



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

A report on

**Coleg Gwent
The Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1XJ**

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by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

About Coleg Gwent

Coleg Gwent is one of the largest colleges in Wales, serving communities across five local authorities in south east Wales. It provides courses from entry level to level 5 in five main campuses, one in each of the five local authorities, at Crosskeys, Ebbw Vale, Newport, Pontypool and Usk. Over a half of learners at the college come from some of the most deprived areas as classified by the top two quintiles in the Welsh index of multiple of multiple deprivation.

The college has provision across all subject sector areas and serves approximately 19,000 learners, of whom approximately 40% follow full-time programmes of study.

The subject areas accounting for the largest proportion of provision include health, public services and care; science and mathematics; engineering and manufacturing technologies; arts, media and publishing; and business, administration and law. Approximately 68% of qualifications studied are vocational and academic qualifications account for 32% of all qualifications.

The college has an annual turnover in excess of £50m and currently employs approximately 1,400 staff.

Summary

Many learners at Coleg Gwent make strong progress in lessons. They are appropriately motivated and ambitious to succeed in their qualifications, and they develop their skills well. A minority demonstrate particularly effective skills in problem solving and critical reflection.

Success rates for vocational qualifications are particularly noteworthy, especially on level 3 vocational programmes.

Most learners feel valued and show substantial self-awareness. They behave very well in and around the college and are considerate to each other. Many demonstrate positive attitudes in lessons and are keen to learn. Teaching is generally effective and the college's provision for skills challenges at level 3 is particularly extensive and worthwhile.

The college supports its learners very well, with support for vulnerable learners being a notable strength.

The principal, senior managers and governors work well together to implement the college's vision, mission and values. Together they have used resources effectively to achieve significant improvements in learner outcomes and financial performance since the last inspection.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Good

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the quality of teaching so that every teacher engages and challenges all learners to achieve their full potential
- R2 Evaluate the impact of teaching and training relating to radicalisation and extremism
- R3 Improve the rigour and accuracy of self-evaluation

What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Many learners make strong progress in lessons. Most learners with additional learning needs make substantial progress in line with their needs and abilities.

Most learners are motivated to achieve and are keen to progress to the next level of their learning programme. Nearly all learners demonstrate confidence in completing their qualifications and sound practical competence when completing tasks. The majority of learners organise their work well. However, in a few cases, learners do not organise their files well enough and this prevents them from being an effective tool for learning and revision.

Most learners improve their speaking and listening skills well relative to their starting points. They are respectful and listen to teachers and their peers attentively. The majority of learners express themselves clearly and make appropriate use of subject specific vocabulary. In a few instances, such as in interactive media, learners make very effective use of technical vocabulary to explain how they create animation sequences for websites.

Most learners explain their work confidently. However, in many classes staff do not provide learners with sufficient opportunity to offer their opinions and ideas.

Many learners structure their work well and use appropriate spelling, punctuation and grammar. A few learners write well for a range of purposes. For instance, level 3 interactive media learners produce well-structured project briefs, thoughtful evaluations and creative text for their websites. A minority of learners demonstrate strong skills in refining written work. For example, A level English literature and language learners annotate text well and demonstrate a comprehensive awareness of language structures.

Many learners with basic skills needs make strong progress in improving their literacy and language skills. They speak and produce extended written work confidently. A few ESOL learners quickly develop valuable skills and competence in the English language.

The majority of learners are aware of what they need to do to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and set long term skills and course targets. However, only a very few learners use short-term targets well to support their learning. A few learners demonstrate useful numeracy skills in applied contexts. Many learners demonstrate valuable digital literacy skills to support their learning. However, only a very few learners sustain or improve their Welsh language skills.

A minority of learners demonstrate effective higher order thinking skills. For example, electronic engineering learners programme complex industrial computer control systems using sophisticated problem solving skills and critical reflection.

