



*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

## **Quality and standards in education and training in Wales**

**A report on the quality of  
further education**

**in**

**Neath Port Talbot College**

**January/February 2008**

**by**

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



**BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL  
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE**



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- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community-based learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ LAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies;
- ▲ offender learning; and
- ▲ the education, guidance and training elements of The Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

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- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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## Introduction

Neath Port Talbot College was inspected as part of a six-year 2004-2010 national programme of inspections of all post-16 providers in Wales. The purpose of the programme is to identify good features and shortcomings in order that the college may improve the quality of education and training offered and raise the standards achieved by learners. Inspection is also designed to give learners more information about the quality of providers of further education.

All inspections conducted under the arrangements apply the following principles:

- the use of a common framework which is common to all sectors of education and training in Wales;
- an emphasis on the college's evaluation of its work;
- the involvement of a provider nominee who worked with the inspection team; and
- the inspection of a sample of provision.

The inspection took place from 28 January 2008 to 7 February 2008. A team led by Her Majesty's Inspectors from Estyn, a statutory body independent of, but funded by, the Welsh Assembly Government, undertook the inspection. The team included peer assessors released from other further education providers in Wales.

The team was required to report on standards achieved by learners, the quality of education and training provided, the quality of leadership and management and to judge if the college provides value for money.

### Grade descriptions

The five-point scale used to represent all inspection judgements in this report is as follows:

<b>Grade 1</b>	good with outstanding features
<b>Grade 2</b>	good features and no important shortcomings
<b>Grade 3</b>	good features outweigh shortcomings
<b>Grade 4</b>	some good features, but shortcomings in important areas
<b>Grade 5</b>	many important shortcomings

The Learning and Skills Act 2000 requires the college to prepare a written statement of the action that they propose to take to address the recommendations in the inspection report and the timescales for completing the proposed actions.



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## Context

### The nature of the provider

- 1 The borough of Neath Port Talbot has a population of 134,500. There are three main towns, Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe. The borough is ranked fourth highest on the Wales Index of multiple deprivation and a high percentage of wards are classified as amongst the most deprived in Wales. About 20% of the population of the borough can speak Welsh.
- 2 Neath Port Talbot College was established in 1999 as a result of a merger between Neath and Afan colleges. The college is tertiary and provides the main centre for post-16 education and training in the Neath Port Talbot borough. There are two 11-18 schools in Neath Port Talbot, a Welsh medium school at Ystalyfera and a Roman Catholic school in Port Talbot. Nine schools provide 11-16 education. Pupils at all secondary schools in the borough attain very well at key stage 4.
- 3 The college is the second largest in Wales and its annual turnover is more than £27 million. In addition to its main campuses at Neath and Afan in Port Talbot, it has adult and community learning centres in Pontardawe and Neath town centre, centres for construction training at Llansamlet and Caerau in Maesteg, a sports academy at Llandarcy and a professional development centre at Twyn-yr-Hydd in Margam Park. The college also uses more than 70 centres to deliver lifelong learning in the community. More than 15,500 learners enrol at the college each year and 3,500 of these study full-time. About half the full-time learners follow courses that lead mainly to A level qualifications. The college employs more than 685 staff.
- 4 The college provides courses in most areas of learning. It has a contract for more than £1.4 million to deliver work-based learning through Pathways Training, the section of the college where government training programmes are located.
- 5 The college plays a leading role in the local 14-19 Learning Network as well as the network for adult community-based learning.
- 6 The college's vision is to be:
  - a grade 1/first class college;
  - a lead player in the Neath Port Talbot Learning Partnership;
  - a recognised centre of excellence for Construction, Care and Sport;
  - a genuine FE/HE institution;
  - an e-learning college; and
  - a cash-rich college.

## Summary

- 7 The profile of inspection grades awarded to the college is very good overall. All the grades awarded for Key Questions 1 to 7 have improved or remained at the same high level since the college was last inspected in 2002. All learning areas inspected are at least good. Standards in three of the learning areas are good with outstanding features. Learners make good progress compared with their starting points on entry to the college. The college provides an outstanding range of courses, particularly for full-time learners. Learners receive good support and guidance. The systems for improving standards and quality work are very effective. The college is very well managed and provides good value for money.

### Table of grades awarded

- 8 The inspection team judged the college's work as follows:

Key Question	Inspection grade
1 How well do learners achieve?	2
2 How effective are teaching, training and assessment?	2
3 How well do the learning experiences meet the needs and interests of learners and the wider community?	1
4 How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2
5 How effective are leadership and strategic management?	1
6 How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?	1
7 How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?	2

- 9 The standards achieved in each of the learning areas inspected are as follows:

Inspection area	Grade
02 Science and mathematics	2
06 Information and communications technology (ICT)	2
7b Hair and beauty	1
10 History, philosophy and theology	2
11 Social sciences	2
12b Languages, literature and culture	2
14 Independent living skills	1
15 Business, administration and law	1



## **Standards**

- 10 Learners achieve very good standards in three of the eight learning areas inspected and good standards in the other five learning areas. The rates at which learners complete and attain qualifications are good in all areas. Most learners on A level courses attain grades which are close to or higher than those predicted from their previous attainment in GCSE examinations.
- 11 Most learners start their college courses after attaining very good grades at GCSE. As a consequence, achieving grades at A level which are close to or above their predicated grades is particularly challenging. The college meets this challenge well and learners' overall value-added score has improved each year over the past five years. The rates at which learners complete qualifications are mostly above those in other colleges in Wales.
- 12 Learners studying for the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification do well. The attainment rate of learners on the Welsh Baccalaureate at advanced level is amongst the best in Wales.
- 13 The majority of learners are very well motivated. They attend regularly and punctually and work well in classes. Most learners make good progress in their studies in all areas. However, learners on a few A level courses do not develop good enough independent learning skills.

## **The quality of education and training**

- 14 Overall, teaching and assessment are good. Most teachers use a wide range of teaching approaches to engage learners' interest. They plan their lessons well and maintain learners' interest in nearly all classes. In most cases, teachers make good use of information and communications technology. In a very few cases, they do not organise lessons with enough variety to engage learners of different abilities or with differing learning styles. In these cases, particularly in a small number of A level subjects, the lessons are too teacher led.
- 15 Generally, teachers set and mark work regularly and effectively. Most teachers mark written work carefully and give learners clear guidance on what they need to do to improve the quality of their work and to achieve higher grades. However, in a few cases, teachers do not give learners enough constructive, formative feedback on their written work.
- 16 The college provides a wide range of full-time and part-time courses in all learning areas. Learners have excellent opportunities to progress from entry level to higher education, work-based learning and skilled employment. The college has an excellent partnership with all the secondary schools in the borough to meet the needs of the 14-19 Learning Network. Through the partnership, it provides an extensive range of options for school pupils. The college is fully committed to extending Welsh culture and is making good progress in extending its bilingual provision.
- 17 The college has a strong ethos of respect for all and is committed to the promotion of equality and diversity. Managers plan and manage support for learners well and managers and staff in the various learner support teams work together well. College

staff work closely with partner secondary schools to help learners to make informed decisions about their future education and training, and to ease their transition from school to college life.

