



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Neath Port Talbot College
Dwr y Felin Road
Neath
SA10 7RF**

Date of inspection: November 2012

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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Publication date: 04/03/2013

Context

Neath Port Talbot college was created in 1999 as a result of the merger of former Neath and Afan colleges. The college is one of the larger colleges in Wales and has a turnover of over £40m per annum. It provides 16-19 tertiary education for the borough of Neath Port Talbot as well as bespoke training for local industry and businesses and also plays a leading role in the local delivery of community learning. The college leads a consortium for the delivery of a £9.5m contract for work-based learning.

As well as its two main campuses, the college also delivers education and training at a further six locations in the local area. It has subsidiary companies in South West Wales as well as a language school in Portsmouth.

The curriculum offers more than 45 subjects at AS/A level as well as wide range of vocational courses from entry level to level 4. The college also provides a broad range of higher education programmes as part of franchised agreements with local universities.

In 2011-2012 the college enrolled nearly 4,000 full-time and about 9,700 part-time learners. Just over 50% of learners are female and about 3% of learners are members of ethnic minority groups. Forty-six per cent of full-time learners receive the educational maintenance allowance. About 2% of the learners at the college speak Welsh.

The population of Neath Port Talbot Borough is about 137,600 and there are 19 areas in the borough that are amongst the 10% most deprived areas in Wales. Overall, 57% of learners live in the most deprived wards in Neath Port Talbot. The unemployment rate at 9.2% is above the average Welsh unemployment rate of 8.1%. The economic inactivity rate in Neath Port Talbot at 28.9% is higher than the 24.6% average for Wales. In Neath Port Talbot, 22.4% of jobs are in the manufacturing sectors compared with 13.6% in Wales and 10.6% in Great Britain.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance is good overall because:

- success rates for qualifications overall are good and have risen at a faster rate than in other Welsh colleges over the past three years;
- the college performs well when success rates are ranked against other colleges in Wales;
- learners on A level courses do well in comparison with other providers and when compared with their previous attainments at GCSE level in schools;
- a high proportion of learners achieve higher grades on graded vocational courses;
- learners from relatively deprived backgrounds do at least as well as other learners; and
- almost all learners feel safe and enjoy their experiences at the college.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are good because:

- the college has improved the rates at which learners attain and complete qualifications over the last three years;
- the governors provide a robust challenge to any areas of underperformance;
- the principal and senior management team provide effective leadership;
- the college has made good progress in implementing the recommendations of the previous inspection report; and
- the plans for improvement closely match the issues identified in the self-assessment report.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the rates at which learners complete and attain main qualifications on vocational courses where the current performance is below the average in other Welsh colleges
- R2 Improve the standards of teaching and assessment in all learning areas to match the aspirations in the college's plans
- R3 Make sure that all teachers set targets, monitor and track learners' progress in literacy and numeracy to bring about improvement
- R4 Use the evidence from observations of teaching and learning to inform course and curriculum reviews
- R5 Promote the Welsh language and extend learners' knowledge and understanding of Wales and its culture in line with the college's bilingual strategy

What happens next?

The college link inspector will monitor the college action plans and progress against the above recommendations. The college will be required to submit a case study of excellent partnership working identified by inspectors.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

The rates at which learners complete and attain qualifications are good and have improved at a faster rate than in other colleges in Wales over the past three years (2009-2011). The rates at which learners complete and attain long course qualifications are above the average in other colleges in Wales. The college compares particularly well with other colleges in the improvements shown in the completion rates on long courses. The improvements in the rates of attainment also show an upward trend but at a slower rate than the improvements in the rates of completion.

The rates at which learners attain A level qualifications are above the average for all providers in Wales and have improved over the past three years. In science and mathematics learners gained a similar percentage of high grade outcomes (A*-B) in most A level subjects when compared to other providers of tertiary education. Success rates in AS level subjects have shown a consistent trend of improvement over the last three years in most subjects. The grades that learners attain in A level subjects at least match those predicted from their previous attainment in GCSE qualifications in nearly all A level subjects and were better than the grades predicted in a minority of subjects in 2012.