Learners successfully complete their qualifications at rates slightly above the national comparators. In each of last three years, learners completed their main qualifications

at rates consistently above national comparators. Success rates on vocational main qualifications show an upward trend over the three-year period from 2014 to 2017 and are consistently above national comparators.

Success rates for learners on vocational level 3 qualifications are particularly strong. However, success rates for learners on academic level 3 qualifications have fallen over the last three years and are now below the national comparators.

Many learners improve their GCSE grades after resitting mathematics or English examinations. Male and female learners, learners from deprived backgrounds, learners with disabilities and learners from most minority ethnic groups successfully achieve their qualifications in line with the overall performance of learners at the college.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all learners feel safe in college and know where to go if they need help with a problem. They feel confident that tutors respond to issues in a prompt and supportive manner. Through engagement with a range of lessons and activities, the majority of learners have a clear understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. For instance, in Welsh Baccalaureate lessons learners take part in useful discussions about obesity and the implications of this on long-term health and wellbeing. However, a few learners are not sufficiently aware of how to maintain a healthy and safe lifestyle, including how to stay safe when online.

Many learners develop useful employability skills through participation in skills challenges activities. The majority of learners make a valuable contribution to the community through fundraising activities. For example, a college initiative has enabled learners to gain funding to address important issues such as period poverty or to raise money to refurbish a community space for independent living skills learners. In addition, the majority of learners are suitably engaged in a range of wider college experiences, such as youth enterprise events and an enhancement programme that supplements their courses. These initiatives help learners to develop beneficial employability skills.

Most learners feel that their views are valued and that the college responds to their feedback promptly. Those learners who take on college wide responsibilities, such as learner representatives, student governors and ambassadors, actively take part in important decision-making processes in the college. For example, learner representatives on the Usk campus have influenced the design of the new building and access to library resources.

Most learners in classes and around the college show a substantial degree of self-awareness and many engage with visitors in a friendly and professional manner. They know how to conduct themselves appropriately. Most learners are considerate to one another. This is particularly evident in classes where there are learners with different backgrounds and learning needs. In these cases, learners support and encourage one another, showing sensitivity and thoughtfulness.

Many learners demonstrate positive attitudes to learning in lessons. They are keen to learn and are usually well prepared for teaching sessions. However, a few

learners do not attend college regularly enough or are not punctual at teaching sessions. During the inspection, a few learners in a majority of sessions were absent or late arriving at lessons and as result, missed important work.

The majority of learners are resilient and persist with tasks well, for example, in GCSE mathematics, learners who have previously found this subject challenging are keen to improve their skills. Many learners engage purposefully in work-related learning and apply themselves well to vocational tasks.

Many learners welcome new experiences. They see these as valuable opportunities to develop new skills or gain experience that will help them in their chosen career. For example, vocational art and design learners respond sensitively and maturely when involved in a challenging life-drawing workshop.

Many learners of all abilities are motivated by their courses and see the relevance of their learning to help them progress to further learning or employment. However, a minority of learners do not demonstrate sufficient drive and persistence and too frequently remain passive in lessons.

Through engagement with a range of skills competitions, a few learners show confidence, adaptability and resolve to be successful in work related situations. For example, level 1 and level 2 bricklaying learners demonstrate their skills successfully in an inter-college competition organised by a national employer. A few learners possess highly effective problem-solving skills that help them develop and realise innovative work. These learners are confident to take risks with their work and explore new concepts and techniques successfully.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Nearly all teachers have up-to-date subject knowledge and experience. Many teachers use a range of resources well in practical sessions, and most workshops are industry standard working environments. For example, in creative media, teachers work well with learners to establish the environment and working practices of a digital design studio.

Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Many teachers plan their lessons well, allowing learners to build on their previous knowledge and develop confidence. In a GCSE English resit class, the teacher carefully layers activities of increasing complexity so that learners develop and practise the skills of summary and synthesis to extract information from texts. However, in a minority of lessons the pace of learning is too slow and a few learners, especially the more able, are not sufficiently challenged.

