



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

A report on

**Work-based Learning at Swansea Bay Skills Partnership
Gower College Swansea
Tycoch Road
Swansea
SA2 9EB**

Date of inspection: February 2016

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.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

© Crown Copyright 2016: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 23/05/2016

Context

The Swansea Bay Skill Partnership (SBSP) is a work-based learning consortium that was established in April 2015. The consortium is led by Gower College Swansea. It is made up of eight work-based learning providers. These are:

- Gower College Swansea – Lead consortium member
- City and County of Swansea Lifelong Learning Employment Training (LLETS) – consortium member

The sub-contractors are:

- XR Training
- Care in Hand
- WBTA
- Vocations Training
- Futureworks – Pembrokeshire County Council
- Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Trust

In South West Wales, SBSP is currently delivering training to approximately 1,000 learners.

The consortium delivers the following work-based learning programmes:

- Foundation Apprenticeships (FA)
- Apprenticeships (A)
- Higher Apprenticeships (HA)

It offers the following work-based learning routes:

- Arts, Media and Publishing
- Business Administration and Law
- Construction, Planning and the Built Environment
- Education and Training
- Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
- Hair and Beauty
- Health, Public Services and Care
- Hospitality and Catering
- ICT
- Leisure, Travel and Tourism
- Retailing and Customer Service

Summary

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

Current performance

Overall, the rates at which learners attain their training frameworks are at or below the national average for work-based learning. Unpublished data for 2014-2015 shows that attainment rates for learners are beginning to improve. However, the number of learners who take longer than expected to complete their training programme is too high.

Generally, learners successfully achieve their Essential Wales Skills (ESW) qualifications at rates comparable to the national average. In a few cases, learners achieve these qualifications above the levels expected for their qualification framework.

The quality of teaching, training and assessment is adequate. Teaching staff, tutors and assessors across the consortium have up-to-date subject knowledge and occupational and industry skills. They apply these skills well to plan in their sessions. Most teaching staff have high expectations for learners. However, teaching staff and assessors do not always stretch and challenge learners enough to reach their full potential.

Assessors in the work place have good relationships with their learners and employers. They set appropriate targets for learners to achieve their qualification aim. However, they do not routinely set targets to support learners to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

Due to the uncertainty about its contract and the nature of the partnership, senior leaders have been unable to establish and communicate a clear and long-term strategic direction for the consortium. As a result, many staff and sub-contractors are unclear about the aims of the consortium and their place within it. A range of quality development and operation groups have been set up. However, it is too early to measure the impact of these groups.

Prospects for improvement

The provider's prospects for improvement are judged as adequate because:

- Overall, learner attainment rate are improving
- Across the consortium, the number of learners who take longer than expected to complete their training programme is too high
- Most tutors and assessors have high expectation for learners
- A few learners are not stretched or challenged enough
- Consortium staff provide good support for learners

- The consortium has a wide range of effective partnerships with employers
- Consortium partners and sub-contractors do not promote the language and culture of Wales well enough to all learners
- Self-assessment processes across the consortium are not robust enough

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the rates at which learners successfully complete their training frameworks and qualifications
- R2 Do more to promote the Welsh language and education for sustainable development and global citizenship of all learners
- R3 Put in place robust arrangements to ensure that all learners improve their literacy and numeracy skills
- R4 Ensure that all learners receive regular constructive written feedback to help them improve
- R5 Establish and communicate clear strategic aims and objectives to all members of the consortium
- R6 Improve the way in which learners' performance is monitored and managed
- R7 Improve the accuracy of self-assessment
- R8 Develop a planned programme of professional development, including the identification and sharing of good practice across the consortium

What happens next?

Given the adequate judgements, a team of inspectors will undertake a monitoring visit approximately one year after the publication of the inspection report. This visit will be to assess the progress made by the provider against the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

In 2013-2014, learners at Gower College Swansea (GCS) attained their training frameworks at the national average for work-based learning. However, in the same period learners at City and County of Swansea Lifelong Learning and Employment Training (LLETS) attained their frameworks at rates six percentage points below the national average for work-based learning.

Unpublished data for 2014-2015 indicates that GCS learners' attainment rates are slightly above the previous year's national average. Data indicates that Higher Apprenticeship learners' attainment rates are well above the previous year's national average. In the same period learners at LLETS attained their frameworks at rates slightly below the previous year's national average.