The percentage of learners achieving higher grades on BTEC National qualifications is good, with 26% of learners achieving triple distinction grades. However, across the college there is too much variation in the rates at which learners succeed in their main qualification aims on vocational courses. The outcomes on main qualifications in construction are very good and above the rates in other colleges in Wales. However, the rates at which learners succeed on main qualifications in health and care are below the average rates in other colleges in Wales.

The achievement rates of learners studying the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification are better than those in most other colleges in Wales at all levels and have improved over the last two years.

Learners from deprived backgrounds do well at the college. About 46% of learners receive the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and they achieve at least as well as, and often better than, learners who do not receive the allowance. There is no statistically significant variation between the performance of male and female learners across the college.

Most learners make good progress in both practical and theory sessions. They relate theory to practice well and their files show good records of clear progress in their knowledge and understanding of the topics that they have studied. In a few courses, learners make very good use of the information on the virtual learning environment to support their learning and aid their progress. Most learners show increased confidence and challenge each other's opinions in class discussions.

Nearly all full-time learners do an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy and know their weaknesses. A majority are aware of what they need to do generally to improve their literacy skills although only a minority are aware of any detailed targets for improvement. A few learners make good use of their individual learning plans to plan and track the improvements in their literacy skills.

Most learners have good strategies for extracting information from texts. Many write accurately using spelling, punctuation and grammar appropriate to their level. However, a minority show inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation and grammar in their completed work.

Many learners on A level courses write well and at length for a range of purposes. However, a minority of learners do not develop their literacy and numeracy skills consistently enough from their starting points.

About 2% of full-time learners at the college are fluent Welsh speakers. A minority of these learners attend Welsh medium tutorials. A few learners improve their Welsh language skills when on work experience in Welsh language settings. Learners without these opportunities make little progress in improving their Welsh language skills.

Wellbeing: Good

Learners enjoy coming to the college. They feel safe and well supported. They learn about what that they should eat to keep healthy but don't always select the healthy food options in the college's food outlets. An increasing number of learners take part in a good range of sporting and other physical activities including inter-class competitive sporting events. Learners with physical disabilities participate particularly well.

Nearly all learners attend college regularly. They show respect to each other and to their teachers and learners value highly the mature way in which they are treated.

The learners who are elected as class representatives are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They take an active part in the college's Union Parliament which meets twice a term. Members of the Union Parliament meet regularly with the college's senior managers. Through this mechanism they make useful contributions to the work of the college by keeping managers at all levels informed about learners' views.

Learners who study the Welsh Baccalaureate gain very good knowledge and understanding of the importance of community involvement. Generally, other learners do not have the benefit of these opportunities.

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

Overall the curriculum meets the needs of learners, employers and the community very well and provides learners with good opportunities to progress to higher levels of

study and employment. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time further and higher education courses from entry level to level 6 across all learning areas. These include vocational and pre-vocational programmes and around 45 A level subjects.

The college collaborates very well with other learning providers to extend learning opportunities for 14 to 19-year-old learners. Currently about 800 14 to 16-year-old school pupils attend college programmes with about 30% of these learners attending schools outside the borough of Neath Port Talbot.

Just over 350 full-time learners (10%) across a range of courses study the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels.

The college promotes education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) very well. All full-time learners have good opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of the principles of ESDGC through the tutorial programme and the subjects they study. The college gives learners good support and encouragement to become involved in a range of additional activities and lead projects that promote environmental and cultural awareness. For example, learners have recently produced a detailed report on the college and environmental issues, have set up 'eco groups' and are producing a magazine programme which will be screened on televisions around the college. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of this work on the experiences of all learners.