Many teachers use questioning well to assess knowledge and gauge learners' progress throughout the lesson. In a few cases, teachers use questioning particularly skilfully to guide learners to think beyond the task, solve problems and develop confidence. However, across the college, only a few teachers use questioning as a teaching tool effectively.

Most teachers provide learners with valuable verbal and written feedback. This is effective in setting high expectations for learners and helping learners understand what they need to do to improve. Most learning and technical support assistants work alongside teachers to support learning well.

The college offers a comprehensive range of courses from entry level through to higher education. AS and A level provision is offered at the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone at Ebbw Vale and at the Crosskeys campus, with a total of 34 A level subjects available.

A recent change in policy for A level provision means that learners' AS and A level choices, alongside the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification, are now more appropriately matched to their individual needs and abilities.

The planning process is thorough, flexible and purposeful. It takes into account regional skills priorities, feedback from local employers, and allows sensible variation in curriculum offer between campuses. Learners have suitable progression routes into further and higher education, employment and training.

Most learners have access to work-related education through their vocational programmes or through their Welsh Baccalaureate studies. For example, public service learners benefit from close links with the police who involve the learners in simulated serious incident investigations. Most land-based learners take part in work experience, such as gaining first-hand experience of lambing to improve their employment prospects.

The college holds useful employer forums that meet termly and help inform curriculum planning. For example, recent changes in focus from ICT to computing provision have come about as a result of employers' feedback.

The college encourages a few learners across a wide range of vocational areas to enter skills competitions at all levels. The college has a strong commitment to developing the skills of its learners. In particular, provision for the Welsh Baccalaureate at level 3, with its skills challenges, is extensive. At level 1 and level 2, learners take a range of units that provide similar experiences to the skills challenges. These provide learners at all levels with useful opportunities to develop a range of skills.

The college has clear and coherent pathways for learners who have not attained a GCSE grade C or above in mathematics or English to develop their skills and resit their GCSE exams. In timetabled classes for Essential Skills Wales (ESW) qualifications and GCSE mathematics and English resits, most teachers plan lessons which are appropriately paced and include a range of activities which engage learners. In these lessons, most teachers provide feedback that gives learners a clear sense of their current performance and what they need to do to improve.

Nearly all learners across the college complete the Wales essential skills toolkit initial and diagnostic assessment for literacy and numeracy. However, particularly for learners at level 3 and those who are not taking GCSE resit classes, teachers do not set clear enough targets for learners to know what they need to do improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Through their vocational programmes, opportunities for learners to develop their digital literacy skills, through for example online collaborative activities, are underdeveloped.

Very few of the college's learners or staff are Welsh speakers. A very few courses take place through the medium of Welsh. A few dedicated staff and learners provide worthwhile opportunities for learners to engage in social activities such as attending the Urdd Eisteddfod or the Welsh language 'buddies' scheme.

Recent developments to increase opportunities for learners in priority areas to develop their Welsh language skills, and to improve teachers' Welsh language skills are beginning to have an impact. However, on the whole, there are few opportunities for learners to enhance or develop their Welsh language skills.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The college has strong well-established arrangements with Careers Wales and local schools to help learners understand the range of provision that the college offers.

Staff plan well for the transition of learners with additional learning needs from school to college. During admission and induction, staff pay close attention to identifying learners' individual support needs and communicate these to all appropriate staff effectively.

Most heads of school use helpful, internally-designed tracking systems to monitor learners' performance and progress and inform discussion with course leaders and tutors. However, the college's overall tracking system is currently not operationally effective. This contributes to variations in the approach to and quality of target setting for learners.

Teachers and managers regularly review the performance of those learners who receive learning support. They monitor the progress of individual learners well and plan any additional support they may need.

Learning support assistants provide effective and well targeted in-class support to learners with additional learning needs. Provision for learning support takes account of local variations in need and demography. For example, at the Newport campus there is effective support in place for learners who cannot speak English or Welsh.