### **The quality of leadership and management**

- 18 The focus of the college is on improving the experience of learners and the mission of the college sets clear standards and expectations for all staff. The principal and senior management team provide strong and effective leadership. Since the appointment of the current principal in 2004, the college has been transformed. The restructuring of management roles and responsibilities, completed successfully within a tight time frame, has improved the viability of the college and enabled it to invest strongly in all its resources. However, the performance management system is not always systematically applied to all staff and communication with staff in some of the smaller college sites is not always effective.
- 19 The college has very effective systems and processes for evaluating and improving quality and standards. The systems have had an increasing impact over the last three years. They have led to more consistency in the application of quality systems and processes across the college, and a greater degree of staff accountability than in the past. However, the systems do not give enough attention to the quality of learners' outcomes on AS courses.
- 20 Overall, staff are well qualified and experienced. The college actively promotes the continuous professional development of all staff through its extensive staff development programme. However, managers do not systematically evaluate the impact of the staff training on the effectiveness of teaching. The standard of accommodation is good overall with high-quality accommodation on a few of its sites. The college has recently invested heavily in information technology to aid teaching and learning, and most areas are well equipped with learning resources. Overall, the college provides good value for money.

## Recommendations

- 21 In order to improve, the staff and governing body need to:
- R1 help learners to develop more independent learning skills, particularly on A level courses;
  - R2 develop the role of senior and principal lecturers to focus more on improving teaching and assessment practices;
  - R3 focus more on the completion and attainment rates on AS courses in course reviews and self-assessment;
  - R4 improve the effectiveness of communication across all the college's sites;
  - R5 make sure that performance management procedures are applied consistently;  
and
  - R6 measure the impact of the staff development programme on teaching and assessment practices.

## Standards

### Key Question 1: How well do learners achieve?

#### Grade 2: Good with no important shortcomings

- 22 Overall, learners achieve very good standards in three of the eight learning areas inspected, and good standards in the other five areas. The findings of the inspection team are very close to those of the college in its self-evaluation report. The inspection grades awarded for standards achieved by learners in seven of the eight areas are the same as those in the self-evaluation report but the inspection grade is one grade lower in the eighth area.
- 23 In the learning areas inspected, the rates at which learners gain qualifications are good or very good. In the 29 A level subjects inspected, the rates at which learners attain qualifications overall are very good and have improved over the last five years. Most learners start their college courses after attaining very good grades at GCSE. Learners do slightly better overall than would have been predicted from their attainments at GCSE. The rates at which learners complete courses are good in most areas.

Learners' standards of achievement				
Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
23%	64%	12%	1%	0%

- 24 The standards achieved in each of the learning areas inspected are as follows:

Inspection area	Inspection grade
02 Science and mathematics	2
06 Information and communications technology	2
7b Hair and beauty	1
10 History, philosophy and theology	2
11 Social sciences	2
12b Languages, literature and culture	2
14 Independent living skills	1
15 Business, administration and law	1

- 25 Many learners in the areas inspected attain very good results on vocational and academic courses. The rates at which learners on level 3 courses progress to higher education are high. Many learners who start on level 1 and 2 courses make good progress to higher level courses. Independent living skills learners progress on to mainstream vocational courses at a very high rate.

- 26 Learners develop very good practical skills in vocational areas and in A level science subjects. In vocational areas, learners develop their key skills very well and gain qualifications at appropriate levels to their main qualifications for both the core and wider key skills. Learners following the Welsh Bacculaureate at foundation, intermediate and advanced level attain key skills at high rates. However, learners on most AS courses do not have good enough opportunities to gain key skills at level 3.
- 27 The attainment rates of learners doing the Welsh Bacculaureate are excellent. In 2007, all the learners doing the foundation level Welsh Bacculaureate gained the full award. The rates at which learners gained the advanced level Welsh Bacculaureate were well above the rates in other schools and colleges in Wales.
- 28 Overall, most learners complete their courses at a good rate. Overall, attainment rates on A level courses are consistently high in all subjects, and a good proportion gain the higher grades. Most learners achieve A level grades that are slightly above predictions based on their previous performance at GCSE. Most A level learners display good standards in their oral and written work and make good use of information and communications technology to present their work. Learners are generally making good progress with their studies. They get a lot done in their classes and complete set tasks well. They are well aware of their target grades and what they need to do to achieve them. However, learners on a few A level courses do not develop good enough independent learning skills.
- 29 Nearly all learners are well motivated, attentive and enthusiastic. Learners' attendance and punctuality on most courses are good. Learners behave well in all parts of the college.

## The quality of education and training

### Key Question 2: How effective are teaching, training and assessment?

#### Grade 2: Good with no important shortcomings

- 30 The findings of the inspection team were a very close match to the lesson grades awarded by the college in its internal inspection observations and its self-evaluation report. Most of the lessons observed during the inspection were judged to be good or outstanding.

The quality of teaching in the learning areas inspected				
Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
23%	57%	19%	1%	0%

- 31 Overall, teachers plan courses and lessons well. Most teachers use a suitably wide variety of teaching approaches to engage learners' interest. They use target setting well to inform learners of expected performance and to challenge them to succeed.
- 32 In hair and beauty, and business, teachers use their industrial and commercial experience very well in teaching sessions to promote learners' ability to relate theory and practice. They communicate their high expectations to learners and set challenging targets for improvement. Teachers use the target language consistently in modern foreign language lessons and in Welsh.
- 33 In a very few cases, teachers do not organise lessons with enough variety to engage learners of different abilities or with differing learning styles. In these cases, particularly in a small number of A level subjects, the lessons are too teacher led and teachers make too much use of photocopied notes. In these cases, learners are not encouraged to do enough research outside the classroom. Most teachers use ICT and other classroom resources well to successfully engage learners, but too few use the full potential of the equipment available in the college.
- 34 Teachers share their knowledge of examination requirements well with learners. All teachers have good subject knowledge and carefully plan lessons to ensure good progression from previous work. Most teachers use questioning skilfully to assess learners' understanding and promote analysis and evaluation. However, a few do not direct questions enough at individuals to ensure that they all participate in discussion, and to test their understanding.
- 35 Generally, teachers set and mark work regularly and effectively. They use assignments that meet the needs of learners and awarding bodies. They plan assessments well and explain the purpose clearly to learners. Most teachers mark written work carefully and give learners clear guidance on what they need to do to improve the quality of their work and to achieve higher grades. However, in a few cases, teachers do not give learners enough constructive, formative feedback on their written work.

### **Key Question 3: How well do the learning experiences meet the needs and interests of learners and the wider community?**

#### **Grade 1: Good with outstanding features**

- 36 The college offers a wide range of provision in all learning areas. Full-time and part-time programmes include courses from pre-entry level to level 3 and higher education provision. Level 1 provision has grown substantially and is now offered in all vocational programme areas. Enrolments to higher education programmes in the college have increased by over 30% between 2006 and 2007.
- 37 When compared to other areas in Wales, the borough of Neath Port Talbot has one of the highest participation rates in education for 16-19 year olds. The college offers a very wide range of more than 45 A and AS subjects as well as an excellent range of full-time vocational courses. Learners have excellent opportunities to 'mix and match' A level subjects with vocational courses and more than 150 learners follow mixed programmes.
- 38 The college enrolls about 15,500 learners annually and more than 3,500 of these study full-time. About half of the full-time learners follow mainly A level programmes of study in the sixth form faculty. The college is also the largest provider of work-based learning in the borough and the number of learners on these programmes has more than doubled in the last three years.

#### **Outstanding practice**

The college has excellent joint provision with all the schools in the borough that have been developed over the last three years. These include:

- a very good range of 14-19 Learning Network supported programmes;
- a wide range of taster sessions in vocational areas offered to Year 9 pupils from all secondary schools within Neath Port Talbot, to help learners to make informed curriculum choices at the end of key stage 3. More than half of the Year 9 pupils take part in the taster sessions;
- an innovative range of options at key stage 4. These include GCSE dance and Spanish and the BTEC introductory certificate in vocational studies for more than a hundred learners at all schools in the borough;
- collaboration between the college and the local faith based 11-18 school. This has led to shared delivery of A level modern foreign languages in the Port Talbot area; and
- the foundation and intermediate Welsh Baccalaureate qualifications are provided by the college in collaboration with two partner 11-16 schools for key stage 4 pupils.