All full-time learners follow a relevant programme of work-related education. Many complete work experience with employers and teachers arrange appropriate, realistic work experience for learners when, for example, age restrictions prevent them from working in a vocational area or there are limited opportunities for suitable experiences. The college also gives learners appropriate opportunities to undertake enterprise and entrepreneurial activities as part of, or in addition to, their main programme and it organises a wide range of enrichment activities for learners.

The college identifies the levels of learners' literacy and numeracy skills well. They have initial and diagnostic assessments to identify their skill level and areas where they have weaknesses. However, generally teachers do not make good enough use of this detailed information to plan appropriately for the development of learners' essential skills, particularly when learners are working above level 1.

All schools within the college have bilingual champions whose role is to share good practice. A few courses offer elements of the programme bilingually and learners can attend bilingual tutorials. Learners studying the Welsh Baccalaureate learn about Wales and the Welsh culture. In most other classes teachers miss opportunities to raise learners' awareness of the Welsh dimension through their subject area. Overall, the college does not do enough to promote the Welsh language and extend learners' knowledge and understanding of Wales and its culture.

Teaching: Good

The quality of teaching in most sessions is good. In the best sessions, teachers engage learners fully and ensure that they make good progress. Teachers use an

appropriate variety of techniques to stimulate, motivate and engage learners and help to develop their learning. They make good use of praise, especially in one-to-one feedback. In nearly all vocational sessions teachers refer to good industrial and business practice and prepare learners well for the world of work. In most sessions the pace is lively, and teachers set challenging targets and have high expectations. There is a good balance between instruction, support and observation of learners. Most teachers set frequent tasks to engage and test the learners. In most lessons, the teacher strives to make learning enjoyable for the learners. In a minority of lessons the pace of teaching and learning is too slow and teachers do not provide learners with enough challenge. A few sessions are too teacher-led and as a result learners are too passive.

Most teachers display excellent subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and well organised. In most sessions teachers make good use of multi-media, PowerPoint and the internet to interest and stimulate learners and to support teaching and learning. They use questioning skills well to probe and challenge the learners and to provide challenges to learners for all levels of ability. However, in a few lessons teachers use a limited range of questioning techniques that fail to promote learners' knowledge and understanding effectively.

In most cases teachers' marking and written feedback is regular and constructive. Most teachers provide learners with a good range of opportunities to check their progress. However, the standard of teachers' marking for spelling, grammar and punctuation is too variable and teachers do not always correct errors. In a few cases teachers do not give learners enough feedback about the specific actions they need to take to improve the standard of their work.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Overall, the college's arrangements for promoting the health and wellbeing of learners are good. The importance of health lifestyles is promoted well through the tutorial programme. A good range of healthy eating choices are available in all food outlets and these are promoted well throughout the college.

The college has good arrangements for initial guidance and support. College staff provide learners with clear and realistic pre-entry information and advice about the college and its courses. Teachers and support staff give learners good support during their courses to enable them to cope with the demands of their programme. College staff work very closely and effectively with local secondary schools to manage the transition of learners from school to college.

Teachers provide full-time learners with structured and useful tutorial programmes. As a result learners are clear about where they can go to seek advice and value the support they receive. Many teachers provide learners with additional support in literacy and numeracy which is tailored to their needs and that of their programme. However, in a few cases, teachers do not always deliver the tutorial programme consistently enough.

The college has particularly effective arrangements to support more vulnerable learners, for example those who have been in care. In addition to the additional

support provided by the college staff the learner support team also maintains regular contact with the relevant staff in social services. The college has been given many prestigious awards for the effectiveness of its work in this area.

The college's system for electronic individual learning plans (eILP) is a comprehensive method for tracking and recording learners' achievements and progress. Many teachers use it well to target support at learners who are not making the expected progress. However, while the eILP is used very well in some departments it is not used as effectively in all areas.

