

A report on the work based learning provision of

B-WBL at Pembrokeshire College

**Merlins Bridge
Haverfordwest
SA61 1SZ**

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by

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

About B-WBL at Pembrokeshire College

B-wbl is a long-established provider of apprenticeships in Wales and has a Welsh Government contract with the value of £21m. The consortium delivers apprenticeships at foundation apprenticeship, apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship levels to approximately 4500 learners across a range of learning areas including:

- Health, public services and care
- Agriculture, horticulture and animal care
- Engineering and manufacturing technologies
- Construction, planning and the built environment
- Information and communication technology
- Leisure, travel and tourism
- Education and training
- Business, administration and law
- Retailing and customer service
- Hair and beauty
- Catering and hospitality

The provider works with the following delivery partners:

- Pembrokeshire College
- Coleg Sir Gar / Coleg Ceredigion
- Coleg Gwent
- Bridgend College
- TSW Training
- PRP Training
- Cymru Care Training
- HB Training
- Cwmbran Centre for Young People
- Coleg QS (run down contract)

Summary

Most learners make strong progress towards completing their apprenticeships. Most learners are highly motivated and passionate about their roles and engage positively with their apprenticeship programmes. They value their learning experiences and demonstrate a strong commitment to developing their skills. They develop a wide range of practical skills that they routinely use and further develop in their workplaces. Learners become valued members of their employer's workforce contributing daily to a wide range of activities. Most learners develop strong theory knowledge and apply theory to practice particularly well. Learners' written work is of a good standard and learners routinely develop their literacy and numeracy skills throughout their apprenticeship. When responding to questions or engaging with employers and clients most learners give clear and confident responses using the correct technical terms and phrases. Across apprenticeship levels learners achieve their apprenticeships at rates above national comparators. Around a quarter of learners complete their frameworks later than expected.

Across the consortium, most teachers, trainers and assessors have high expectations of their learners. They give learners strong levels of support and guidance throughout the programme. They structure on and off-the-job sessions well and use a range of strategies to ensure learners progress. They adapt their delivery style well to meet the individual needs of learners, including those with an additional learning need, although in a few sessions activities are too assessor led. Most teachers, trainers and assessors use questioning well to test knowledge and understanding, although in a few cases questioning lacks depth and challenge. Teachers, trainers and assessors generally give learners strong verbal and written feedback. However, in a few cases feedback is not detailed enough and does not give learners clear guidance regarding how they can improve their performance. Teachers, trainers and assessors have a clear focus on supporting learners to continually improve their literacy and numeracy skills during their apprenticeship.

The consortium has a strong commitment to supporting the well-being of its learners. They use a wide range of resources and support materials to support the individual needs of learners well. The consortium uses its electronic system well to effectively track learner progress and achievement, including those learners with additional learning needs. Teachers, trainers and assessors provide well-tailored support, for learners with additional learning needs.

Senior leaders across the consortium have been highly effective in setting a clear strategic direction that supports the work of all partners. The consortium works in a culture of collaboration, transparency, openness and trust. The particularly effective partnership working demonstrated by the consortium has resulted in strong learner outcomes and a

clear ambition of achieving excellence. The consortium's quality improvement processes are robust, comprehensive and detailed. They have a sharp focus on learner progress and outcomes and clearly identify trends in performance. Partner underperformance is identified early with a range of effective support strategies being used to underpin improvement. The consortium's leaders engage effectively with local, regional, and national bodies to ensure that apprenticeships are delivered to meet the needs of employers. Professional learning is comprehensive and wide ranging and effectively shared across the consortium.

Recommendations

R1. Further reduce learner late completion rates

What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection. Estyn will invite the provider to prepare case studies on its work in relation to its learner well-being financial fund, consortium/partnership working and the consistent high expectations of learners for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Learning

Across the consortium most learners make strong progress in their apprenticeship. Many learners are aware of their progress and actively engage in negotiating assessment targets with their assessors and teachers. The majority of learners routinely take ownership for their learning, especially those on level three and higher level programmes. Most learners demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They conduct themselves professionally both on and off-the-job and have a strong rapport with assessors, teachers and peers.