Pupils from schools in the local area also take part in the construction curriculum centre in conjunction with the Construction Industry Training Board and Careers Wales West. The pupils are able to gain a foundation certificate in building craft occupations. The college has also recently built a new construction centre on the Afan site so that school pupils have good opportunities to gain construction craft skills.

- 39 The college provides very successful Saturday clubs in catering, construction and engineering.
- 40 Key skills are integrated very well into the curriculum in most vocational areas and in many A level subjects, particularly on the courses where learners are doing the Welsh Baccalaureate. In most cases, learners are encouraged to do key skills at an appropriate level. In the best practices in hair and beauty, the wider key skills are integrated into innovative project work. However, in AS level provision, learners are not always challenged enough to undertake key skills at high enough levels.
- 41 The college has a good range of provision in the Welsh Baccalaureate at all three levels. More than 100 learners are enrolled on the foundation and intermediate awards in seven vocational areas. Learners on the advanced award do both A levels and vocational qualifications.

### **Outstanding practice**

The college's sporting academies attract talented sportsmen and women from a wide geographical area to enrol on a broad range of courses across all areas of the college. The academy structure successfully combines high-level sporting performance with academic study by, for example, timetabling training sessions before the start of the college day. The college is one of the most successful in the UK in terms on results and achievements in sport.

Many learners benefit from a broad range of additional activities that promote their personal and social development, and enrich their learning experience. Enrichment opportunities include a range of sporting, cultural and entrepreneurial activities. Learners from the Afan campus are involved in a 'buddy' reading scheme with 300 pupils from Dyffryn comprehensive school. More than 80% of the full-time learners take part in the programmes.

- 42 The college has a strong entrepreneurial culture in many vocational areas. The Practice Company in Business has won several national and international awards. Learners gain insight into professional practices through extra curricular projects, such as, 'Lift' the college dance company, and 'First Sounds' the college record label, linked to Young Enterprise schemes. College learner enterprise champions have developed a very good learner enterprise community on the VLE. More than 600 learners take part in entrepreneurial activities.
- 43 The college is fully committed to extending the Welsh culture and is making very good progress in extending its bilingual provision. The college's Welsh language scheme is a standing agenda item on all college committees. The college has developed excellent links with the local Welsh-medium school to deliver bilingual provision. These include certificates and diplomas in childcare and education, Applied AS/A levels in travel and tourism, GCSE Spanish and a foundation construction award and NVQ 1 in horticulture.
- 44 Welsh-speaking A level students in all learning areas have Welsh-medium tutorial provision, and Welsh-speaking learners on sports programmes access a bilingual



community on the college's VLE. Nearly all Welsh-speaking learners meet informally, on a weekly basis, in the college's Welsh-medium club, Clwb Croeso.

- 45 The college works closely with a broad range of employers and agencies such as the Welsh Initiative for Supported Employment, Women's Aid, and Job Centre Plus. In sport, there are excellent links with governing bodies, training providers and professional sport teams.
- 46 The college has a good and appropriate sustainability policy and education for sustainable development is good in many curriculum areas. Activities related to sustainability are incorporated well within the college's tutorial programme. Pre-vocational learners are responsible for the college's paper recycling scheme as part of their work for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

#### **Key Question 4: How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?**

<b>Grade 2: Good with no important shortcomings</b>
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- 47 The college has a comprehensive and useful range of policies and procedures to promote the care, guidance and support of learners. These include policies relating to discipline, the protection of children and vulnerable adults, and dignity for all (bullying and harassment). The college's Learner Directorate Group and Policy Group systematically review and update all policies regularly.
- 48 Managers plan and manage support for learners well. There are close and effective working relationships between managers and staff in the various learner support teams. Staff work well together to identify barriers that prevent learners from achieving their potential, and to help learners to access the wide range of support services available.
- 49 Good information is available to prospective learners to help them choose suitable courses. This includes high-quality promotional DVDs, attractive bilingual publications, open evenings and short taster courses to help learners choose the most suitable course.
- 50 College staff work closely with partner secondary schools to gather information which identifies pupils' specific support needs before they start their college course. College staff attend school open evenings where they provide key stage 3 and 4 pupils and their parents with information about courses and the support available. Pupils, including those who are disengaged from mainstream education, have good opportunities to visit the college to familiarise themselves with the facilities on offer and to meet staff. More than half of the college's partner schools send their senior staff to the college when GCSE results arrive, and during enrolment, to help learners in their decision making and transition.
- 51 There is a good admissions process. College staff often interview prospective learners on school premises to help them feel more comfortable. The completion of an interview checklist provides a further opportunity for staff to gain information about learners' specific needs. Overall, these strategies help prospective learners to make informed decisions about their future education and training, and significantly ease their transition from school to college life.

- 52 All full-time and part-time learners take part in a comprehensive induction programme, which helps them to settle into their programmes quickly. They also receive an attractive and informative 'Keep Safe' booklet and a handbook which summarises important college information. Learners on many programmes take part in team-building activities, which help them to get to know their peers.
- 53 During tutorials, all learners complete an individual learning plan (ILP) which records the targets agreed by learners and their tutor. However, while they use this information well to review progress, targets are not always SMART enough to judge how well a learner has progressed from one period to the next.
- 54 Tutors monitor learners' attendance well, and while attendance is good overall, there is too much variation in attendance rates between one learning area and another. The college has recently introduced electronic registration to help managers monitor the attendance of individuals and groups of learners more effectively.
- 55 All learners have access to a very good range of support services. Learning Services are based in the Neath and Afan campuses, but learners on other campuses can access the friendly and helpful services on offer. These include careers information from Careers Wales staff, and advice and guidance on health, personal and financial matters. The college has recently appointed a full-time counsellor who offers a confidential counselling service to staff as well as learners.
- 56 The college provides good support for learners with additional learning support needs. At enrolment or earlier, staff screen all full-time learners and most part-time learners to identify their basic skills needs and preferred learning styles. A high percentage of learners identified as needing support take it up to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in the current year. This support includes attendance at timetabled sessions, drop-in workshops and in-class help from basic skills tutors.
- 57 The college uses supplementary funds well to provide specialist equipment to support learners with disabilities. These include a Braille, a specialist scanner and a machine which produces tactile diagrams for visually impaired learners. There is also a good text simplification service which enables staff to adapt work to meet learners' different needs.
- 58 The college has a strong ethos of respect for all. Managers take bullying and harassment seriously, and provide learners with suitable help and advice about what action to take if they feel vulnerable.
- 59 The college has a strong commitment to the promotion of equality and diversity, and has clear action plans to address issues of race, gender and disability. Staff have undertaken diversity training, and learners' awareness of equality issues is raised through events such as 'World @ nptc' which celebrates difference.

## Leadership and management

### Key Question 5: How effective are leadership and strategic management?

#### Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

- 60 The focus of the college is on improving the experience of learners and the mission of the college sets clear standards and expectations for all staff. The principal and senior management team provide strong and effective leadership. Since the appointment of the current principal in 2004, the college has undergone a major transformation. The restructuring of management roles and responsibilities, completed successfully within a tight time frame, has improved the viability of the college and enabled it to invest strongly in developing its resources. The management of change for improvement is outstanding.
- 61 The college has consulted very well with all staff, managers, members of the corporation and other stakeholders to improve the college mission statement. This now provides a stronger emphasis on 'high quality learning', 'inclusion' and 'equality of opportunity', and gives a sharper focus to strategic and operational planning. These values are reflected in strategic and operational plans which make sure that learners' needs drive all improvements.
- 62 The annual planning cycle includes a review of college policies, strategic aims and objectives and future activities. All managers, staff and the governors are involved in the process. There is a very good link between the planning and quality cycles.

