



To:
Councillor Jennifer Raynor
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning and Skills

BY EMAIL

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Dyddiad:

Summary: This is a letter from the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 17 December looking at the Swansea Skills Partnership and the Covid situation in Education.

Dear Cllr Raynor,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 17 December 2020

We would like to thank you and the Interim Director of Education Helen Morgan Rees, Cllr Robert Smith and members of the Swansea Skills Partnership for attending our meeting. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

Swansea Skills Partnership

We found this discussion with members of the Swansea Skills Partnership very useful, helping us to understand its role, the progress being made and the added value of having such a Partnership in Swansea.

We were pleased to hear about some of the positive outcomes from this partnership working including in particular digital learning, recognising this links closely to the City Deal project but that is has also been essential in the current Covid situation. We were also interested to hear about the focus on careers advice and guidance for learners.

We were keen to hear about the digital platform called 'My Choice' that has been developed. We were told that until now all advice and guidance for vocational learning was in different places, now with this platform, Year 11's are able to access it all in one place. We recognise that it is also beneficial for schools when looking to gain impartial

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advice and guidance. We were glad to hear that pupils can access all the common applications forms for 6th Form, Colleges and work based learning too as well as learners being able see what is happening in Swansea, possible future opportunities and links to other websites. We welcomed the news that Welsh Government are looking at the Platform to see how it can be shared as good practice for others to use.

We were told digital learning and capacity has changed completely over the past 9 months. We emphasised the importance of young people being able to find out what digital careers are out there and will be available in the future especially with the new arena and City Deal. We felt it was important that young people in Swansea are skilled enough to get the top jobs as well as other available roles as opportunities arise from these projects. We also heard about the importance of continuing professional development for teachers, colleges and universities in how lessons are taught and the pedagogy around incorporating devices and technology into learning.

The Panel was pleased to hear that the Partnership was exactly what the Education Policy Development Committee (PDC) had had in mind when it made its recommendation to Cabinet in 2018. The Panel agreed with the Chair of the Policy Development Committee when he said a vocational element should form part of every child's educational experience. He said he was happy with what the partnership has delivered but that it will now needs to be a dynamic, able to change and evolve as required, including developing the new curriculum linked to general work based skills.

The Panel felt it was vital to include the business community on the Partnership and would like to see this progressed, which was something originally raised by the PDC. You told us that the strength of the partnership is having organisations on it that have their fingers on the pulse as far as the business community is concerned like for example colleges who have food links with employers. Also that there needs to be a broader perception of what employment in the future is about, for example employers need applicants to be flexible, with good transferable skills and able to market themselves.

The work of the Partnership is evolving and it will be important to keep up momentum. We heard that Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) has been identified as an item that would benefit from a focus from the Partnership. The example of the good work on NEET at Pentrehafod Comprehensive School was raised, which we felt shows what can be achieved by one school in partnership, so with all partners involved a lot more can be achieved.

We were pleased to hear about the commitment, knowledge and experience that individual members of the Partnership are bringing to the table, working together, to improve the learning and opportunities of young people in Swansea.

We asked about whether there was any duplication of effort with other Partnerships and were informed that there are other partnerships where there is some overlap but this is not duplication and is beneficial to Swansea, like for example work around the new curriculum and a developing a good quality learning offer. There has been some benefit from regional programmes afforded by the region.

We heard that the Partnership has worked well having representation from outside of Swansea like Neath Port Talbot Colleges and that it is positive to be able to work across borders and with a wide range of partners to the benefit of our learners. We were told for the Partnership to now improve and progress further they will now need to revisit the purpose, priorities and original intentions moving forward and that would include more fresh thinking including involvement from the business community.

We were pleased to hear about the positive impact the Partnership is having especially in relation to digital learning and the careers platform My Choice. The Panel look forward to seeing how the Partnership develops in the future by building on these good early foundations. We would emphasise the importance of engaging the local business community and the need to look to include them in the partnership moving forward. We agreed that it would be highly beneficial to see a focus on NEET which will be a vital area that can be influenced by all partners. We would like to thank all those who attended the meeting which has enabled us to see a clearer route map for the future of the Partnership.

Covid and our Education Services

We were told in December there was a ministerial directive for schools to move to remote learning and that attendance levels in schools had already plummeted to 44% prior to that directive. We heard that 92 out of the 94 schools in Swansea had been affected by positive cases with the highest incident school having 69 cases, with a number of schools having above 25 cases. There has been 938 positive cases so far in schools plus more children out of school self-isolating. We recognise the disruption has therefore been significant. We would again like to thank the Education Department and Schools for the amazing job they are doing at this very difficult time.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised but would ask for a response to the following point by 2 February

1. Can you tell us how you plan to select and include representatives from the business community as an integral part of the Partnership and what the timescale for this might be?

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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