Most learners are passionate and enthusiastic about their roles. They take pride in their work and complete most tasks to a high standard. Many learners demonstrate strong communication skills and collaborate effectively when interacting with their assessors, teachers, employers and clients. For example, a level 3 brickwork apprentice co-ordinated and finalised groundwork designs to a high specification. This learner effectively demonstrated their ability to negotiate the client's needs with the building standards required to make the project a success.

During their apprenticeships, most learners develop and demonstrate strong practical skills and theory knowledge that enables them to become valued members of their employer's staff, contributing effectively to their businesses. A few learners develop higher level practical skills and theory knowledge. As a result, they undertake more complex practical tasks in their workplaces and complete theory work to a higher standard. Many learners are ambitious and seek progression both within their apprenticeship and in the workplace. They are confident and demonstrate sound problem-solving capabilities when working independently and as part of a group. For example, level two and three agriculture learners demonstrate effective communication skills to weigh and take the temperature of calves with each learner rotating the role of catching, weighing, taking readings and recording the results on a data sheet.

In off-the-job sessions, progress review meetings and when undertaking practical tasks, most learners demonstrate recall of previous learning well, explaining complex processes using appropriate terminology. They confidently respond to questions from their teachers, trainers and assessors, they are reflective and use good speaking and listening skills. Learners clearly link theory to practical workplace experiences. For example, an engineering learner in a manufacturing workplace developed and demonstrated particularly high levels of technical understanding and knowledge when using complex and fine tolerance computer-aided measuring equipment.

Learners take part in skills competitions across a variety of disciplines, with strong outcomes achieved. This reflects the high standards promoted across the consortium and supports learners to develop confidence and ambition.

Learners complete initial assessments through the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST), and most complete regular tasks to upskill their literacy, numeracy and digital skills even when they have completed their qualifications or have proxies. Many learners develop their literacy and numeracy skills well throughout the programme. Written work is well presented and generally of a good standard containing minimal error. For example, plumbing level 3 learners completed a complex numeracy task requiring a wide range of engineering calculations to be completed. Where appropriate learners undertake essential skills qualifications at a high level than required.

Most learners across the consortium develop strong digital skills, navigating confidently through their e-portfolios to upload work, review progress and access support materials. Many learners are competent when accessing and producing written work on digital platforms and using specialist software.

Across the consortium, learners complete Prentis-iaith at the start of their programme. A few fluent Welsh-speaking learners choose to undertake elements of their programme through the Welsh language, completing written assessments and engaging in verbal discussions with assessors and teachers. Where appropriate fluent Welsh-speaking learners support less confident learners by developing ideas and resources to improve their use of Welsh.

At foundation apprenticeship and apprenticeship level, framework attainment rates have further improved and in 2023/2024 are above sector averages. In 2023/2024 higher apprenticeship framework attainment rates improved and remain above sector averages. Many learners with an identified additional learning need make sound progress towards completing their apprenticeships. Learners perform particularly well in engineering, management and agriculture. Over the previous three years the consortium has improved its learner attainment rates across all learning areas. Across the consortium around a quarter of learners complete their frameworks later than their expected completion date.

Well-being, support and guidance

The consortium has an effective health and well-being strategy that sets out a clear commitment to improving the well-being of learners and staff. They have established a shared expectation of this commitment and created a positive culture that supports learners' resilience and well-being. The strategy is monitored effectively through regular quality audits with any identified actions being followed up with partners. Detailed action logs are used well to monitor and record progress against actions.

All learners receive a comprehensive induction programme, which helps them to settle into their programme and provides clear information and guidance on the availability of support.

