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August 2014

Dear Mark

## **Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on YMCA Wales Community College**

Following the Annual Review of Performance visit to your institution on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014, this letter forms an annual report based on the outcomes of that visit. The 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 Head of the College and senior managers, tutors, and learners. 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 link inspector visit, the inspectors reported their findings to the Head of the College and other members of the senior leadership team.

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

Estyn inspected YMCA Wales Community College in 2011 and judged its overall performance to be excellent, with excellent prospects for improvement. Since the inspection, 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**

The college's overall success rate for 2012-2013 was 98.5%. This represents an increase in performance over a three-year period during which success rates have improved by 1.3 percentage points, consistently above national comparators for the sector.

Many learners progress to higher level qualifications, having been motivated by their experience with the provider to raise their aspirations. Many learners use the skills they acquire within their work place.

In 2012-2013 attainment was 98.8%: 10.8% above the 2011-2012 national comparator.

However, the provider has identified the need to improve recruitment, selection and essential skills support for Level 3 provision in Education and Training (80.1%) and for Youth Work (84%) as learners do not achieve as well in these areas compared to other courses.

Attainment by learners on Offender Management programmes is 100%. However, it is not clear what the impact this impressive level of attainment has on reducing offending behaviour or on improving these learners' prospects for employment.

## **2 Essential Skills**

The college has made good progress with its arrangements for improving learners' essential skills. In addition to producing an Essential Skills Strategy, the college has worked with an independent consultant to develop a short but focused essential skills action plan. This identifies appropriately the main areas for development, namely: improving the planning of initial assessment; embedding essential skills in vocational training; and increasing the signposting of learners to external agencies. Eight tutors have completed Level 2 qualifications to help them support learners with their literacy.

The college has also recognised the gaps in its baseline assessment information. It has recently made arrangements to administer initial and diagnostic testing for all learners studying for more than five hours each week. These are mainly learners studying for qualifications in Youth Work or Education and Training.

For learners studying fewer than five hours each week, the college relies on partner agencies to carry out the assessment process. However, teachers at the college do not receive the results of these and therefore cannot adequately quality assure the support arrangements for these learners.

The college curriculum committee effectively monitors these initiatives; however, it is too soon to say what impact they will have in raising skill levels.

### **3 Teaching and assessment**

The college has drafted a teaching and learning observation policy. Managers and co-ordinators observe all tutors at least once each year. The college has developed a useful teaching observation template to record these evaluations. However, this is not detailed enough to analyse the various aspects that make up good teaching. The college uses the results of observations to inform its annual tutor review process. During 2013-2014, most observations of teaching and learning were judged to be good or excellent. Managers have a good system of supporting tutors whose teaching needs to be improved.

The quality manager analyses the results of observations and uses them well to inform the annual training plan. Recent training has focussed on standardising the college marking scheme. Teachers have good access to other relevant opportunities for professional development and also receive an annual voucher to purchase training of their choice.

The quality manager effectively monitors the attendance at training of all sessional tutors to ensure that they are included in the arrangements.

### **4 Curriculum**

The college has a specific focus on delivering learning for adults who offend and on improving the skills of youth service staff in Wales. This focus provides a clear direction for the way in which the college organises its provision and also guides much of its good partnership working.

The college consults well with individual partners to develop and deliver provision to meet established and emerging needs. It also responds well to the need for developing new programmes and qualifications. This has resulted in it extending the range of accreditation opportunities for learners. There are good progression opportunities for youth service staff to develop relevant skills and gain accreditation at higher level.

A high proportion of learners are from 'hard to reach' groups who have become disengaged from learning. The college has worked effectively with the National Probation Service to develop a broad range of programmes that enable adults on community sentences to gain useful accreditation. However, it is not clear how well these learners are able to use the skills for which they gain accreditation.

The college recruits a high proportion of learners from areas of deprivation. It has analysed the distribution of these learners across provision and they are evenly distributed throughout the range of courses provided.

### **5 Leadership and management**

The college has produced a three-year strategic plan that appropriately recognises

local and national priorities. It contains relevant outcome-focused performance targets, such as those for recruiting the proportion of learners from areas experiencing educational deprivation. It builds successfully on the excellent features noted in the college's previous inspection report. Staff, governors and learners were helpfully involved in developing the plan through attendance at away-days. This approach has helped to communicate and effectively embed the new strategic approach.

Strategic aims are linked effectively to the annual staff performance appraisal scheme and this helps staff to understand their role in improving performance. The strategic aims are also included in partners' Service Level Agreements and enable the college to set out clearly its expectations for joint working.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of how well the college is performing through regular data reporting and analysis. Outcomes are monitored against the operational plan at monthly senior management meetings.

Governors are broadly representative of the communities they serve. Their attendance at board meetings is good. They provide good levels of challenge and support. However, the probation service is not represented well enough. This is a shortcoming when almost half of the college provision is concerned with meeting the needs of adults who offend.

The college maintains its partnerships well, linking with over 50 local and national agencies, in both statutory and voluntary sectors. This broad range of partnership work enables the College to respond well to the needs of a wide range of learners.