The consortium's most recent unpublished data for August 2015 to date indicates that learners' attainment rates have been maintained and in a few learning areas improved.

Across the consortium, the number of learners who take longer than expected to complete their training programme is too high. In 2013-2016, GCS has reduced the number slightly. However, in the same period, the number of late completers at LLETS has increased and is excessively high.

Most learners successfully achieve their Essential Skills Wales (ESW) qualifications at rates comparable to the national averages and at levels appropriate to their training programmes. A very few learners achieve these qualifications above the level expected for their qualification framework.

Most learners are making appropriate progress on their training programmes. Most develop and demonstrate good standards of practical competence, especially in the workplace. The majority of learners demonstrate theory knowledge appropriate to the stage of their training programme. A few learners develop a more in-depth knowledge and apply this well to their practical work in their workplace.

The majority of learners complete their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) portfolios well. They contain an appropriate range of evidence including witness testimony and photographic records. The majority of learners' written work is well presented with reasonable spelling, punctuation and grammar appropriate to the level of training. However, learners do not always receive constructive written feedback from their assessor. As a result, learners do not develop their literacy and numeracy skills well enough and do not know what they need to do to improve their performance.

A few learners use and develop their bilingual skills well during on and off-the-job training sessions, assessment activities and progress reviews. However, too few learners practise and develop their Welsh during their training or assessment activities.

Wellbeing: Good

Most learners have a good understanding of health and safety issues in their training centres or work environment. For example, learners on Level 3 hairdressing courses understand the tests they must carry out before applying colour and learners on Level 3 electrical courses understand the legal responsibilities associated their jobs and the consequences of technical errors.

Most learners feel safe during their classes and at their work place. They have a good understanding of whom to turn to should they, or others, experience bullying or harassment. Nearly all learners know how to make a complaint.

Most learners are aware of the importance of developing and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. A few learners have very good independent and time-management skills. They organise their work effectively and they plan and complete work well in advance of deadlines. Many learners set themselves clear career goals.

Many learners engage effectively in both taught sessions and on-the-job learning. They work well in pairs, groups and independently and they help each other to expand their learning through lively discussion. For example, in a plumbing workshop, learners worked very well in pairs on a technical task to measure, cut and fit a pipe. However, in a few cases, learners are too passive in theory classes and they do not contribute enough to class and group discussions.

All learners undertake a comprehensive one-to-one or group induction programme, which pays good attention to wellbeing and the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

A few learners are aware of the importance of developing good oral, literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills to be effective in their jobs. In the best cases, learners routinely learn the spellings of technical words and phrases and they ensure that they understand the numerical concepts associated with their work.

All learners are employed and have good employability skills. They attend off-the-job training sessions regularly and are punctual. Many learners grow in confidence because of undertaking their studies and their on-the-job experiences.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Adequate
---	-----------------

Learning experiences: Adequate

The consortium delivers a good variety of programmes that meet the needs of learners and employers well.

Employers are happy with the way training programmes are organised and delivered. They speak highly of the support they receive. In a few cases, training programme content is adapted to meet employers' specific needs. This includes suspending learners' attendance at off-the-job training sessions during employers' busy times and selecting NVQ units that effectively match the requirements of the employer's business.

The consortium's approach to the provision for skills focuses on learners achieving the literacy and numeracy skills needed to complete their qualification frameworks. However, not enough learners are challenged to achieve higher-level literacy and numeracy skills.

Nearly all learners have an appropriate diagnostic assessment at the start of their training programme. However, teachers and assessors do not use the results of these assessments consistently enough to ensure that all learners have specific literacy and numeracy targets. As a result, learners do not have a clear understanding of what they need to improve.

The consortium's arrangements for delivery of Essential Skills Wales (ESW) qualifications vary too much. They include taught sessions; one-to-one support and independent learning using specific task sheets or workbooks. Staff use a planning checklist to monitor the inclusion of essential skills in lesson plans and schemes of work. However, staff miss naturally occurring opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy in the workplace. Overall, the consortium's arrangements for improving learners' skills are not effective or robust enough.

Within the consortium, the provision for learners' Welsh language development is inconsistent and varies too much. In a few cases, learners carry out assessment activities for their qualification framework and essential skills through the medium of Welsh. Many learners are not encouraged enough to use their Welsh language skills at off-the-job training sessions. A minority of learners develop their awareness of Welsh culture well.