Teachers and support staff provide learners with additional learning needs with very effective support. They identify individual learning needs well at entry and tailor support to meet the needs of individual learners. A few learners volunteer as peer mentors to help their fellow learners to overcome difficulties in a wide range of issues. Teachers and tutors provide them with very good training to support them to carry out this role.

The college has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Good

The college provides a welcoming, inclusive learning environment for all learners. It promotes an ethos of equality across all parts of the college. It has a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that promote equality and diversity well. A full-time diversity officer leads on all aspects of this work and reports to the diversity management group which is chaired by a member of the senior management team. This group has worked well to raise the profile of equality and diversity across the college. A very pro-active Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender support group promotes the college's ethos of genuine welcome and support for all learners.

Overall, the quality of accommodation across the diverse sites varies between satisfactory and excellent. The college makes best use of older accommodation to make sure learners work in an appropriate environment which supports their learning. Classroom displays are generally good. However, few wall displays are bilingual or celebrate the culture of Wales. Most classrooms and workshops are well resourced with a wide range of teaching and learning resources. Overall, learners and staff have good access to a wide range of information and communication (ICT) across all the college sites.

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

The principal and senior management team work well together to deliver the strategic priorities of the college. They have recently reviewed and updated the college management structure to include deputy directors. This new role for heads of departments promotes a cross-college focus and has led to improved communication at all levels.

Managers at all levels have clear roles and responsibilities and have a very good understanding of their contribution within the college lines of accountability. The college plans management meetings well to ensure that all managers are fully included in the work of the college and that any issues are addressed promptly.

The college five year strategic plan includes newly defined vision statements and a clear set of values. These values are included appropriately in all aspects of the college including performance management and learner induction. The values aim to place the learner at the centre of the all the college's activities.

College managers make very effective use of a range of data to analyse course and programme outcomes. They use this information well to inform operational planning and to set challenging targets to improve performance and outcomes. The principal and college leadership have high expectations of all staff and any aspects of underperformance are addressed efficiently. The college has recently modified the performance management process to improve its effectiveness. However, the college does not take sufficient account of the evidence from session observations about the standards of teaching and assessment when evaluating the effectiveness of provision or when planning for improvement.

College governors have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They bring a wide range of diverse skills to the governing body. They use these skills well to both support and challenge the college management. They have extensive knowledge of the local area. They combine a priority on the role of the college within the Neath Port Talbot community with a clear emphasis on providing high quality education for all learners.

The college works very well with a range of partners to respond to local need and to meet national priorities. The principal and senior management have a thorough understanding of the social and economic profile of the county borough and the needs and challenges faced by the local community. They use this information effectively as part of their strategic planning.

Improving quality: Good

The college has a comprehensive and well-planned system for monitoring the quality of its provision and setting targets for raising standards and improving learner outcomes. Self-assessment is well embedded within the operational management of the college.

The annual self-assessment process at department and college level is well informed by reviews undertaken at course team level. Course teams review the performance of courses against national averages and value-added data in order to highlight strengths and areas for improvement. The college's system of internal inspections focuses in detail on areas of under-performance as well as on areas of outstanding practice to enable these to be shared across the college. The outcomes of internal inspections feed into the self-assessment reports produced for each department. At all stages teachers and managers make very good use of analysis of data on learner outcomes and the outcomes of learner consultations. However, the reviews do not include enough information about the standards of teaching and assessment and there is not enough analysis of all the factors that could potentially contribute to learners' under-performance.

Self-assessment leads to the production of quality development plans at departmental level. These are useful working documents which managers update regularly. The plans have clear and time-constrained targets which prioritise the main areas for improvement.

The college's learning and performance management group meets regularly to identify and discuss reasons for any underperformance. The findings of this group are presented to the learning and performance committee of the governors for careful scrutiny. Heads of departments are required to attend the committee and account for their performance data and explain underperformance in individual courses.