#### Outstanding practice

Overall, the college's strategic planning is outstanding. The college has restructured its resources over the last four years. This has led to a significant reduction in indicator of pay as a percentage of total college expenditure, to a level which is better than the sector norm. The college now has planned annual surpluses which have allowed it to invest in resources such as ICT and to develop high quality accommodation. This has had a positive impact on morale, standards and the quality of teaching and learning across the college.

- 63 The college has an effective management structure. The responsibilities of managers and staff are clear, and there are clear lines of accountability within the structure and a high level of consistency in the way the college meets the needs of learners, for example, in the delivery of learning support. The senior management team are very effective in their respective roles and work well as a team. All staff know clearly what is expected of them in meeting college aims. All college meetings are very well organised.
- 64 The management structure has been broadened and improved to include 42 post holders at the level of principal or senior lecturer, with responsibilities either for learners and support, essential skills, or teaching and learning. These post holders have a direct influence on improving teaching and learning across the college. They have a good impact in supporting teachers in the classroom, and a positive influence on the experience of learners.

- 65 Communication is generally good across the college. The senior management team consult widely through team structures and consultative committees and groups. There is a good schedule of meetings for managers at different levels. This allows staff at all levels to contribute to planning. Managers support their staff well. They devolve responsibility where appropriate, but monitor outcomes carefully. However, communication with staff who work at the smaller college sites is not always effective.
- 66 All college staff and managers are appraised against personal performance targets within the college performance management process. The college has made good progress in setting realistic, achievable targets in most areas. Managers' targets are challenging and SMART and, where relevant, are tied to learners' achievements. However, there is too much inconsistency in the ways in which targets are set for teaching and business support staff.

### **Outstanding practice**

The college is a proactive leading player in a number of important strategic partnerships in the Neath Port Talbot borough. These include the New Learning Network (NLN) structure established for adult and community based learning. There is also a very strong partnership with the local authority, covering issues such as the 14-19 Learning Network and school-college transition arrangements. The college also plays a leading role in the Neath Port Talbot Learning Partnership consisting of over 60 providers. This is a specific 'Brokerage Body' to manage the planning and delivery of post-16 education in the locality. They also lead the Neath Port Talbot 'Essential Skills Strategy'. These partnerships have significant benefits for learners as they give wider choice for learners and good access to resources.

- 67 The governing body has a good range of members with expertise and experience from a range of backgrounds, including the public, voluntary and private sector. They provide effective direction and support for the college, and are closely involved in setting its strategic direction. Governors hold managers to account for shortcomings in performance and set improvement targets within a specified timescale. This is a highly effective process for ensuring that staff are held to account by the governing body.

### **Key Question 6: How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?**

#### **Grade 1: Good with outstanding features**

- 68 Overall, the college has very good systems and processes for evaluating and improving quality and standards. The systems have had an increasingly large impact over the last three years. They have led to more consistency in the application of quality systems across the college, and a far greater degree of staff accountability than in the past.
- 69 Over the last three years, there has been a regular cycle of annual internal inspections covering all learning areas. The internal inspections involve an appropriate sample of class observation of teaching and learning, conducted by colleagues who are Estyn peer assessors, and they include formal meetings with

relevant staff and learners. Each internal inspection leads to a detailed formal report and the award of grades on the key questions of the common inspection framework.

### **Outstanding practice**

Internal inspection activity, including observation of lessons, takes place every week. The learning areas involved receive notice of their internal inspection only a fortnight in advance. Senior managers have a central role in the process of internal inspection, including the moderation of lesson observations and grades, and the delivery of formal feedback to learning area staff by the principal or deputy principal. The process has evolved recently in two learning areas, where managers take fuller responsibility for the conduct of the inspection as a result of a strong track record of performance in past years.

- 70 Overall, the system of internal inspection involves a large allocation of resources in terms of time. However, it has paid dividends in terms of the significant improvements that have come about as a result.

### **Outstanding practice**

The college has a learning and performance management group which evaluates the quality and standards of courses in a robust and challenging way. There is a strong focus on addressing underperformance through action planning and staff development. There is a close link between this group and the work of the learning and performance committee of the governing body. Heads of school report regularly to both these groups where they receive a high degree of challenge from well-informed managers and members of the governing body. The learning and performance committee has a good understanding of levels of performance across learning areas. It provides effective oversight of matters relating to quality and standards.

- 71 Overall, the quality of school and course files is good. Course co-ordinators generally produce course reviews which highlight strengths and weaknesses in performance. The reviews use raw data on performance, national benchmarks and value-added analysis well. The college uses an appropriately wide range of data analyses to gauge its performance, including ALIS data and information from the Fisher Family Trust. The quality directorate gathers and analyses relevant data on performance on courses, while management information systems tend to focus more on LLWR and compliance requirements. However, a few course reviews are not evaluative enough, do not take full enough account of the rates at which learners complete their courses or do not place enough emphasis on attainment in AS examinations.
- 72 The college uses a wide range of methods to collect and analyse learners' views on their courses and on aspects of the college as a whole. It uses annual questionnaires, focus groups and learner representatives on courses to gauge learner satisfaction with the teaching and services that the college provides. The college has used learner focus days over the last three years to gather feedback from learners on a range of themes, such as facilities, tutorials, teaching and

learning, and equality and diversity. The college has used an external agency to support the process this year. These systems have led to improvements in the college, for example in relation to changes to the tutorial programme and the provision of counselling services.

- 73 The functional areas of the college have produced evaluative reviews of their performance. These have suitable action plans relating to areas for further development, and they report appropriately on progress against action points. The functional areas have set out the objectives and key performance indicators relating to their work. A few have begun to develop service level agreements, and to identify how they can contribute to meeting the criteria within the common inspection framework.
- 74 The quality of peer observations of lessons is good overall, especially in relation to attainment data and teaching and assessment. However, too many focus on aspects of teaching when evaluating standards achieved by learners in lessons. A few do not identify enough outstanding features to justify the award of grade 1.
- 75 Quality development plans stemming from quality systems and the internal inspection reports are of good quality. They identify measurable targets for improvement, linked to relevant resources and timescales. Management meetings review progress in implementing all plans in a rigorous way. Senior managers initiated a recovery plan in engineering three years ago as a result of internal inspection outcomes. The plan has been implemented and reviewed effectively with appropriate oversight by senior managers and the governing body.
- 76 The quality of the self-assessment report is good overall. It is evaluative and honest and generally uses data on performance well. There has been very good progress in meeting the recommendations of the previous inspection report in 2002. Progress has been rapid over the last three years with an increased focus on quality. The quality systems, especially the internal inspection arrangements, have had a very positive impact in driving up standards and quality. There is a close match between the grades awarded to lessons, learning areas and key questions within the college's self-assessment report and those awarded by the external inspection team.

#### **Key Question 7: How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?**

<b>Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings</b>
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- 77 The college employs enough teaching and support staff to deliver its range of programmes effectively. All staff have up-to-date detailed job descriptions that clearly set out roles and responsibilities. Staff are well qualified and nearly all teaching staff have a teaching qualification. A good proportion of staff have assessor and/or verifier qualifications.
- 78 More than 10% of the teaching staff can teach through the medium of Welsh and English. The college encourages its staff to take part in the Welsh Assembly Government's Welsh language sabbatical scheme, and three have already completed the course successfully and are using their skills well.