Across the consortium, provision for the development of education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) is not developed well enough.

Teaching: Adequate

Teaching staff, tutors and assessors have up-to-date subject knowledge and occupational and industry skills. Almost all teaching staff use these skills well to plan their sessions. The majority of sessions encourage learners to think for themselves and collaborate with others.

Most staff have high expectations for learners and give them appropriate support in class. However, in a few sessions staff do not provide tasks that challenge learners well enough.

Most staff use an appropriate range of teaching methods, with a good mix of tutor input and learner activity, which makes classroom activities enjoyable and engaging for learners. Teaching and training resources are generally of a good quality. Almost all assessors and training staff deliver on-the-job training activities well. They provide learners with appropriate practical skills and knowledge suitable for their job role.

Assessors in the work place have good relationships with their learners and employers. They work with a wide range of local and national employers to secure good quality work environments for learners. Almost all assessors carry out regular

progress reviews with their learners. They set appropriate targets for learners to work towards their qualification aim. However, assessors do not routinely set targets or actions to support learners to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

Almost all assessors plan their assessment activities thoroughly. They are knowledgeable about learners' work activities and able to link the content of the NVQ to learners' work. Most learners understand what is expected of them and how they will be assessed. Most assessors give learners constructive oral and written feedback. However, in a few cases learners are not sure how much progress they have made or what they need to do to complete their qualification.

NVQ portfolios contain a variety of evidence and learners' work appropriate to the level of their qualification. Most learners produce good quality written work. However, in a few cases assessors do not always correct spelling and grammatical errors in learners' written work.

Assessors and teaching staff track learner progress through a number of different tracking systems. Staff meet on a monthly basis to monitor learners' progress and review contract requirements, such as target profiling and missing progress reviews. A whole consortium wide tracking system is currently being developed to inform senior managers about how well learners are progressing and if they are on target to achieve their qualification aim. Consortium members' staff are starting to attend regular standardisation meetings to share good practice across the consortium.

Care, support and guidance: Good

All partners within the consortium have a wide range of relevant policies that cover important areas relating to learners' health and wellbeing, including bullying and harassment, equality and diversity and health and safety. Learners feel safe and know how to report any incidents of harassment or bullying.

Each partner ensures that learners have access to pre-entry information and advice, and provides thorough induction packs and tailored induction sessions. Induction arrangements promote health and wellbeing appropriately. One partner offers a comprehensive electronic resource for wellbeing topics and there is effective promotion of its use within a few departments. However, there is very little cross-consortium promotion of the support and guidance facilities available to learners. A few learners are unaware of any support and guidance available to them, other than via their assessor.

The consortium ensures that all learners undertake literacy and numeracy initial assessments when they start their programme. As a result of this screening, additional literacy and numeracy support is provided for learners identified as having a specific learning need. Many learners who receive in-class support achieve well and make good progress in their learning.

Tutors and assessors display caring attitudes to their learners, know their backgrounds and individual needs well, and provide them with good levels of individual and group support.

There are no important concerns about safeguarding across the consortium's provision. However, a few minor areas for improvement around the clarity of policies and procedures were raised with the consortium during the inspection.

Learning environment: Good

Each consortium member has an appropriate policy to promote equality and diversity. All consortium staff have attended equality and diversity training, although this training is not updated regularly for all members of staff. The consortium's sub-contractors arrange their own equality and diversity training. However, the consortium lead or partners do not always monitor whether training has improved the provision and practice.

Across the consortium there are a range of useful resources to promote equality and diversity to learners. At induction, learners receive an effective introduction to equality and diversity policies and practices. However, during progress reviews, staff do not re-enforce equality and diversity issues well enough.

Most classrooms and training centres are well equipped with a good range of learning resources. There is good access to ICT and this enables learners to access research and learning materials quickly. In training centres and classrooms there are topical displays that celebrate learners' work and achievements.

Training workshops and facilities are well equipped, of a good size and fit for purpose. Teaching and training staff create an environment that is conducive to learning.

