

Simon Pirotte
Principal
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Dear Mr Pirotte

Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on Bridgend College

Following the Annual Review of Performance visit to your institution on 25 to 27 June 2014, this letter forms an annual report based on the outcomes of that visit. The letter is published on the Estyn website.

Mark Evans HMI and Bernard Hayward HMI evaluated the current performance of the institution and reviewed the progress made against the recommendations arising from earlier inspections. They 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 inspection in April 2009, the college has worked well to address the recommendations left by the inspection team during a period of significant change.

1 Outcomes and standards

The college enrolls learners from an area that contains many disadvantaged wards and about a half of its learners live within areas with a high index for deprivation. Across the college, 75% of enrolments are on long courses. In the period 2011 to 2013 the completion rates for learners have improved slightly but remain below the sector average. Attainment and success rates have also slightly improved but still

remain below the sector average. The majority of learning areas across the college perform below national comparators for the sector.

Currently, the college has a strong focus on working to raise performance in all learning areas to bring them into line with national comparators. Unpublished data show that the college is on target to improve learner success rates for the period 2013 to 2014.

Learner success rates on short courses are good with many successfully completing their courses.

2 Essential Skills

The college screens most learners to identify any literacy or numeracy needs before they start their courses. In most cases, this happens prior to their arrival at the college for their induction. This allows teachers and support staff to plan the resources and other arrangements to be put in place ready for the start of learners' courses. Around a half of all the learners tested require support to improve their basic skills.

Learners who have additional learning needs receive support. The college has good relationships with specialist agencies, special schools and parents. This enables it to put in place necessary additional resources to use a wide range of specialist staff to support learners.

The delivery of ESW is mostly contextualised and embedded into the learner's course. The college uses a common marking scheme for literacy that has been developed in recent years. However, there are inconsistencies in the way this is used by staff across the college.

The new faculty structure has placed the responsibility for the standards of learner support, basic skills support and ESW with the recently appointed Deans of Faculty. Improving the delivery of, and attainment in, ESW qualifications is a high priority for the college and the deans have made resources available to support their improvement plans.

3 Teaching and assessment

The identification and sharing of good teaching and assessment practice have been improving across the college. There is a clear and strategic approach to improving the quality of teaching and assessment. Deans, curriculum area managers and section leaders are both supported and challenged by the principal and senior managers to further improve teaching and learning. Developments in teaching practice include the 'be inspired' strategy which engages teachers in short, practical 'how to' sessions. Activities also include opportunities for staff to share innovative practice relating to more learner-focused teaching and learning activities.

To support these strategies the college has key members of staff who have defined roles that are designed to support teaching staff to improve their practice. The college uses an updated and revised process to undertake its teaching observations.

Judgements are moderated and, where necessary, appropriate support is put in place together with an action plan that is routinely monitored.

4 Curriculum

The college delivers a comprehensive range of courses to meet the needs of learners and employers throughout the local and wider area. It uses an appropriate range of labour market information to develop new provision in a wide range of subjects. The college also offers pathways to higher education courses in most learning areas. It has recently undertaken a comprehensive curriculum review that has resulted in a more appropriate provision being made available to its learners. As a result of using labour market information and course performance data more effectively, the college no longer offers a number of Level 3 courses and is now delivering more Level 1 and Level 2 courses to meet demand at a lower level.

The college has revised its support systems for learners who now benefit from improved learning and personal welfare support. The college works closely with local secondary schools to deliver an appropriate range of vocational courses for school pupils. Further curriculum development has taken place to make sure that the college is prepared for the introduction of Learning Area Programmes. The college continues to maintain good working relationships with a wide range of employers. These relationships assist the college in gaining specialist resources and securing work placement opportunities for its learners.

5 Leadership and management

During the past year, the principal and governing body has developed a clear vision and strategic direction for the college and sought to create a distinctive culture and ethos. Managers and staff are now working as a more cohesive team to achieve the key aims of the college and senior leaders and governors work well together to support these.

The principal has communicated the strategic direction for the college at a time of significant financial challenge. Senior leaders have managed a deficit financial budget and created a small surplus. A major staff restructure has resulted in redefined roles for managers at all levels and a sharper focus on improving many aspects of the college, for example, setting challenging targets to improve the rates at which learners achieve their qualifications. Managers and staff at all levels have clear responsibilities and are more accountable for improving learner standards.

Communication across the college is good. Senior managers keep staff well informed about strategic and operational developments and clear communication has been effective at a time of significant challenge to the college. Staff at all levels receive a wide range of information and attend regular update meetings with the principal and senior managers. This helps to engage staff and has a positive impact on team working.

