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Dear Mr Jones

### **Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on Gower College Swansea**

Following the Annual Review of Performance visit to your institution on 6 to 8 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 from earlier inspections. They held discussions with the principal and senior managers, lecturers, 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 FEI's teaching and learning observation process.

At the end of the monitoring visit, the link inspectors reported their findings to the principal and other members of the senior leadership team.

### **Outcome of the link inspector visit**

Since the inspection of Gower College Swansea in January 2012, the college has made good progress in addressing most of the recommendations left by the inspection team.

#### **1 Outcomes and standards**

Almost half the learners attending the college are from areas with a high index of deprivation. All course data across the three measures of completion, attainment and success show that learner outcomes have improved over the last three years.

Across the college, approximately 80% of enrolments are on long courses. On most of these courses, the college has achieved an upward trend for all data indicators over the last three years. In the period 2012 to 2013, the college significantly reduced the number of learning areas that were performing below the national comparator. In a few cases, there is too wide a variation between the performance of courses in different subject learning areas.

The college has a high number of learners undertaking A level courses and these account for approximately 37% of long course learners overall. These courses perform well with 89% of learners attaining their qualifications.

Nearly all learners on short courses successfully complete their qualifications.

## **2 Essential Skills**

The delivery of Essential Skills Wales (ESW) courses has recently been improved and this has helped to improve learner success rates which are now around the average for the sector. The college has clear plans to make further improvements to its delivery of ESW through recent organisational changes and the appointment of a new senior member of staff. As part of these developments, the college has a stronger focus on the training of staff to deliver ESW. The college has a customised marking scheme that has been in use for the last 12 months and will be rolled out to all learning areas in September 2014.

Learners identified as having additional learning needs (ALN) are well supported. The college has improved the transfer of information from external partners on the specific needs of learners with ALN and now makes appropriate arrangements before learners arrive at the college. The college has also improved its transition arrangements for learners joining courses from specialist schools.

## **3 Teaching and assessment**

The college makes use of a good range of strategies to improve teaching and assessment. A useful teaching, learning and assessment strategy and action plan underpins the college's aim of achieving excellence across the majority of its provision. There is now a sharper focus on continually improving the standard of teaching and assessment. Recently completed 'mock' inspections of all learning areas provided first-hand evidence of the quality of teaching and assessment across the college. Good practice has been identified and shared with staff across learning areas. Learning area managers have been supported and challenged by senior managers to further improve teaching and learning. For example, innovation is seen as a key aspect of improving teaching and learning and the college is proactive in encouraging staff to explore new approaches.

## **4 Curriculum**

The college uses a good range of labour market information and other intelligence to plan and deliver an appropriate curriculum. It has developed good links with a wide range of employers. The majority of staff across the college have developed good personal links with local industry. They use these well to access work experience for learners and to gain information relating to industry training needs. The merger of the two legacy colleges led to a review of the curriculum and courses were programmed to be delivered at the most appropriate site to match learners' needs. Some courses were also rationalised to be delivered on a single site to avoid unnecessary duplication of provision. The college works well with local employers and industry to deliver an appropriate range of training programmes.

## **5 Leadership and management**

Members of the leadership team have worked well to merge the two legacy colleges and to encourage staff to realise the potential of the new college.

Over the past year, the principal has set a strategic direction and clear aims for college and senior leaders and governors work well together to support these aims. This has resulted in a sharper focus on improving many aspects of the college, such as learner standards and the quality of teaching and assessment. The college has developed comprehensive self-assessment processes that are embedded in learning areas and underpinned by clear improvement plans. The college is working well to make sure that staff from the two legacy colleges collaborate effectively as a key part of the merged college. This work is now having a positive effect in improving the learners' experience. The college middle management team work well together to implement the college's aims. They now have clear performance targets that are routinely reviewed. They demonstrate a good understanding of how their areas of responsibility are performing and what they need to do to improve. The team work well to identify and share best practice and to challenge all staff to improve their performance.

Senior managers have developed an ambitious estates programme with potential partners at local and regional level.

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

The college has strengthened its quality assurance procedures and developed one clear system from those of the two legacy colleges. The establishment of quality improvement panels allows a robust review to take place regarding the performance of learning areas. Managers and staff at all levels now use reliable data to set targets and monitor and review performance. Senior and middle managers demonstrate a clear understanding of what is working well and what they need to do to improve. There are clear strategies and robust plans for quality improvement; these include the Successful Attainment Strategy and the Teaching and learning

Improvement Strategy. Senior managers regularly challenge middle managers to secure improvement.

## **7 Summary on progress on the recommendations outlined in the report of January 2012**

The recommendations from the last inspection report were made in January 2012. The college is making positive progress towards meeting these recommendations.

It has significantly improved the robustness and use of data by staff. The college now provides governors with information and data relating to learners' performance in a detailed and clear format and staff now use this data to set targets and to monitor and review the performance of their learning areas. The college has implemented a clear strategy and action plan for improving the outcomes of learners in all learning areas.

The college has established good relationships with the schools in the local area and the number of pupils attending the college for taster sessions has increased year on year, particularly in the 11-16 schools. The college is well represented on all the local groups relating to 14-19 provision and provides the leadership for several of these groups. It has been proactive in providing funds to support the latest review of provision for 14-19 learners in the area.

The college has also developed good links with industry and business. It works well with the Higher Education (HE) sector in the region and continues to expand its provision for Foundation Degrees (FD) and other HE programmes.

The college has recently appointed a new Bilingual Champion and will be launching a new Welsh Language Scheme at the National Eisteddfod in August. A Welsh steering group is currently led by the Principal to oversee and develop strategies in this area. College staff work well to promote the benefits of bilingual competence to learners and are currently developing a three-year plan to promote and deliver Welsh language provision for learners and staff.

The college uses a suitable range of questionnaires and surveys to gather information from learners about how to improve courses and other aspects of provision. One thousand, three hundred and ninety-three learners attending the college completed the learner voice survey in 2013. Thirty-eight per cent of respondents rate the college as very good overall. This is just above the sector average of 35%. A further 42% rate the college as good compared to a sector average of 43%. Thirty-four per cent of learners responded that their course was better than they expected. The strongest response in the learner voice survey is for teaching and training at the college with 48% rating it as very good against a sector average of 44%.



The college has made good progress during the merger of the two legacy colleges. During the last year, it has started to embed procedures and place a greater emphasis on improving learner outcomes and the standard of teaching and learning.

The inspectors endorse the college's key development needs as identified in their strategic and other plans.

### **Recommendation**

- R1 The college needs to address the variation in performance between courses in different learning areas.
- R2 That the college continues to make progress as outlined in its institutional Strategic Plan.

### **Next steps**

The Estyn Link Inspectors, Mark Evans HMI and Bernard Hayward HMI will continue to monitor overall progress through their link role with the institution.

Yours sincerely

**Lin Howells**  
Assistant Director