Almost all employer workplaces provide a good learning environment. All are well equipped and give learners a good opportunity to develop up-to-date workplace skills and the opportunity to use good quality, modern workplace technology.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Adequate
--	-----------------

Leadership: Adequate

The consortium has been in formal operation since April 2015. Senior leaders from both consortium partners, including the principal from the college and the head of service from the local authority, have worked together to oversee the development of the consortium through a strategic group since May 2014.

Over this period, the consortium has had considerable uncertainty about its contract and the nature of its partnership. In addition, post holders in critical positions have moved or changed roles. As a result, senior leaders have been unable to establish and communicate a clear and long term strategic direction for the consortium. The combined effect of this is that the consortium has made limited progress towards achieving a strong and functioning partnership at this stage.

Senior leaders have set up a consortium development group and an appropriate range of effective operational groups. These groups are chaired by senior and operational managers and have a good range of suitable members from both consortium partners. The groups have made a solid start in developing practice and procedures for the consortium.

Senior leaders and operational managers at the partners are clear about their roles and responsibilities and manage their day-to-day work well. They have regular meetings with their staff. Managers and staff at all levels have a strong focus on achieving good outcomes for learners. This is beginning to have a positive impact on learners' outcomes.

The operational groups provide a mechanism for communicating information through the consortium and useful discussions take place at these groups. Meetings are well documented. However, across the consortium as a whole, senior leaders have not communicated the strategic aims and direction of the consortium clearly. As a result, staff at lower levels within the consortium, and sub-contractors, are not always clear about the aims of the consortium or their place within it.

The consortium as a whole is accountable to the governing body of the lead partner, Gower College Swansea. The curriculum and quality group of the governing body receives regular reports relating to the consortium and a designated governor is linked with work-based learning. However, the governing body and elected members of the council, who have oversight of provision at the local authority partner, LLETS, are not always kept adequately informed about the future development of the consortium.

Improving quality: Adequate

Overall, the consortium has appropriate systems and processes in place to develop a cross-partnership quality system. However, many of these systems and processes are recently developed and not yet embedded fully or applied consistently across the provision.

LLETS and college faculty staff deliver monthly quality improvement reports to the consortium and college quality management groups, which in turn inform senior staff and the governing body. This system is beginning to inform all parties about the quality improvement requirements across the consortium.

The consortium monitors the performance of learners, using a range of useful systems, across sub-contractors, occupational routes and learning areas. However, there is no consistent approach to tracking and monitoring learner performance across the consortium. The consortium is not yet at a stage where it can use an overarching system effectively enough to track the progress of learners across the provision.

The interim self-assessment report does not always reflect the work of the consortium accurately enough. In many areas, the report does not analyse and evaluate the factors that lead to underperformance well enough; it overstates the positive and understates areas for improvement.

The quality development plan is a comprehensive document that has clear action plans, allocates appropriate timescales and resources and identifies key milestones and responsibilities. However, progress against the actions is at an early stage and milestones and target dates have not yet been reached.

The consortium is beginning to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and to share best practice. However, this is not yet embedded into the consortium's quality improvement activities. As a result, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this process in bringing about improvements in standards and provision.

Consortium members use an appropriate combination of regular written questionnaires, learner voice and focus groups to gather the views of learners. Results of these activities are analysed and appropriate action plans developed. GCS and LLETS curriculum and quality management groups monitor the progress against actions.

The consortium manages its sub-contractors appropriately. There are service level agreements in place that clearly set out what the provider expects of the sub-contractors. The consortium has a clear strategy for bringing about improvements in under-performing sub-contractors. However, this strategy does not always provide sub-contractors with appropriate support in order to improve.

Partnership working: Good

The consortium plays an active and strategic role in key partnerships in the Swansea area, such as the Swansea Economic Regeneration Partnership, the Swansea Learning Partnership and the Regional Learning Partnership. The college principal chairs the South West Wales Regional Learning Partnership Steering Group and the Swansea Bay Skills Partnership. These links have enabled the consortium to support partnership research to gather labour market information, identifying the importance of skills for the life sciences industry in the area. This has enabled the consortium to work in partnership with higher education to develop a Higher Apprenticeship framework for life sciences, satisfying the demand for these skills.

The college principal meets regularly with the local authority's director of education, ensuring a close dialogue that enables the consortium to respond collaboratively to local needs, such as the Swansea Bay development opportunities.