The consortium has robust initial assessment processes and makes good use of a person-centred questionnaire to identify additional support needs at the start of a learner's apprenticeship. Outcomes from initial assessment are used effectively to plan appropriate support. Many teachers, trainers and assessors monitor learners' progress closely to identify any further barriers to learning to plan and provide appropriate referral and support. For example, an essential skills tutor, supporting a learner with English as a second language to complete an application of number qualification, identified a possible barrier to learning and referred the learner for dyslexia screening. The learner has subsequently been provided with the appropriate access to assessment arrangements to reduce any disadvantage.

Most teachers, trainers and assessors provide learners with sound pastoral and personal support to help learners get the best out of their learning programme. Relationships between learners, teachers, trainers, assessors and employers are positive, creating a culture where learners are confident to raise concerns. There is a strong emphasis on learner well-being, with assessors acting as trusted contacts, particularly during workplace visits. The consortium uses its electronic system well to effectively track learners' progress and achievement, including those learners with additional learning needs. Communication tools, including infographics and newsletters, are used well to promote well-being awareness and share outcomes with partners across the consortium.

Learners have access to a wide range of well-being resources available on the consortium's online platform. These resources include useful information relating to mental health, safeguarding and radicalisation. Many learners make good use of this information. A helpful online resource, available to learners 24/7, provides additional well-being support for those who wish to explore issues anonymously.

The consortium has a well-established financial well-being fund which is used effectively to support learners facing hardship challenges. For example, an apprentice who was reliant on using a mobile phone to complete work, secured financial funding to purchase a laptop. As a result, the learner has been able to develop their digital skills further and has since successfully progressed onto a higher level of learning.

The consortium has a well-established equality, well-being and support committee that receives detailed reports relating to participation rates and learner outcomes from under-represented groups. It uses this information well to share practice to secure improvement, for example introducing anti-racism training and the development of additional resources

to support learners who are dyslexic, autistic or have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

The consortium uses a comprehensive range of methods to seek the views of learners, including learner forums and learner surveys. They have achieved high response rates and levels of satisfaction, with partners quick to respond to any issues raised.

All partners have suitable policies and procedures for checking the safe recruitment of staff. A central record of Disclosure and Barring Service and Education Workforce Council registrations is managed by the consortium management team who monitor this information during regular quality checks. The consortium ensures that all designated safeguarding leads undertake appropriate training, and all staff undertake bi-annual safeguarding and Prevent training. The consortium's designated safeguarding person and additional learning needs and inclusion lead provide valuable support, advice and guidance to the consortium partners that secures the health, safety and well-being of learners.

The consortium maintains a comprehensive central record of staff training and monitors the attendance of mandatory training well through detailed quality checks. A well-attended consortium annual professional learning conference provides valuable opportunities for staff to receive training on key developments. This has recently included updates on additional learning needs, anti-racism, trauma-informed practice, and emerging themes identified through the provider's quality review audits.

Across the consortium, learners develop a sound understanding of health and safety, safeguarding, extremism and radicalisation. Almost all learners feel safe and know how to raise concerns with the provider and their employers.

Overall, the consortium's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Teaching, training, assessment and learning experiences

The consortium offers a broad and well-structured range of apprenticeship programmes across a large geographical area, spanning from foundation to higher levels. The programme offer covers a wide variety of sectors with clear routes for learner progression and are aligned closely with regional and national skills priorities.

The consortium works collaboratively with a broad range of employers, from major international and national companies to small and medium-sized enterprises, ensuring that training is relevant and responsive to the needs of industries. Across the consortium, partners offer access to high-quality facilities including classrooms and specialist workshops.

Most teachers, trainers and assessors demonstrate strong subject knowledge and vocational experience to contextualise learning effectively. They draw on their industry backgrounds to make content relevant and accessible. In the best cases, teachers create additional learning opportunities for learners. For example, a plumbing teacher seamlessly develops learners' numeracy skills within a session by asking learners to diagnose and cost the repair of three reported boiler faults and in electrical installation a teacher significantly enhanced learning by integrating the industry recognised 18th Edition Electrical Installation Regulations into the provision. Approaches like these help learners make sense of complex content through realistic, sector-appropriate examples.

