



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 9 May 2024

Swansea Skills Partnership Annual Update

Purpose:	To update the Scrutiny Panel on the work of Partneriaeth Sgiliau Abertawe (PSA)/Swansea Skills Partnership (SSP).
Content:	An update on the key priorities of the Swansea Skills Partnership.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and give views.
Lead Councillor:	Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
Lead Officer & Report Author:	David Bawden, Strategic Skills Co-ordinator David.Bawden@swansea.gov.uk

1. Background

- 1.1 In June 2018, Cabinet approved a recommendation from the Education Skills Policy Development Committee to establish an effective strategic partnership between local education providers and associated organisations. The partnership aims to make Swansea one of the best places to be educated in the UK with a focus on supporting the wellbeing objective, that every child and young person in Swansea gains the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in life. Purpose and membership of the SSP can be found in the Terms of Reference, **Appendix A** (updated September 2023).
- 1.2 The Educational Scrutiny Performance Panel has received annual updates on the purpose, priorities, and outcomes of the SSP since its conception.

2. Briefing and progress update

- 2.1 The SSP is an established strategic education partnership comprising senior representatives from a range of organisations across the area, with the aim of designing destinations for learners by strengthening the links between curriculum and future occupations in Swansea and beyond.

The focus is to support Swansea's corporate plan to improve education and skills with a Designing Destinations Strategy:

“We will deliver a strategy to support vocational learning, post-16 curriculum collaboration, careers and work-related education. We want schools to engage with community learning champions, employers and other education providers to inspire successful futures for learners.”

- 2.2 By the end of the academic year 2022/2023, previous workstreams of the SSP were concluded and reported on in the final meeting of the year. Partners were tasked with suggesting fresh workstreams for the next five years. For the academic year 2023/2024, the SSP was refreshed with new Terms of Reference (**Appendix A**), a more streamlined membership group and three new strategic priorities.
- 2.3 The partnership will consider the following strategic priorities during the next five years:
1. Develop stronger collaborative partnerships with employers (Head of Achievement and Partnership)
 2. Develop collaborative partnerships to explore the delivery of 14-16 vocational programmes from a place and provision perspective (Strategic Co-ordinator for Skills)
 3. Establish collaborative partnerships to develop and deliver a wider range of high-quality post-16 programmes (Strategic Co-ordinator for Skills)
- 2.4 Each strategic priority has a sub-group chaired by a local authority officer and consisting of partners' representative/s. Each chair produces sub-group Term of Reference, an action plan and a termly highlight report. Highlight reports are presented to the SSP a week in advance of the termly meetings.
- 2.5 The remainder of this paper will look at each workstream in turn.

Workstream one: Develop stronger collaborative partnerships with employers.

- 2.6 This workstream will help learners understand the sorts of jobs and industries that are growing in Swansea and the surrounding area and support them to explore which jobs might be right for them. We want to ensure that all learners are offered experiences, opportunities and skills which can help them decide and discover who they are and who they want to be.
- 2.7 The purpose of this working group is to develop an understanding of the partnerships that currently exist between Swansea schools and its local/regional employers and partners and, where required, build on current practice to ensure that there is a minimum offer across Swansea schools that every learner can access. We recognise Careers and Wales and the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership as key partners for this workstream.
- 2.8 The working group will provide an effective support and challenge mechanism comprising senior representatives from a range of organisations and partners across the area, with the aim of supporting the designing of destinations for learners by strengthening the links between Swansea schools and employers.

2.9 The key activities and deliverables for this workstream are likely to include, but are not limited to:

1. Reviewing and gaining a greater understanding of work schools are currently doing with businesses and industry to support young people with careers and work-related experiences.
2. Developing the priorities, to include, but not limited to:
 - Partner Support:** Strengthen current partnerships and build new partnerships.
 - Experiences of Work:** Establishing and embedding Careers and Work-Related Experiences within our schools that are reflective of employers across the growth sectors
 - Learning Pathways:** Empowering young people to make informed decisions regarding their next steps linking to the other two PSA priority areas.
 - Social Value:** Exploring social value opportunities from Swansea Council contracts building on current practice.
 - Vulnerable Learners:** Targeted programmes informed by labour market intelligence which look to increase the possibility and probability of young people with a variety of barriers and challenges of moving into paid employment, training or education through an enhanced careers and work-related experiences offer.

2.10 To date, the working group has audited all Swansea secondary schools to identify where collaboration and partnerships currently exist between schools and business. This has revealed significant involvement from industry through links with Careers Wales, Gower College, and HE providers. There is scope for this to be strengthened by working with employers to pledge their support and hosting opportunities on a web-based platform.

2.11 The working group has discussed the value of a Swansea pledge from businesses in the local area. We intend to adapt the 'My Choice' webpage as a platform to showcase good practice and signpost schools and other organisations to local and regional businesses.

Workstream two: Develop collaborative partnerships to explore the delivery of 14-16 vocational programmes from a place and provision perspective.