The college seeks learners' views regularly using a variety of methods, for example periodic questionnaires, and seeking the views of course representatives and the union parliament. Managers use evidence from these sources well to change practices and bring about improvement in, for example, tutorials, induction and the delivery of essential skills.

The self-assessment report is an honest reflection of the work of the college and the planned actions to improve provision are described well in the quality development plan. However, parts of the self-assessment report are too descriptive and repetitive. Overall the college has responded well to the recommendations from the last inspection.

Partnership working: Excellent

Overall, the college has developed excellent partnership working with a wide range of key partners and stakeholders. These include Sector Skills Councils, secondary schools, primary schools, employers and local authorities. The college is also the lead partner in a consortium of work-based learning providers. Almost all partnerships are well-established and have a track record of success. Stakeholders consider the college to be the 'partner of choice' for providing education and training programmes. All partners have a very high degree of trust in the college and believe it adds extensive value to the education and training opportunities for people within the area.

The college has developed a clear and effective engagement strategy that places it at the centre of almost all its partnership arrangements. As a result, the college plays a key role and often takes the lead in ensuring the quality of education and training programmes within the area.

The college has very good relationships with a wide range of local employers and associations that include national companies and small to medium enterprises. A particular strength in this area is the diversity of employment sectors represented in partnership arrangements with the college. The college works in close collaboration with these employers and other local industries to help them meet their training and development needs. For example, the college is represented on the executive board of the Swansea Bay Construction Support group, which links the education and training needs of approximately 30 construction companies to college provision.

All employers consider the college highly responsive in meeting their needs by providing a high degree of flexibility in delivering the most appropriate training programmes in the most appropriate way. The college often offers bespoke training packages to meet the specific training needs of employers' staff.

The college has a very strong relationship with the local 14-19 learning network and has a strong influence on the strategic planning of provision to ensure that learners in Neath Port Talbot have access to the widest possible range of vocational and general education courses. The college plays a significant role in helping partner schools achieve the requirements of the Learning and Skills Measure.

Secondary schools benefit from the college's involvement in parents open evenings to discuss options with learners. The college also participates in secondary schools' transition programmes with their feeder primary schools.

The College also works well with 14-19 learning networks outside the borough to provide their learners with access to specific courses. These include schools in Powys, Carmarthenshire and Swansea. The partnership with one school in Swansea in construction has resulted in approximately 80 learners doing level 1 and level 2 BTEC qualifications in construction on the college's Llansamlet campus. The college has also developed a bespoke training programme in this school for a group of learners, requiring additional support, enabling them to work towards level 1 qualifications.

Resource management: Good

The college manages its resources effectively and has robust financial controls. College financial processes are good and are closely managed with the appropriate systems in place for delegation and monitoring. This allows curriculum managers to address resource priorities appropriately for the benefit of learners.

There are appropriate systems in place to recruit and deploy staff efficiently and effectively. There are good links between staff, curriculum managers and human resources (HR) to ensure appropriate staff deployment and utilisation.

The college promotes and is supportive of continuous professional development (CPD) and staff and managers respond positively to CPD opportunities. Examples of this include supporting staff to complete additional qualifications, to enhance career progression and curriculum development.

Overall, outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching are good. The college manages its finances and resources well and therefore provides good value for money for its learners.

Appendix 1

Learner Satisfaction

Over 1,400 learners completed the questionnaire, of which nearly 1,300 were full-time learners at the college. The questionnaires show that all learners are very satisfied with their experiences at the college. Nearly all learners (97%) would recommend the college to other potential learners. Almost all learners report that they were given good information about the courses on offer as well as good guidance on choosing courses and subjects to study. Nearly all learners consider that the college provides them with a high standard of equipment, including access to information technology equipment. Almost all learners agree that they feel safe and free from any form of harassment when at the college. Almost all learners indicate that they have improved their knowledge of how to keep healthy and safe since joining the college. The only aspect where a minority of learners felt that the college had not succeeded fully was in enabling them to become more involved in their own community.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

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