Most teachers, trainers and assessors plan and structure sessions well, setting clear objectives and building tasks progressively from prior knowledge. For instance, in a childcare session, the assessor revisits safeguarding and introduces increasingly complex scenarios as the session progresses. Sessions are frequently designed to develop knowledge incrementally while ensuring appropriate challenge at each stage. Many teachers, trainers and assessors have high expectations of their learners and routinely challenge them to produce practical and written work of a higher standard.

Many teachers, trainers and assessors adapt their delivery to meet individual needs, including learning preferences and levels of experience. For example, in a leadership and management session the assessor varies questions according to the learner's job role, encouraging more reflective and context specific responses. In association of accounting technician programmes the teacher seamlessly adapts her delivery for learners with additional learning needs by rephrasing verbal instructions to be more accessible. A more able learner on a level two maintenance operations programme benefits from extension activities by undertaking level three tasks to support their progression. In a few sessions, however, delivery remains overly assessor-led, limiting learner participation and opportunities for deeper thinking.

Most teachers, trainers and assessors use questioning effectively to check understanding and extend learning. They pose open and targeted questions that prompt discussion and help clarify complex ideas. For example, in a groundworks session, the teacher checks learners' understanding of site protocols and extends thinking around sustainability. However, in a very few cases, questioning lacks depth, which reduces its potential to challenge learners or stimulate critical thinking.

Target-setting and feedback, both verbal and recorded, is generally a strong feature of delivery. Most teachers, trainers and assessors provide clear, supportive feedback that encourages reflection and improvement, and many set challenging targets. In digital marketing, for instance, the assessor provides precise feedback to help a learner interpret analytics and revise strategy. In a management session, a level five learner explains how their confidence has grown in managing difficult interpersonal situations at a large

industrial employer as a result of targeted mentoring and coaching units. However, in a very few cases, feedback is generic and lacks developmental clarity and identification of next steps, impacting on learners' ability to make meaningful progress. Although employer involvement in reviews is often helpful, it is inconsistent, and where this is the case, it limits opportunities for collaborative checking of progress and workplace relevance.

Most teachers, trainers and assessors integrate the development of broader skills and make effective use of WEST resources within vocational delivery. In construction, teachers use site planning to develop learners' numeracy skills such as measurement and scale, while in administration, an assessor supports a learner to produce a professional report with a focus on written communication. Many teachers, trainers and assessors promote Welsh language use. For example, teachers create sector-specific bilingual signage in partnership with Criw Cymraeg, a learner group. Prevent is naturally and meaningfully embedded into learning including in a digital literacy session where learners discuss the risks of radicalisation online as part of their safeguarding education.

Nearly all teachers, trainers and assessors establish positive, professional relationships with learners, that fosters learning and progress. These supported relationships underpin and promote increased learner participation and confidence. This is strengthened by delivery staff accessing shared learning resource platforms, which enhances collaboration and results in a more cohesive teaching and learning experience.

Leadership and management

B-wbl is a long-established consortium of ten partners who work effectively in collaboration to deliver their apprenticeship contract. The consortium is highly effective in setting a clear strategic direction based on transparency, openness, trust and quality. The consortium has established a clear mission, vision and strategy that partners understand and contribute fully to. The strong partnership working demonstrated by the consortium has resulted in a shared ethos of continual improvement and a clear vision of achieving excellence.

Managers across the consortium have clearly defined roles and responsibilities with a strong focus on effective collaborative working. The consortium's executive board is led effectively by the principal of Pembrokeshire College and includes the chief executive officers of all partners. Other key groups include the performance board and quality management committee that consists of senior leaders and managers from consortium partners. These groups have clear responsibility for providing scrutiny for partners, with a sharp focus on key improvement priorities.