2.12 The offer of vocational qualifications in Swansea will encourage opportunities to work in an open and collaborative way with key partners and stakeholders. We will make the very best use of local expertise, facilities, and equipment within the region. Well-established partnership working with local post-16 providers will facilitate the smooth transition of learners to post-compulsory education and training.

2.13 Vocational qualifications in Wales for 14–16 year olds are changing. From 2027 schools will teach VCSE subjects (Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education) alongside GCSE subjects (General Certificate of Secondary Education).

- 2.14 The purpose of the working group is to be fully prepared for these changes and explore partnership working where this will allow a school to broaden the curriculum offer available to learners and where it is in the best interest of those learners.
- 2.15 The key activities and deliverables are likely to include, but are not limited to:
1. Reviewing and evaluating current provision, facilities, and partnerships.
 2. Giving clear direction to school in support of the local vocational offer for the new suite of VCSEs.
 3. Developing a full understanding and give clear direction on how the new suite of VCSE qualifications can lead to more effective post-16 opportunities.
 4. Ensure that advice, information, and guidance given to schools fully meets the vision for curriculum for Wales and the new 14-16 learner entitlement.
- 2.16 To date, the working group has mapped out vocational provision across Swansea schools and identified where vocational qualifications are delivered in-house or through other providers. Estyn reports over that past year highlight the strength of school curricula and the offer of a broad range of academic and vocational courses to 14-16 year olds.
- 2.17 The sub-group has decided to look at providing support for the changes in 14-16 programmes as part of Curriculum for Wales. These changes will be in effect from 2027 and are:
1. The Full 14-16 Qualifications offer
<https://www.qualificationswales.org/regulation-reform/reforming/qualified-for-the-future/>
 2. The 14-16 learner entitlement (in Draft)
<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2024-02/14-to-16-statutory-learner-guidance.pdf>
- 2.18 We will work in partnership to ensure that schools have the necessary training, and access to facilities, equipment, and industry expertise to deliver the new set of qualifications. The delivery of this may be within the school premises or with another provider through collaborative working. The working group will discuss fully with schools where facilities are sought to be enhanced on site.
- 2.19 Gower College has recently opened 'The Green Hub' to deliver qualifications in landscaping, horticulture, and eco-construction to 14–16 year olds. This will not only benefit current cohorts, but looking ahead, to develop teaching through the new suite of VCSEs from 2027 onwards.
- 2.20 We have piloted a few events with Swansea University and University of Wales Trinity St David's to introduce young people to engineering and digital health care to support pathways into vocational education.

Workstream three: To establish collaborative partnerships to develop and deliver a wider range of high-quality post 16 programmes.

- 2.21 The purpose of this workstream is to establish effective partnerships to deliver a wider range of post-16 provisions for young people. We want all post-16 learners to be able to access worthwhile qualifications and progress to further learning in education or training, or into employment, as well as widening the choice of courses and improving equality of opportunity.
- 2.22 We aim to fully utilise the experiences gained through online and blended learning during the pandemic, by developing a post-16 delivery model for subjects that may not always be available for learners studying at sixth form or college. Virtual learning environments have the potential to extend the number of subjects offered by a provider while maintaining the quality and rigour of classroom-based teaching. Online models of curriculum delivery can encourage collaboration, reduce the challenge of transport between sites, increase the number of learners studying subjects with lower take-up such as modern foreign languages and increase equity of provision across schools and settings.
- 2.23 The key activities and deliverables are likely to include, but are not limited to:
1. Reviewing and evaluating the post-16 learner voice survey, completed in 2023.
 2. Giving clear direction to the partnership models adopted across Swansea post-16 providers.
 3. Developing an online model of post-16 provision across all providers.
- 2.24 To date, the sub-group has met to discuss key findings of the school's sixth form learner voice survey from 2023. Discussions centred around the feasibility of a wider collaborative model of post-16 provision; however, the challenges of common timetables, shared staffing and transport barriers were considered too great to develop in traditional way.
- 2.25 Therefore, the decision was made to explore a collaborative online delivery model for a few minority A-level subjects, that could be offered across providers in an after-school slot. This was approved by headteachers in October 2023.
- 2.26 The online offer is a collaboration between sixth forms and Gower College for courses to be taught from September 2024. Four courses will be trialled in A-Level Classical Civilisation, Further Mathematics, French and Welsh. The post-16 collaborative offer is dependent on several factors including student take-up, staff engagement, technology, school/ college promotion, and clear communication.

Summary

- 2.27 The refreshed approach to the SSP with new workstreams has seen a strong level of engagement from partners from all organisations. Workstreams have already had a positive impact to support vocational and employability skills, enhance progression opportunities and support learner aspirations.

3. Legal implications

3.1 There are no legal implications.

4. Finance Implications

4.1 There are no finance implications.

5. Equality and Engagement Implications

5.1 This report is for information only and an IIA is not therefore required.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Swansea Skills Partnership Terms of Reference