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Dear Mike

Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on Cardiff and Vale College

Following the Annual Review of Performance visit by Steve Bell HMI and Rachael Bubalo HMI to your institution on 26th June, this letter forms an annual report based on the outcomes of that visit. The letter is published on the Estyn website.

The inspectors held discussions with the deputy principals, managers, tutors and officers of the college. The visit focused on four themes: the college's most recent published data; the outcomes of the 2014 Learner Voice Wales survey and the college's strategy for listening and responding to learners; the college's developing strategy for enrichment, employability and entrepreneurship; and the impact of the merger of the two legacy colleges to form Cardiff and Vale College in 2011.

At the end of the visit, the inspectors reported their findings to the deputy principals and the nominee.

Outcome of the link inspector visits

Estyn inspected Barry College in 2007 and Coleg Glan Hafren in 2008. Cardiff and Vale College – as a further education college - has not been inspected since its formation.

1 Outcomes and standards

The 'all course' data for 2012-2013 shows that the rates at which learners complete and attain their qualifications (success rates) have continued to improve over the last three years. The college's overall success rate is above the national comparator. The Estyn analysis of the college's 'all-course' data (which excludes Essential Skills

Wales outcomes) places the college in the top quarter of all colleges in Wales for 2012-2013.

Although a majority of subject sector areas have shown an improvement in successful completion of courses between 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, a minority have declined and a few, including Science and Mathematics, Social Sciences and History, Philosophy and Theology, are performing significantly below the national benchmarks. Additionally, success rates for A levels and Essential Skills Wales qualifications are below the national comparators.

The college is aware of its strengths and weaknesses in terms of course outcomes. Key performance indicators are monitored regularly and are available for managers and tutors on the college's dashboard. The college annually produces a detailed and analytical performance report, which gives an honest appraisal of current performance. The quality development plan appropriately identifies the main areas for development.

2 Learner Voice

In 2014, 4,468 learners took part in the Learner Voice Wales survey. This represents around one fifth of all college learners. The college has improved its performance in the survey since 2013. However, in nearly all areas, the college compares less well with further education (FE) benchmarks. Seventy-two per cent of all learners in the survey rated the college as good or very good overall. This is below the sector average. Eighty-five per cent said their course was better or as expected. This is close to the sector average.

The college has responded quickly to the results of the learner survey. It has produced a detailed action plan showing the actions it will take in response to the feedback and monitors the plan well. A good example of the college's response is the action taken to improve travel arrangements for learners by working with the local bus company on more convenient timetabling.

The college has an extensive range of systems to gather the views of learners and to feed back to them on the steps it has taken to address their concerns. For example, it conducts its own surveys that are tailored to the specific needs of different groups of learners such as ESOL students. It has also developed an innovative online suggestion box. This is a fairly new facility and the college cannot yet say how well it is used.

The college employs a student voice co-ordinator who works effectively on a range of activities including organising an Annual Learner Voice conference. The college takes good account of all the feedback it receives through these systems to improve the learners' experience.

There is also an effective system of campus learner representatives who receive appropriate training to carry out their role. However, the college recognises it needs

to do more to include part-time learners in these arrangements and is in the process of recruiting additional representatives.

3 Enrichment, employability and entrepreneurship

The college is developing a strategy to enrich learners' experiences, to develop their entrepreneurial skills and increase their employability. The college has an enthusiastic and well-motivated team developing and implementing actions from the strategy. These will include:

- an employability and progression adviser who will work with learners to help them plan for their future learning or employment;
- a job-search facility to match learners with employers;
- an alumni programme to help former learners keep in touch with the college and for the college to track their destinations and follow their progress; and
- a range of activities to help improve learners' skills.

The strategy has the potential to add a valuable extra dimension to the learners' experience. At present, although there is some evidence of the impact of the strategy on the quality and breadth of experiences learners receive, it is too soon to measure the impact on learners' outcomes. Additionally, it is not clear how the college will evaluate the impact of the strategy on learners' outcomes.

4 Merger

Following the merger of the two colleges and the appointment of the new principal and senior leadership team, a clear ethos and direction of travel have been established. The key priorities of 'Quality, Efficiency, and Growth' are communicated effectively to staff across the merged institution. A meeting with the senior and middle managers indicated that the leadership team at this level were positive about the impact of the merger.

Since the merger, the overall rates at which learners successfully complete their qualifications have improved. The college has established stronger and more effective strategic links with a range of partners, in particular with Cardiff Council. It has undertaken a review of its curriculum to reduce unnecessary duplication in its provision and to improve quality and efficiency. It has invested in a new Cardiff city centre campus building which is currently under construction.

Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards in subject sector areas and courses that are performing below the level of national comparators
- R2 Recruit learner representatives from part-time courses
- R3 Monitor the impact of the strategy for enrichment, employability and entrepreneurship on overall outcomes

Next steps

Steve Bell HMI will continue to monitor overall progress through his link role with the college.

Yours sincerely

Lin Howells
Assistant Director