- 79 Managers monitor and manage all staff well, and staff's absence rates are below the sector average. Managers of teaching staff carry out a useful twice yearly analysis of workload allocation with the Deputy Principal to ensure that teaching staff deployment is fair and cost effective.
- 80 The college promotes the continuous professional development of all staff very well. Managers identify staff development needs effectively through the annual staff appraisal system, the internal inspection process and course team meetings. The college provides an extensive staff development programme which uses in-house expertise to share good practice, as well as external facilitators and speakers. Managers encourage staff strongly to attend external training events, such as awarding body updates.
- 81 The college keeps very good records of all staff training. However, it does not systematically measure the impact of the staff development programme on the quality of teaching, and assessment.
- 82 The induction programme for new staff is good and it provides staff with a wide range of information. All staff receive a comprehensive staff induction handbook which helps them to undertake their new role. While the college delivers the staff induction programme, on three occasions during the year, some new staff wait too long before taking part in the formal induction process.
- 83 The college has invested heavily in information technology. The ratio of computers to learners is very good overall. Learners in a few areas make good use of the virtual learning environment, and many teachers make effective use of interactive whiteboard technology in lessons.
- 84 The college has three good, modern learning resource centres, two at the Neath site and one at Afan. Learners based at other sites do not have the benefit of an on-site learning resource centre; however, all learners are entitled to access the resources at Neath and Afan. All three learning resource centres have a good range of books and other resources, such as DVDs, journals and online resources. The college is one of the few colleges in Wales to pilot the use of online electronic books. Sports science learners based at the Llandarcy site benefit from access to a good range of electronic textbooks. All learning resource centre staff are well qualified. Staff at the centre work closely with learners to help them to think independently, to develop research skills and to use available resources, including ICT.
- 85 Overall the standard of accommodation is good on all the main sites of the college. The accommodation on the main Neath and Afan campus is of mixed quality. Many of the buildings have been improved and refurbished to provide a good standard of teaching accommodation. A few of the buildings provide exceptionally high quality facilities. These include the electronic learning centre on the Neath campus and the Sport Academy at Llandarcy. However, in a few cases, classes are in rooms that are too small for the group size.
- 86 The college has developed good planning systems for budget setting. These include an online facility to allow staff to build courses based on relative costs and associated income streams. The senior management team and governors closely monitor the budget and there is a cross-college committee consisting of middle managers which

also scrutinises the accounts offering further challenge to budget holders. Budgets are devolved to faculty or department cost centres, and managers have a good understanding of the costs within their areas.

- 87 The college is at an early stage of implementing a good range of sustainability and recycling initiatives. The estates department monitors the use of energy and water closely and there have been recent significant reductions in consumption rates of both energy and water.
- 88 Standards are outstanding in three of the learning areas inspected and good in the other five learning areas inspected. Since the last inspection, these learning areas have either improved or maintained high standards. The college applies value for money principles well. It has become more efficient in the way it uses all resources; for instance, staff expenditure to overall expenditure ratios have improved significantly. The college provides good value for money.



## Standards achieved by learners in learning areas inspected

### Science and mathematics

#### Grade 2: Good features with no important shortcomings

- 89 The college provides a wide range of level 3 courses in science and mathematics. These include mathematics, further mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, human biology, geology, environmental science and psychology at AS and A2 level as well as the newly-introduced National Diploma in Applied Science (forensics). There are also courses in GCSE mathematics and science at level 2 for full-time learners as well as evening classes in AS level psychology and GCSE mathematics.
- 90 Standards in biology and human biology are good. Nearly all learners in biology have a good understanding of biological systems and their associated biochemistry. Most learners can recall relevant subject knowledge and apply it to different contexts, for example relating protein structure to enzyme action. Learners in human biology show a good understanding of biotechnology, such as the processes involved in the extraction of DNA and the various applications of DNA fingerprinting.
- 91 Learners in chemistry achieve good standards. Nearly all have a good understanding of chemical concepts such as collision theory, the factors affecting rates of reaction and electrochemistry. Most learners apply their previous knowledge well to practical situations and plan appropriate methods to collect valid and reliable results.
- 92 The quality of learners' work in physics is generally good. Most learners have a good understanding of theoretical physics. They develop good practical and investigative skills which they use accurately and methodically to carry out practical work on, for example, specific heat capacity and oscillations. However, a few learners do not benefit fully from enough opportunities to pursue and develop a deeper understanding of their work outside the classroom and, as a consequence, do not make sufficient progress.
- 93 In mathematics, most learners make satisfactory progress in acquiring new knowledge, understanding and skills. They generally achieve the objectives set for them in lessons and demonstrate a good understanding of trigonometry, differentiation and partial fractions. However, many learners, particularly those of higher ability, are not always challenged to further develop their understanding of the subject.
- 94 Most learners in psychology show a satisfactory understanding of key concepts in comparative psychology, social psychology and research methods. In general, learners play an active role in learning and in discussions.
- 95 Standards in geology and environmental science are good. Learners in geology develop good analytical skills which they use to identify fossil specimens on the basis of fine morphological features. In environmental science, learners show an active interest in the subject and demonstrate a good awareness of local environmental issues, such as the conflicts arising from the development of land in the Neath Valley for various purposes.

- 96 Learners on the National Diploma Applied Science (forensics) course achieve good standards. They work well in individual and group settings and readily discuss their work with their peers. Almost all learners can apply their previous mathematical knowledge, such as the construction of straight-line graphs, to illustrate scientific concepts and relationships.
- 97 At GCSE, most learners make good progress in improving their understanding of mathematical and scientific concepts. Many learners who have previously failed in science and mathematics, succeed in improving their grades.
- 98 The grades that learners achieve on A level courses are variable. In the last two years, attainment of high grades at A2 level in biology, human biology, chemistry, geology and psychology is close to, or slightly above, the average for schools and colleges in Wales. Learners' attainment in A2 in physics and mathematics is slightly below the Wales average.
- 99 In 2007, learners' results in chemistry, biology, environmental science and human biology are better than predicted from their GCSE scores. However, in mathematics, physics and psychology, learners' results are slightly below those predicted. Learners complete courses in science and mathematics at high rates.
- 100 Many learners show good levels of motivation and develop good independent learning skills. They use information and learning technology well to support their own learning outside the classroom. However, a few learners do not show enough initiative in lessons to pursue further understanding by asking questions or leading discussions.
- 101 In A level classes, learners have good opportunities to practise on past papers and show a good understanding of course assessment requirements. They are aware of their target grades but generally do not know what they have to do to achieve them.
- 102 Attendance in science and mathematics is good. Learners are attentive and respectful in class and maintain positive relationships with their teachers.

### **Information and communications technology**

<b>Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings</b>
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- 103 The college offers a wide range of courses in information and communications technology (ICT). Full-time programmes at levels 1, 2 and 3 are offered at the two main college sites, Neath and Afan. Part-time courses at levels 1 and 2 are also offered at Neath, Afan, Queen Street, and Pontardawe. Learners can study for the Welsh Baccalaureate on the BTEC First Diploma for IT Practitioners course at the Neath campus.
- 104 Learners on all courses develop good ICT skills in using software packages. Full-time learners use spreadsheet, multi-media and web-design software packages well. Learners on full-time vocational courses achieve a wide range of additional qualifications in ICT, such as ECDL, Open College Network (OCN) web design, and OCN computer maintenance. These skills help them to gain highly-skilled jobs.