The college has identified the risks involved in the contracting out of offender learning by the probation service. Senior managers have identified new opportunities, including areas such as play and community development that could fill the gap should the probation contract not be renewed.

The College is responding proactively to the Welsh Government 'Transformation Agenda', working with ACL partnerships and WEA Cymru. There is a clear timetable to take this work forward and managers have communicated clearly any developments to keep staff informed.

## **6 Leadership and management (quality assurance)**

The college has good systems in place to improve the quality of its provision. It produces an evaluative self-assessment report that identifies appropriate areas for improvement. These inform a comprehensive quality improvement plan (QDP) that prioritises actions and states clearly who is responsible for them. Senior staff monitor progress towards the QDP objectives and report regularly to governors to ensure that the board is well informed.

The college has a useful management information system that helps to record and



track clearly the provider's progress towards objectives. There are good systems for taking account of learners' views and the college uses these effectively when reviewing the quality of provision.

The college has good arrangements in place for observing the performance of staff and extends these to visits to third party providers. However, these arrangements have not been successful in identifying all of the issues to do with the quality of offender learning that Estyn had reported previously to HMI Probation.

The college reviews its policies annually. However, the updated safeguarding policy does not fully reflect amendments to safeguarding-related legislation as contained in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

### **Summary of progress on the recommendations outlined in the report of 2011**

The college has made good progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection.

#### **R1 Develop work to improve basic and essential skills opportunities for all learners**

The majority of learners take part in learning for less than five hours each week and the college has not undertaken an initial assessment of their basic or essential skills. However, it has recently developed a service level agreement with a company to provide initial assessment, skills diagnosis and basic skills development support for all learners. It is too soon for the college to evaluate the impact of this intervention.

#### **R2 Help tutors identify and develop ways to embed the Welsh dimension into more activities in their delivery**

The college has appointed a Welsh Champion to strengthen its ability to support tutors in developing Welsh medium provision and the Welsh dimension within sessions. It makes workbooks available in Welsh and has worked with Urdd Gobaith Cymru to develop assessment materials in Welsh. A few teachers introduce elements of Welsh language into their lessons and the college encourages all staff to develop their own Welsh language skills.

#### **R3 Widen engagement at a strategic level to promote the good practice at the college**

The college continues to develop its links with the National Probation Service in anticipation of a reorientation of services to offenders. It has commenced discussions with WEA to explore a partnership in response to the Welsh Governments 'Transformation Agenda'.

In addition, the Head of College has become involved in a broader range of Partners' Boards.

## **7 Learner Voice**

Overall, since 2013, the college has improved its performance in the Learner Voice Wales survey. One hundred and thirty-three of the college's learners took part in the survey in 2014. Outcomes are mainly positive, with 96% rating the provider as good or very good – five percentage points higher than the average for Wales. Eighty-four per cent said the course was better or as expected. This is nine percentage points below the sector average.

There were, however, some areas for improvement, with only 62% rating teaching and training as very good, compared with a Wales sector average of 72%. Learners rated a number of aspects of teaching and training below the sector average, including keeping you interested and explaining work. The college has paid good attention to this feedback and is responding well to the findings as part of its strategy for improving learning and teaching.

The college supplements the Learner Voice Wales feedback by holding regular focus groups, the results of which it analyses and shares with partners to help them improve provision. It is too early to evaluate the impact of all these activities. However, the college recognises that it does not make good enough use of learner voice feedback to improve probation service delivery.

## **8 Welsh language and culture**

Developing and promoting the Welsh language and culture remain a strategic priority for the college. It has a voluntary Welsh language scheme with a robust reporting mechanism and includes Welsh as part of its equality impact assessments. This is good practice and the college has recently received a positive review from the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Currently, all areas of the curriculum are available through the medium of Welsh and the college has set itself an ambitious target of offering 100% of Welsh language speakers the opportunity to learn in Welsh.

The college has a bi-lingual champion, shared with two other colleges, who is successfully raising staff awareness. Around a half of staff members are studying together on a Welsh language course for beginners. The college is improving the content of its website and is also working hard to improve the quality of translation of resources on certain courses. A recent and exciting development is the drafting of an Agored accredited unit on Welsh language and culture aimed at professionals coming to work in Wales.

The college pays good attention to embedding the Welsh context into its UK wide training courses. For example, it includes relevant aspects of Welsh policy and practice into its Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) and youth work courses. Each year, the college successfully delivers a number of Youth

Worker and PTLLS courses through the medium of Welsh.

### **Recommendations**

In order to bring about the necessary improvements in a timely manner, the institution should do the following.

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- R1 Evaluate the impact of interventions and support for improving learners' essential and basic skills
- R2 Improve the assessment of teaching and learning in all settings
- R3 Review and update the safeguarding policy to take full account of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- R4 Improve the representation of the Probation Service at Board level

### **Next steps**

Rachael Bubalo HMI and Alun Connick HMI will continue to monitor overall progress through their link role with the institution.

Yours sincerely

**Lin Howells**  
Assistant Director