Middle managers, a number of whom are just starting their new roles, have begun to work constructively together to implement the college's key strategic aims. These managers have revised leadership roles and performance targets aimed at

embedding the college culture and improving success rates. They demonstrate a good understanding of how their areas of responsibility are performing and what they need to do to improve. The team works well to develop the areas for which they are responsible and to challenge and support their staff to improve their performance.

6 Leadership and management (quality assurance)

The college has developed its quality assurance procedures to meet its current aims more effectively. It now uses a risk-based model that aims to give managers and staff a better understanding of the performance of courses. The model collects a range of information relating to learners and their performance while at the college. It enables comprehensive tracking of progress and identifies where there is a need for early intervention so that support can be offered. Evidence suggests that this support has increased completion rates. The evaluation of courses and functional areas has been further strengthened by a routine programme of reviews. These quality assurance procedures have a clearer focus on raising attainment and improving the quality of teaching and assessment.

Deans, curriculum area managers and section leaders demonstrate a good understanding of their strengths and what they need to do to secure improvement in their learning or support area. Data is used more consistently by managers and staff to monitor performance against targets. The college has developed appropriate plans and strategies for improvement across all key strands of its work.

7 Summary on progress on the recommendations outlined in the report of April 2009

Overall, the college has addressed the recommendations of the last inspection. Since the time of the inspection, there have been significant challenges and changes within the college, including the budget deficit and the organisational restructure.

8 Other

Partnerships

The college has a long-standing partnership with schools within the local authority and makes a significant contribution to the continuing development of 14-19 provision.

Over several years the college has established and expanded its 'twilight' provision for A levels and other Level 3 courses for school pupils who wish to take specialist qualifications. Currently, there are 190 pupils on these programmes with limited delivery being offered during the day to meet demand. The college also works with the Welsh-medium sector delivering vocational programmes for both 14-16 and 16-19 pupils through the medium of Welsh. The college has maintained and expanded the provision for interactive media at its Studio 34 Skills Centre which focuses on the delivery of programmes for Year 12 pupils at risk of becoming disengaged. In total, there are over 600 school pupils attending the college on various courses.

The college is one of the largest providers of higher education (HE) in the sector and more than 1,000 learners are currently following HE programmes. Good progression opportunities are available in each subject sector area. In the current year, the college has established a new HE pathway with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

The college is also the lead provider for the Adult and Community Learning (ACL) partnership in the area and employs the ACL Partnership Manager with the principal chairing the ACL Strategic Board.

The college has both long-standing and more recent links with local business and industry and has provided training programmes for major industries and SMEs. The college has established a detailed Employer Engagement Strategy that identifies key objectives for 2014 to 2015.

Welsh

The college works closely with a local Welsh-medium school to deliver a range of courses in vocational areas from Level 1 to Level 3 through the medium of Welsh. These programmes are in motor vehicle and health and social care with 70 learners currently on programme. At post-16, the college delivers a Level 3 programme in health and social care through the Welsh language and there are 41 pupils currently on this programme.

The college also provides a range of events relating to the Welsh language and culture. Over the past three years, it has been recognised for the work it does for the Welsh language and bilingualism, for example, through Colegau Cymru nomination and awards for staff development and for Welsh in the workplace. The college is continuing to work to fully promote the benefits of bilingualism for all learners.

Learner voice

The college uses a range of appropriate survey questionnaires to seek the views of learners regarding how they can improve the learning experience while attending the college. Two thousand, two hundred and eleven learners in the college completed the learner voice survey in 2014. Eighty-one per cent of respondents rate the college as very good or good. This puts the college top across the sector for this response at a time of great change and challenge. Forty per cent of respondents stated that their course was better than they expected and this is above the sector average. Responses to the five key themes in the survey show the college rated above the sector in all five. The college was rated particularly highly by respondents for the help and support that learners receive and was rated at 41%, six percentage points above the sector average.

The senior management team and staff at all levels are clear regarding the college's main priorities for improvement. They have a wide range of strategies and documents in place to support these developments. Inspectors recognise these priorities and your link inspectors will continue to monitor overall progress through their link role with the college.

Recommendations

- Continue to build the capacity of the senior leadership team to undertake its strategic role;
- Ensure that financial stability is maintained;
- Continue to improve the monitoring of data systems and procedures; and
- Improve the rates at which learners achieve their qualifications across all subject learning areas.

Next steps

Mark Evans HMI and Bernard Hayward HMI will continue to monitor overall progress through their role as links with the institution.

Yours sincerely

Lin Howells
Assistant Director