Communication across partners is particularly strong with regular meetings to share a wide range of information. Communication is cohesive and beneficial to partners and staff across all levels of the consortium.

The provider has developed and uses comprehensive and robust quality assurance processes that supports its culture of continuous improvement well. As a result, quality assurance across most of the consortium is strong. The consortium routinely uses a comprehensive range of quality probes to interrogate data to enable it to evaluate performance. Useful performance indicators are agreed across the consortium annually and focus on compliance, outcomes, learner satisfaction and improving opportunities for underrepresented groups and Welsh language. The consortium uses a detailed tracking system to identify trends in performance across the consortium. As a result, they identify any decline in performance across the consortium early and put in place interventions and support. Intervention actions include additional visits from management team members that provide focused support. For example, a partner with a substantial contract has been effectively supported by the consortium to improve learner outcomes. This support will continue until the partner's quality assurance procedures are developed and used consistently to support sustained improvement.

Annual self-evaluation is robust and includes all partners, using a wide range of first-hand evidence to inform judgements. All partners produce their own self-evaluations that are moderated by the consortium's quality management committee and endorsed by the executive board after scrutiny. This comprehensive and robust procedure enables partners to have a detailed understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement. Consortium self-evaluation is comprehensive and clearly identifies progress against key performance indicator targets, strengths and areas for improvement. The provider's quality improvement plan contains clear and suitable targets for improvement in the consortium's work. Quality improvement across the consortium has a sharp focus on learner experiences and outcomes.

The consortium engages effectively with local, regional and national bodies to ensure that apprenticeship provision appropriately reflects priorities at these levels. They are represented at the regional skills partnership and work well with employer representative groups to deliver apprenticeships to meet need.

For example, the consortium is delivering specialist clinical health programmes for the National Health Service. The consortium maintains valuable relationships with a wide range of external organisations, including awarding bodies and employer forums. The consortium works effectively with a wide range of employers. These employers range from large multi-national companies, national organisations, small to medium and micro business in a wide range of learning areas. Nearly all partners have beneficial employer

engagement strategies that set clear expectations for employers regarding the support they need to give learners.

As part of their strategy to promote high standards and continuous improvement, leaders across the consortium foster a robust culture of professional learning, underpinned by collaboration, strategic planning, and responsiveness to learner needs and sector developments. Teachers and assessors benefit from a well-structured programme of professional learning, including training on safeguarding, radicalisation and extremism, additional learning needs, digital delivery, and learner well-being.

Professional learning is collaborative, with partners contributing to annual practitioner conferences and themed events such as workshops on artificial intelligence and embedding anti-racism approaches. The cross-consortium approach has facilitated developments such as bilingual resources, effective questioning techniques used by staff and strategies to support learners who do not have English as a first language. Activities such as practice-sharing sessions and structured peer reviews have helped to identify and disseminate effective practice across the consortium. In the best cases, teachers and assessors at learning area level engage independently to share idea and improve their practice.

The consortium evaluates the impact of professional learning well through surveys, quality reviews, and observations. This beneficial data feeds into a detailed annual professional learning plan, ensuring that professional learning remains responsive and impactful. The inclusive and responsive approach to professional learning ensures that professional and personal development positively impacts both teaching practice and learner progress.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the learner and employer questionnaires and consider the views of teachers, trainers and assessors through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the principal/chief executive, governors (where appropriate), senior and middle managers and individual teachers, trainers and assessors to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- meet learners to discuss their work, to listen to them and to gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of sessions, including off-the-job, theory and practical training sessions
- visit a broad range of learners in their workplaces to observe their workplace skills, observe assessments, review their theory work and meet their employers
- look closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- consider the provider's quality improvement plan and looked at evidence to show how well the provider had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a wide range of provider documents, including information on learner assessment, tracking and progress, records of meetings of managers and staff, meeting with sub-contractors and key partners and meetings with employers, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

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

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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