- 105 Adult learners on part-time programmes make good progress in developing basic information technology skills in using standard office packages, such as word processing, database and presentation packages. Learners on ECDL courses develop a good understanding of basic computing principles. Learners on the computerised accounts courses are developing good computerised accounting skills using industry standard, accounting software.
- 106 All learners work productively in class; they understand what they are doing and what is required of them. Learners use technical terms competently and confidently. In most sessions, learners increase their understanding of computing concepts, and develop their information technology skills through a range of practical exercises and activities. However, in a minority of sessions, the more able learners do not extend themselves sufficiently and only reach minimum standards. The majority of student assignment work is well presented.
- 107 The rates at which full-time learners complete courses and attain level 3 qualifications are good. In 2006-2007, all learners who enrolled gained the A2 qualification. Learners on the Applied A level in ICT achieved results that were better than those predicted based upon their GCSE results. The rates at which learners completed and attained GNVQ Foundation were satisfactory in 2005-2006, and good in 2006-2007. The completion and attainment rates on the GNVQ Intermediate course were good in both years.
- 108 Many learners progress from levels 1 and 2 courses to level 3 and to higher education programmes at the college or at other institutions.
- 109 Standards of behaviour are very good in all lessons. All learners carefully follow demonstrations and carry out instructions competently. Learners on all courses are attentive and all make good use of their time in class, working productively and enthusiastically on class exercises and assessments. Learners work well together and are very supportive of each other in the classroom.
- 110 Learners on the BTEC First Diploma course apply their skills and knowledge in a realistic work environment through the work-experience programme. However, the college does not provide enough opportunities for learners on level 3 courses to demonstrate their skills in work or to understand fully how computers are used in industry.
- 111 Learners on A level courses generally attend regularly and punctually. Attendance on part-time courses is too variable.

### **Hair and beauty**

<b>Grade 1: Good with outstanding features</b>
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- 112 Full-time learners follow courses leading to NVQs in hairdressing at levels 1, 2 and 3 and beauty therapy at levels 2 and 3. At level 3, the diploma in holistic therapy is also available. A combined hairdressing and beauty therapy course at NVQ level 2 offers learners the opportunity to acquire a wider range of skills, which enhances their employability. A good range of part-time courses is also available during the day or in the evening.

- 113 Most learners develop their practical skills, particularly in beauty and holistic therapies, to high standards. All learners demonstrate a sound awareness of the importance of safe and hygienic practice when working in salons and treatment rooms. Almost all learners have a professional approach to work and take great pride in their personal appearance. Most learners develop good knowledge and understanding of key concepts and relate theory and practice very well.
- 114 The portfolios and files of most learners, particularly those in beauty and holistic therapies, are very well organised and presented and learners take pride in the presentation of their work.

### **Outstanding practice**

Most learners develop their key skills to outstanding standards because the work is made very relevant for learners. Learners enjoy collecting evidence for their key skills portfolios and completing projects and assignments that relate directly to the hair and beauty industry. In beauty and holistic therapies, learners use the high-quality presentations they give to their peers to provide key skills evidence.

Learners on level 3 beauty therapy courses develop key skills well through their involvement in the imaginative 'Challenge' initiative, which requires them to work with minimum supervision to plan a long-term project. Working in small teams, learners decide on how to develop a business idea to meet specific criteria. They meet regularly to decide on strategy and record video and diary evidence of their work. By the end of the project, learners have a very good understanding of issues relating to entrepreneurship and sustainability of the business and environment. Learners also develop the important life, work and management skills they need to be successful in the workplace.

- 115 In 2006-2007, the completion rates on most courses are good or very good. Attainment rates of full qualifications on many courses are also very good, but not as high as in the previous year. Learners who do not gain all the units needed for their NVQ are able to gain credit for the units that they have attained. This enables those who leave their courses early to return at a later date to complete their qualifications.
- 116 Most learners make very good progress in learning, and get jobs using their skills or start another relevant course to improve their prospects of highly-skilled employment.
- 117 Learners on all courses use their personal development log to reflect weekly on their activities and progress to date. This process gives learners a very clear understanding of how well they are doing and helps them to identify priorities for the next period.
- 118 In practical sessions, all learners complete action planners and tracking records. These enable learners to work closely with their teachers to set effective, and often challenging, short-term targets for improvement. Learners know what they need to do to complete their qualifications within agreed timescales.
- 119 Most learners are well motivated and enjoy their work. They take a professional approach and respond well to the high expectations of their teachers. Most learners

participate fully in discussions and classroom activities. Many mature learners work hard to achieve, often in difficult circumstances. Learners' punctuality and attendance rates are generally very good and college staff follow up absences quickly.

- 120 Most full-time learners benefit from their involvement in a good range of other activities such as internal and external competitions, and attendance at trade fairs and specialist seminars. Level 3 learners in beauty therapy benefit from their participation in events run jointly between college staff and local employers, who reinforce industry requirements, and give learners valuable feedback after interviewing them.
- 121 All full-time learners undertake well-planned work experience. As a result, learners gain confidence as they develop a better understanding of the demands of busy commercial salons.

### **History, philosophy and theology**

<b>Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings</b>
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- 122 The college provides A level and AS level courses in history and religious studies and an AS course in critical thinking.
- 123 Standards are very good overall in critical thinking. Standards in both history and religious studies are mainly good. However, in a few classes, learners do not make good enough progress as they do not do enough extended learning.
- 124 Most history and religious studies learners can recall the content of their work accurately and in detail. They show an appropriate understanding of the period they are studying. In history, most learners have a good understanding of the social and political background of the period they are studying, and they have a clear sense of chronology. Most learners use a satisfactory range of subject terminology, and have an appropriate understanding of historical concepts. They can explain the causes of such significant events as the rise of the labour party and the social, racial and religious policies of the Third Reich. Learners examine first-hand and second-hand source material well to evaluate causal factors and contrasting view points. Learners' work files contain an appropriate record of work but too many files are incomplete and disorganised.
- 125 In religious studies the learners have a good understanding of both the traditional and modern philosophical and ethical concepts under study, and appreciate the key principles which underpin them. They can also relate these to their chosen module, Buddhism. All learners research information in the classroom from different sources and use the information appropriately to support arguments. However, too few learners do enough additional background reading outside the classroom.
- 126 Learners following the AS critical thinking course show commitment to what is often an additional AS. This underpins their learning in other areas, for example, where they develop an understanding of how to assess sources of evidence. Learners apply an extensive range of high-order skills to solve problems and explore concepts.

- 127 Learners develop appropriate standards in the key skill of communication in all subjects, although history learners do not use ICT well enough to research and investigate topics.
- 128 Learners' completion rates in A level history and religious studies and AS critical thinking are generally good. Overall, examination attainment rates are good, with a 100% pass rate in all three subjects. In history, learners' results at A level are better than would have been predicted from their GCSE scores. However, in religious studies, the grades that around half the learners attain in A level are slightly below those predicted from their GCSE scores.
- 129 Learners acquire their knowledge, understanding and skills at an appropriate rate. They progress appropriately through their courses but do not receive enough written feedback between monthly tasks in history and religious studies. This undermines their ability to monitor their own progress through the course. Most history and religious studies learners develop an appropriate range of skills and abilities.
- 130 Learners' attendance and punctuality are good overall. Most learners have a satisfactory attitude to their work. Learners in both subjects work well on their own and with others.

### **Social sciences**

<b>Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings</b>
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- 131 The college offers full-time A level and AS level courses in geography, economics, sociology and government and politics. There is also an Access to Higher Education course.
- 132 Standards are generally good. Most learners demonstrate a secure understanding of their work and a good understanding of key concepts, and use subject terminology accurately. Most can recall aspects of their work accurately to support arguments, and to develop a depth of understanding. They apply this knowledge and understanding to good effect when responding to questions, and completing assignments on a range of different topics.
- 133 Most student files contain useful notes and assignments. These show that learners develop good skills of critical analysis in most subjects. Work files also provide a good record for their examination revision. However, in a minority of cases, in some sociology classes, and geography classes on the Afan site, there is a more limited record of assessed work in files.
- 134 Most learners apply their understanding effectively to case studies, and use their knowledge to good effect on visits or when undertaking fieldwork. They develop a good understanding of subject requirements at A level and AS level, and have good opportunities to practice answering examination questions. Many learners understand the demands of A and AS questions, and identify key words to structure their answers. In geography and economics, they are confident when handling case study materials and interpreting data. Learners in government and politics provide perceptive observations when discussing the role of one of the previous Prime Ministers.