The consortium has strong partnerships with local industries and employers, with whom it works well to develop work-based learning provision that is responsive to the needs of the labour market. For example, when TATA Steel reviewed their apprenticeship requirements, they opted to work with the consortium, to develop an apprenticeship programme that suited the specific needs of the steel industry's laboratory functions. This created opportunities for learners to access apprenticeships that enabled them to progress to higher level qualifications. The consortium works closely with one titanium manufacturer to help the company recruit apprentices. It has designed a customised recruitment programme to ensure that candidates are clearly informed about the needs and demands of the industry, involving a presentation by the company, a one day visit to the employer and extended work experience opportunities.

Nearly all employers with whom the consortium works feel well-supported by the consortium. Close working with awarding bodies has enabled the consortium to take the lead in developing several higher apprenticeship frameworks that meet labour market needs.

Consortium staff work well with local schools to support careers awareness events for learners and parents and to help schools develop links with industry. The consortium provides a school vocational programme in several secondary schools, enabling learners to develop vocational skills and gain a good insight into work-based learning. It provides useful taster sessions to learners in pupil referral units, which broadens their awareness of progression opportunities within the world of work. However funding restrictions have resulted in this provision decreasing over the last year. There is no clear strategy that explains how the consortium will continue to support schools in this way.

Resource management: Adequate

The consortium monitors the recruitment and take-up of apprenticeship places effectively through its data and finance group meetings. These meetings are used well to identify under performance against set targets for the recruitment of learners to the consortium's learning areas. However, whilst the actions taken by the consortium to address any under-performance has effectively reduced the deficit, it has not removed it. When under performance has been identified, performance targets are adjusted quickly, accompanied by a transfer of funding, to those learning areas where demand for places are higher. However, not all consortium members or sub-contractors fully understand the reasons behind any changes to targets and funding.

Each consortium member and sub-contractor manages their staff and resources independently through their own internal management structures. These are generally managed well in order to meet operational needs. However, there is a wide variation in the ratio of learner to assessor across the consortium's programmes. This means that while some assessors are under-utilised other assessors have too many learners to take on new ones. Despite this imbalance, there is only limited sharing of assessors between consortium members and sub-contractors, in order to re-balance the provision and reduce waiting lists.

In nearly every learning provider assessors also undertake the role of reviewer. However, in a very few learning areas these roles are split, which leads to an unnecessary division of responsibility for staff and increased work for the learner to co-ordinate their meetings with more than one person.

Each consortium member and sub-contractor has their own comprehensive induction programme for all new staff. These programmes all include appropriate mandatory topics that new staff must complete before they take up their new job. Every induction programme covers safeguarding responsibilities as well as managing personal health and safety. The continuous personal development arrangements appropriately take account of an individual assessor's training and development needs. In particular, assessors' needs to remain up-to-date with awarding body requirements are addressed well.

Although consortium members and sub-contractors undertake their own comprehensive training needs analysis and develop their own training plans, there is no overarching analysis or plan for the consortium as a whole. However, training events are generally offered to other consortium members where there are spaces, and recently there has been the development of shared training in key safeguarding matters.

There are a few good examples of the consortium members providing training for each other's staff. However, the sharing of resources across consortium members and the strategic analysis of staff training needs in order to inform planning are underdeveloped.

Overall, the standards and rates at which learners attain qualifications are generally around the benchmark; therefore the consortium provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Learner satisfaction

We use the outcomes of the Welsh Government Learner Voice survey to inform all our inspections of post 16 education and training. Learner Voice is a learner satisfaction survey conducted by the Welsh Government between January and February each year.

The survey asks learners a range of questions about the following key themes:

- the information, advice and support provided to them;
- provider responsiveness, learning environment and student wellbeing;
- the quality of teaching and training; and
- overall satisfaction.

Each theme contain, a range of questions requiring learners to rate their provider's performance.

To date there has not been a DfES Learner Voice survey carried out for the Swansea Bay Skills Partnership.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Sandra Barnard	Reporting Inspector
Steve Bell	Team Inspector
Gerard Kerslake	Team Inspector
Vanessa Morgan	Team Inspector
Stephen Davies	Team Inspector
Mark Evans	Team Inspector
Penny Lewis	Team Inspector
Alun Connick	Team Inspector
Reginald Hughes	Peer Inspector
Caroline Peek	Peer Inspector
Gill Davies	Nominee