The college has beneficial links with local provision for learners with autism spectrum disorders, and supports these learners well to progress into post-16 education.

The college identifies and supports vulnerable learners well through effective use of external project funding. In this way, staff provide helpful support for the eight per cent of learners who are most at risk of disengaging from education.

The college gives valuable practical help to enable learners to overcome a range of barriers, including poverty. For example, it provides those learners who need them with toiletries or emergency lunch tickets. Staff use behaviour assessments and action plans well to help learners develop appropriate behaviours, recognise their achievements and build self-esteem.

Staff monitor closely the attendance of extremely vulnerable learners, for example those who have been trafficked. Many personal tutors make appropriate contact with absent learners to intervene quickly and help learners to sustain their learning. However, the robustness and consistency of overall attendance tracking and follow-up vary too much between tutors.

The college has close links with higher education institutions that enable learners to extend their awareness of progression opportunities.

The college manages safeguarding matters appropriately and gives no cause for concern. All staff undertake training to improve their awareness of radicalisation and extremism. Teachers discuss these topics with learners during induction and within tutorial sessions. While a few learners improve their awareness of these topics through their course content, most other learners' understanding of radicalisation is underdeveloped. The college has not yet developed strategies to evaluate the impact of the teaching and training that it delivers in relation to the Prevent agenda.

Leadership and management: Good

The principal provides clear direction and strategic leadership to the college and is supported well by the senior management team. The principal, senior managers and the governing body have introduced a new vision and mission for the college, which is focused clearly on delivering excellence. This vision is supported by a new strategic plan and simplified set of values to develop the culture, values and behaviours of staff throughout the college. The vision and mission are shared well by senior and middle managers across the college.

All managers meet termly as part of 'One United Management Team', which provides valuable opportunities for managers at all levels, including functional managers to problem solve, share ideas and contribute to strategic development of the college. These meetings are beginning to have a positive impact on developing values, behaviours and team work.

Senior managers have recently developed strategies and training programmes to develop the skills of middle leaders, enabling them to undertake their roles more effectively and consistently. This training has been particularly helpful in developing their competence and skills when undertaking staff performance management. Currently, middle managers are continuing to develop their skills, but there remains too much variability in their effectiveness.

Communication across the college is strong, with staff at all levels receiving regular and useful updates and information on a wide range of college matters.

The governing body fulfils its duty of challenge and support appropriately. It usefully reviews the college's progress against its key aims and objectives.

The college has appropriate processes in place to monitor learner performance and outcomes. College managers regularly scrutinise data and use departmental monitoring reports beneficially to inform improvement planning across subject areas and campuses.

The college has appropriate processes for self-evaluation. College validation panels and external reviews are used well to strengthen self-evaluation processes. Many departmental self-assessment reports demonstrate a sound understanding of strengths and areas for development. However, a few lack clear evaluation and reach an inaccurate judgement of the departments' work. Departmental quality development plans set useful targets for improvement.

The college understands its strengths and areas for development well. However, the college self-assessment report does not draw on first-hand evidence from departmental reports well enough to inform its judgements. The college quality development plan is detailed and used well by leaders to set and monitor actions for improvement.

The college has a comprehensive range of mechanisms to support the professional development of teachers and leaders. These include valuable college-wide development activities as well as personalised coaching and support from the college's team of teaching and learning mentors. Leaders evaluate the impact of their staff development work appropriately. The college also facilitates and secures funding for a few teachers to engage with industrial professional training opportunities. These teachers undertake beneficial return-to-industry work placements to refresh their specialist vocational knowledge and skills.

Leaders prioritise and manage resources effectively, including a number of key strategic projects, such as renovating the Usk campus and the wider college's technology infrastructure. The college has robust business planning and budget monitoring processes. The college responds well to unexpected contingencies.

The college estate contains accommodation and resources of a high standard and the college has an ambitious estate plan, which is reviewed quarterly. The plan takes appropriate account of the college's strategic planning and the plans of local authorities and key partners.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

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