider has produced a useful leaflet outlining the advantages of bilingualism, which it gives to learners at enrolment. All classes participate in "Welsh phrase of the week". The provider's Welsh Champion, provides tutors with helpful training and support to promote the language and has also improved the range of materials available on its website. This aspect of learning is now included within lesson observations. As a result, managers evaluate how effectively staff are embedding an awareness of the Welsh language and culture into their lessons.

In South Wales, there are good examples of partnerships that have enabled the provider to develop language provision in the workplace. This has taken place in a growing number of key employers, such as BT and Arriva Trains. Recently 23 learners from RCT Housing Association requested language courses.

## **Recommendations**

In order to bring about the necessary improvements in a timely manner, the

institution should:

- R1 improve standards in essential skills;
- R2 increase the number of measurable targets in the essential skills action plan and monitor them effectively;
- R3 improve the focus on impact in strategic planning to enable better evaluation of activity;
- R4 complete the unified SAR and ensure it includes progress against previous recommendations where these are still applicable;
- R5 improve the links between the outcomes of teaching observations and the staff development programme to ensure that the quality of all teaching is at least good; and
- R6 improve the tracking of learners' progress onto other education, training or employment.

### **Next steps**

As a result of this evaluation, the institution will now have 30 days to prepare an action plan. This action plan needs to outline the steps the institution will take to implement the necessary improvements. The plan needs to clearly identify who will take responsibility for tasks, contain milestones, identify relevant resources and how success will be evidenced.

In addition to the recommendations, the institution should respond to all the issues noted in this letter.

The action plan should be sent to Lin Howells at: [Linda.howells@estyn.gov.uk](mailto:Linda.howells@estyn.gov.uk).

Your Estyn Link Inspector will continue to monitor overall progress and the action plan through their link role with the institution.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of Governing Body and to the Welsh Government for information.

Yours sincerely



**Lin Howells**  
Assistant Director

cc: Chair of Governing Body  
Welsh Government