

Principal Judith Evans
Coleg-Y-Cymoedd
Heol yr Odyn
Parc Nantgarw
Cardiff
CF15 7QX

August 2014

Dear Ms Evans

Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on Coleg-Y-Cymoedd

Following the Annual Review of Performance visit to your institution on 11 to 13 June 2014, this letter forms an annual report based on the outcomes of that visit. This letter is published on the Estyn website.

Mark Evans HMI and Alun Connick HMI evaluated the current performance of the institution and reviewed the progress made against the recommendations arising from earlier inspections.

The 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 learning walks and scrutiny of the provider's observation process.

At the end of the visit, the inspectors reported their findings to the principal and other members of the senior leadership team.

Outcome of the link inspector visit

Since the last inspections of the two legacy colleges, the new merged college is working well to address the recommendations left by the inspection teams.

1 Outcomes and standards

The college recruits learners from an area that includes many disadvantaged wards. Nearly two-thirds of its learners are from areas with a high index of deprivation. Many of these learners have poor levels of literacy and numeracy on entry to the college. The college has worked effectively to improve trends in performance over

the last two years and attainment rates are at or around the national comparator. However, overall success rates – which include completion rates – are still below the national comparator.

Across the college, 44% of enrolments are on long courses. Over the last two years the college has achieved improvements on long courses for completions, attainment and overall success. Over half of the learning areas show an improvement in successful completion of courses between 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. Currently, the college is working to align performance across all learning areas consistently with national comparators. Many learners on short courses successfully complete their learning programmes.

2 Essential Skills

Learner support services are now working together as a single unit to operate consistently across the college. This should mean that provision for learners with additional learning needs will be monitored and coordinated in the same way across all campuses in future. Welfare services and the coordination of career planning should also be delivered consistently. The college has recently introduced a new management information system and ILP documentation as part of a process to improve communication between learner support and teaching staff. These developments are designed to enable teachers to be better informed about issues that may impact on learners' performance. The college has information-sharing protocols in place with Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council, enabling access for the college to learners' school data. It is currently negotiating a similar protocol with Caerphilly County Borough Council.

There are good mechanisms in place to identify which learners need support. Nearly all learners receive initial assessment of their basic and essential skills that informs the planning of support. The college uses this information appropriately to identify learners who need additional support to develop their literacy and numeracy. There are useful drop-in facilities available to provide support and learners are well informed about how they can access additional help.

The college has improved the resources available for tutorials; however, tutorial sessions do not focus clearly enough on learners' career planning to ensure they are making the best decisions about progress to HE, training and employment.

3 Teaching and assessment

The college is continuing to strengthen its focus on teaching and assessment. It has developed a range of helpful initiatives that are improving the quality of teaching and assessment and further initiatives and events are planned for the near future. A number of staff have clearly defined roles that are designed to promote good practice. For example, teaching mentors help staff to develop teaching approaches that include more learner-focused activities.

College managers are monitoring the quality of teaching and assessment across the college through teaching observation assessments and good practice is increasingly shared across the college. Learning area managers are supported by senior managers and challenged robustly to further improve teaching and learning. The college is actively supporting teaching staff to improve teaching and assessment by engaging in innovative and learner-centred teaching practice.

4 Curriculum

The college delivers a wide provision that meets the needs of learners and employers throughout the local area and south east region. It has delayed wholesale curriculum change in favour of a phased merger plan to avoid unnecessary disruption to learners. This strategy has improved managers' focus on curriculum change to align with the introduction of Learning Area Programmes. An appropriate range of labour market information is used well to deliver courses and develop new provision in a wide range of vocational and academic subjects. The college has analysed the take-up of A-level provision and used this information to reconfigure entry criteria in order to attract and recruit more appropriate learners. It has developed a particularly good curriculum offer in partnership with a local sixth form college and a local secondary school.

The college has developed and maintains good working relationships with a wide range of employers that assist in the development and delivery of courses to meet the needs of local industry. These relationships help staff across the college to keep up to date with industry and, in many instances, to secure work experience opportunities for their learners.

5 Leadership and management

The principal and senior management team have achieved the merger of the two legacy colleges through a considered and phased strategy. This approach has been carefully planned to have minimal negative impact on learners and it has been effective in developing the identity of the new college and promoting joint staff working. It has resulted in staff participating in launch of the new integrated college with a shared vision and with enthusiasm.