- 135 Most learners have good subject skills. Learners on all courses research a wide variety of sources of information and develop good skills of analysis and synthesis. In geography, most learners have good high-order skills in critical analysis and problem solving. Overall, learners in all subjects use and apply their subject skills effectively. They are aware of their personal targets.
- 136 The rates at which learners complete A level courses and AS level courses are generally good and close to national comparators in all subjects in 2006. Overall, A level attainment rates in 2007 are good, with a 100% pass rate in all subjects. Learners in geography and economics attain better at the higher grades than national comparators. Learners' results in most subjects are better than would have been predicted according to their GCSE scores.
- 137 Overall, learners make good progress and work diligently to ensure that they attain the grades required to progress to higher education or work. Most learners contribute well to the sessions when given the opportunity. They readily provide answers, suggestions and explanations when prompted. Most learners organise their time well and work effectively and efficiently. They develop good work habits, make appropriate notes and annotate texts when necessary.
- 138 Learners' attendance rates and punctuality are good overall. Learners are well motivated, and show a keen interest in the work. They co-operate well and demonstrate consideration and respect for each other.

### **Languages, literature and culture**

<b>Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings</b>
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- 139 The college provides AS and A2 courses in English language, English literature, English language and literature, Welsh second language, French, German and Spanish. Learners in Spanish start the AS course with no previous study of the language. Most of the courses are available on the Neath and Afan campuses, but AS and A level English language and English literature are only available on the Neath campus. The learning area contributes towards the teaching of an access to higher education course. The college provides GCSE English during the day and in the evening for full-time and part-time learners. It also provides an OCN course for French beginners on the Afan campus.
- 140 In 2005-2006, completion rates on A level courses were generally close to or below national comparators. Completion rates improved greatly in most courses in 2006-2007 and are now good overall. Completion rates for the GCSE English course are generally low.
- 141 Attainment rates are consistently high on A level courses. They were outstanding in A2 Welsh in 2006-2007. All learners who complete the AS or A2 course pass the examination. The proportion of learners who attain a higher grade (A or B) is generally high. The proportion of learners who attain A\*-C grades in GCSE English is satisfactory.

- 142 Most learners achieve A level grades that are broadly in line with predictions based on their previous performance at GCSE, although value-added performance in AS English language is relatively weak.
- 143 Most A level learners display good standards in their oral and written work. Standards in A level Welsh and French classes are often very high. In A level classes in English, German and Spanish they are frequently good.
- 144 In English work, learners are developing a good understanding of linguistic concepts, and apply theoretical frameworks well to the study of spoken and written language. Learners apply linguistic skills well when they consider literary texts. They use their own experience appropriately to reflect on the use of language in different contexts, for example, in the world of work. Many learners have a sound grasp of the plot, characters and themes of the literary texts they study. Most support their ideas appropriately by close reference to texts. On occasions, in English work, learners identify features in literary texts without explaining what effect they have, and their understanding of grammatical features is not always secure. In a few classes on literature, they do not contribute enough to lessons or undertake enough research of their own before lessons.
- 145 In modern foreign languages and in Welsh, learners generally have good or very good listening and oral skills. In many classes, learners respond well to challenging tasks and use a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical constructions in their responses. Learners' written work is often good, especially where it engages their interests well, for example, in discussing dreams in Welsh. Learners in modern foreign languages and Welsh often develop problem-solving skills to a high level. A few learners in Welsh and modern foreign languages do not form extended sentences enough in oral work. Learners' responses to literary texts in Welsh are not as strong as when they discuss contemporary issues and situations. Overall, learners develop their independent learning skills enough in the classroom, but not enough outside the classroom through research tasks or reading beyond the requirements of the examination.
- 146 Learners are generally making good progress. They get a lot done in their classes and complete set tasks well with little prompting from staff. Many learners have very well-organised files. They are very aware of their individual target grades and the assessment objectives of the qualifications they study. Learners generally recall previous learning well. Learners have a clear idea of how to improve their work to meet their target grades. Spanish learners persevere well despite having little previous knowledge of the language before starting the AS course.
- 147 Overall, learners display high levels of motivation and commitment to their studies. They work very well in pairs and groups. They interact well with their teachers and with each other. They respond well to opportunities to take an active part in lessons. In most cases, learners arrive on time. Attendance rates are sound overall, but vary too much between classes.



## Independent living skills

### Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

- 148 The college provides three full-time programmes in Independent living skills and six vocational courses including taster and vocationally-specific courses in hairdressing, catering and horticulture. The college has recently reorganised its programmes so that learners have opportunities to progress between programmes and on to mainstream vocational courses. Learners with more profound learning difficulties attend part-time courses at the Afan campus or in social services day centre provision within the wider community. The courses have a strong vocational element.
- 149 Learners have outstanding ICT skills. They use computers very effectively for research and use a wide range of applications to produce high quality work that is well illustrated. Learners with poor dexterity and handwriting skills take pride in producing work with such a high standard of presentation. Learners also make good use of ICT for independent research.
- 150 Learners develop very good speaking and listening skills. They are helped to do this through a thorough and effective range of teaching methods and careful questioning. Learners respond well orally, and explain what they are doing with understanding.
- 151 Learners gain good and useful knowledge about basic health and safety on all courses. They learn how to look after themselves and be safe in college and the wider environment. All learners on vocational courses gain appropriate specialist vocational health and safety skills.

### Outstanding practice

Learners gain excellent work-related skills through a very wide range of enterprise activities organised by the college. These include activities supported by Business Enterprise such as selling cards and car washing. Business Enterprise staff regularly support the teaching of enterprise activities. A group of learners recently received an award for their contributions to enterprise at a local community business conference.

Learners' sense of community involvement is very good. They gain these skills through working on schemes that involve community participation and charity events. Learners are involved in programmes to enhance local communities through 'Keep Wales Tidy', college paper recycling schemes and fund raising for the local Air Ambulance in conjunction with a local rugby team. They regularly visit outside events such as arts and drama productions organised by community groups. Achievement of learning goals is celebrated by presentation events supported by the college principal.

- 152 The rates at which learners complete their courses and attain qualifications have been outstanding over the last two years. More than 80% of learners who start courses go on to gain the target qualification. All learners following the ASDAN qualification 'Towards Independence' course complete the course and gain the qualification. Many learners achieve a good range of national awards in life skills and

communication, for example, Edexcel Life Skills and English Speaking Board qualifications. These qualifications provide a high and appropriate level of challenge to the learners.

### **Outstanding practice**

The progress of 16-19 year old learners from vocational preparation courses to mainstream vocational programmes is outstanding. In 2006-2007, 76% of learners who completed these courses progressed to a range of level 1 and level 2 programmes in Health and Social Care, Construction, Carpentry and IT. Learners with more significant needs make very good progress onto the discrete vocational courses in catering, horticulture and hairdressing.