The principal and governors have worked well in setting the strategic direction for the new college and senior managers work well together to support these aims. There is a clear ethos of 'equal partners' across the two legacy colleges when undertaking the first stage of merger and this is working well to ensure that staff from the two legacy colleges collaborate. Communication at all levels across the college is good with staff being well informed about developments and receiving a wide range of information.

The college middle management, many of whom are just starting their new roles, are working well together to implement the college's aims. These managers have revised performance targets, with the main aim being to improve learner standards.

6 Leadership and management (quality assurance)

The college has continued to develop and strengthen its quality assurance procedures and processes to meet its aims more effectively. There are clear development plans and strategies for improvement across a wide range of key areas. Managers at all levels demonstrate a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement in the college. Senior leaders have strengthened the accountability of middle managers and staff regarding the performance of their learning area. Newly introduced systems and procedures are aimed at making sure learners are supported by early interventions which are used when needs are identified. The quality assurance procedures have a clear focus on tracking the progress of learners, raising attainment and improving the quality of teaching and assessment.

7 Summary on progress on the recommendations outlined in the report of the two legacy colleges

Overall, the new college has made good progress towards meeting the recommendations from the last inspections of the legacy colleges. Its new policies strategies and plans achieve a good synthesis of actions to further improve the consistency and quality of delivery to learners.

8 Other

The college works well with local schools to deliver provision in the Rhondda Cynon Taff area. In response to the identified need for suitable provision for learners who drop out of school before January, the college has developed a January intake to accommodate learners to enable them to continue in education.

The college maintains a productive dialogue with school head teachers from Caerphilly in an attempt to improve the progression opportunities for learners. A few come to the college for A levels that the schools are unable to provide. Good partnership working with local authorities has enabled the development of information-sharing protocols with RCT, allowing access to learners' pre-16 educational data. This means that the college can provide more effective transition arrangements for learners joining the college.

Highly effective partnership working with St David's College and Cardinal Newman RC School has resulted in Cardinal Newman basing its Year 12 provision within the college, thus enabling those learners to maintain their links with faith-based provision.

The college's good links with employers, including 'blue chip' companies, creates good opportunities for progression for learners. The college is currently investing in developing a facility for learners to develop skills in rail maintenance, having agreed with an employer that learners will progress into apprenticeships.

The college has produced a revised Welsh Language Scheme, in which it has set demanding targets. The scheme has been submitted and is awaiting approval from the Welsh Language Commissioner. The college's two Bilingual Champions have brought all staff together for language training and promoted several initiatives to promote and encourage the use of the Welsh language in some classes.

The merging of the two legacy colleges has created a larger number of Welsh learners and speakers and helped to raise the status and value of the Welsh language across the college. Welsh Champions have carried out a quality probe into the delivery of the Welsh dimension within classroom activities: this showed an improvement in learners' awareness and use of the Welsh language. They are now in the process of revising a Welsh Dimension handbook for teaching staff. The Champions have developed good partnership links with organisations such as the local Mentrau Iaith, and they work well with Welsh-medium secondary schools in the area to enable Welsh-speaking learners to make effective transitions to college.

Three thousand, four hundred and eighty-eight full-time learners in the college completed the learner voice survey in 2014. This represents approximately 64% of the learners. Thirty-six per cent of respondents rate the college as very good overall, similar to the sector average and a further 43% rate the college as good, which is also consistent with the sector average. Thirty-four per cent of full-time respondents state that their course was better than they expected and this is just below the sector average. Responses to the five key themes in the survey show the college rated at slightly below the sector in three.

The college uses an appropriate range of other surveys and questionnaires to seek the views of learners regarding how they can improve the learning experience and to inform the planning and development of the provision.

The main priorities for improvement are understood by the college and stated in appropriate plans. Inspectors endorse these priorities and your link inspectors will continue to monitor overall progress through their link role with the institution. They will also review the progress the college makes in improving the recording and reporting of outcomes from learning support and the processes used to measure learners' skills improvement.

Recommendations

- R1 Continue to address inconsistencies in outcomes and bring success rates in relevant areas up to the level of national comparators
- R2 Increase the monitoring and evaluation of provision for learner support

Next steps

Mark Evans HMI and Alun Connick HMI will continue to monitor overall progress through his link role with the institution.

Yours sincerely

Lin Howells
Assistant Director