- 153 Learners make good progress on their courses and most learners can explain some progress they have made. Learners on the vocational preparation programme are aware that the course will prepare them to progress to a vocational course of study.
- 154 However, in a few cases, learners are unclear as to the qualification they will gain at the end of their programme of study.
- 155 Learners are encouraged to support each other, be self critical and accept further guidance from both peers and tutors. In the majority of teaching sessions, learners are highly motivated and committed. They are encouraged to evaluate their work and accept feedback from other learners. Learners show a high level of respect for their peers, their tutors and learning support assistants. They enjoy the work that they do at college and nearly all of them attend all classes regularly and punctually.

### **Business, administration and law**

#### **Grade 1: Good with outstanding features**

- 156 The college provides a wide range of full-time and part-time courses at levels 2 and 3. In addition to a range of business and administration qualifications at level 3, the college also provides A levels in accounting, law, business studies and applied business. Association of Accounting Technician (AAT) qualifications are available at all levels as well as a small number of accounting courses.
- 157 All learners achieve well across the full range of courses. They display good and very good levels of knowledge and understanding of business, accounting and legal concepts. Many learners are accomplished in the way they apply their knowledge to the current business and legal environment to analyse and solve problems. Many A level learners make very good use of appropriate technical terminology and present complex concepts well. Learners on vocational courses display very good practical business skills.

**Outstanding practice**

Many A level law learners develop excellent knowledge and understanding of the legal environment through exemplary links with a local barrister and solicitors. This arrangement supports the learners to develop a high level of confidence in using legal terminology and applying legal concepts. The legal professionals provide excellent role models and provide careers guidance for learners who intend to enter the legal profession. The outstanding achievements in law are celebrated annually by awards sponsored by the legal practices.

- 158 Most learners present work to a high standard. They display very good organisational skills. Most of the work in learner files is of a high quality and demonstrates a good range of skills at a level appropriate to the course.

**Outstanding practice**

Business students of all abilities are very successful in running their own businesses and practice company. They develop very good enterprise skills and demonstrate high levels of personal effectiveness. Learners develop and apply a wide range of skills in a realistic working environment. They are appointed to various roles within the company through a realistic recruitment process. Learners achieve high standards of business success, trading on a national and international level.

- 159 Learners develop a good awareness of businesses in Wales, Europe and the World in many courses. In A level business, applied business and accounting classes, learners demonstrate a very good awareness of the recent developments in the business environment. They identify trends and are imaginative in the way they debate future outcomes. AAT learners confidently use examples from their own workplace to illustrate the application of theory.

**Outstanding practice**

On all A level courses, attainment is outstanding. The percentage of learners achieving high grades exceeds the average for Wales in all subjects. In law and applied business (double award) in 2006-2007 the attainment at higher grades is outstanding. Sixty-one per cent of learners in law, and 54% of learners in applied business achieve an A or B grade. In accounts and law, learners achieve very well in comparison to their prior attainment. The rates at which learners complete courses are also very good. Most learners progress to higher education.

- 160 Learners respond well to the high expectations of their teachers and make very good progress in learning.
- 161 Learners have a very good understanding of the assessment requirements of their qualifications. Learners are given detailed feedback on most work and have a clear understanding of how they are progressing. Almost all learners doing applied business improve their attainment following interim assessment feedback. Learners on the NVQ programmes make very good progress and benefit from individual

lesson feedback and target setting. Almost all learners respond positively to guidance and targets set in negotiation with their course tutors, and are motivated to reach the high expectations set. Learners benefit from support and guidance in regular tutorial sessions focused on reviewing their progress overall.

- 162 Many learners are successful in progressing to higher levels of qualifications, either at the college or in higher education.
- 163 Learners achieve good standards in key skills appropriate to their level of study alongside their main qualifications. Learners following the Welsh Baccalaureate develop the full range of key skills. All learners demonstrate good ICT skills, and use a range of suitable applications to present their work. Many vocational learners display very good ICT skills. They successfully select the most appropriate office application for the task and demonstrate high levels of confidence and creativity.
- 164 All learners listen well and present ideas and opinions with confidence. Learners show respect and consideration for their peers and their tutors. They behave appropriately and display high levels of co-operation in a variety of settings. Most learners are confident and have good independent learning skills. Learners on NVQ programmes support one another well. Attendance is good and the punctuality of almost all learners is excellent.

## **Provider's response to the report findings**

Neath Port Talbot College is pleased with, and is reassured by, this very positive report on the quality of the provision and on the standards achieved by learners studying at the College.

The recognition given by the inspection team to the actual progress made since the previous inspection and to the distance travelled with regard to transforming the nature and culture of the college is heartening. This has only been achieved through the unstinting commitment of governors, managers and staff to realising the College's vision statements. Our partner organisations, employers and stakeholders also share the credit for the advances made.

The strengths identified in terms of strategic and operational management, financial planning and control, breadth of provision, partnership working and effectiveness in the management of quality all impact positively upon the learners' experience and the support provided for learners, which also have outstanding features. This is also reflected in the consistently high standards achieved in the learning areas and this has been acknowledged in the grade profile for Key Question 1.

The College appreciates the constructive feedback received throughout the report and the issues identified will be addressed via the College's quality and performance management systems. The specific recommendations, a number of which mirror recommendations in the College's own self assessment report, are particularly helpful in challenging the College to focus upon those issues which will enable quality of provision and standards of achievement to become universally outstanding across the college.

Strategies to improve communication across all college sites and to ensure full compliance with the agreed procedures for performance management are in place and are being implemented already through the quality development plan. Further attention will also now be devoted to A level and AS level courses from the perspective of improving learning, teaching and assessment through galvanising the potential and expertise of the principal and senior lecturers and through evaluating the extent of the impact which training programmes have on pedagogical practices and upon the learners' experience.

The first of the College's six vision statements is 'to be a Grade 1/first class college' and this report serves to benchmark the fact that the vision is close to being achieved.

## Appendix 1

### **The evidence base of the inspection**

Seven inspectors, two additional inspectors and 16 peer assessors spent a total of 148 inspector days at the college.

The inspectors and peer assessors visited:

- 162 classes;
- a variety of other activities delivered by the college;
- Welsh Baccalaureate sessions;
- tutorials; and
- key skills sessions.

Members of the inspection team held meetings with:

- the principal;
- the clerk to the governors;
- the chair of the governing body and the chairs of all the subcommittees of the governing body;
- senior and middle managers;
- a range of teaching, support and administrative support staff;
- learners in the learning areas being inspected and other learning areas;
- employers and partners involved in the learning areas inspected;
- the headteachers of all the secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot; and
- representatives of other partner agencies and stakeholders linked with the college.

The team also considered:

- a range of learners' work in the learning areas inspected; and
- comprehensive documentation provided by the college, both before and during the inspection.

## Appendix 2

### The inspection team

Eleanor Davies HMI	Reporting Inspector
Barry Norris HMI	Team Inspector
Gareth Wyn Jones HMI	Team Inspector
Una Connolly HMI	Team Inspector
Stephen Davies HMI	Team inspector
Barry Rees HMI	Team inspector
Claire Morgan HMI	Team inspector
Alun Maddocks	Additional Inspector
Catrin Rees	Additional Inspector
Lesley Scarrett	Peer assessor
Michael Martin	Peer assessor
Gwyneth Bonnet	Peer assessor
Amanda Wilde	Peer assessor
Barbara Prosser	Peer assessor
Lorraine Groves	Peer assessor
Delyth Roberts	Peer assessor
Hazel Thompson	Peer assessor
Lisa Thomas	Peer assessor
Gethin Powell	Peer assessor
Theresa Jones	Peer assessor
Carol Allen	Peer assessor
Keith Pritchard	Peer assessor
Paul Denham	Peer assessor
Pam Shaw	Peer assessor
David Evans	Peer assessor
Ian Dickson	Peer assessor
Hilary Griffiths	Peer assessor
Rob Fowler	Provider nominee