



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Education, Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board
Thursday 25th May 2023

Report of the Head of Education Development – Christopher Millis

Matter for Information

Wards Affected:

All Wards

Report Title: Neath Port Talbot Seren Hub

Purpose of the Report:

To provide Members with a summary of the Neath Port Talbot Seren Hub.

Executive Summary:

The report provides detail of Neath Port Talbot Seren Hub which began in 2016 and the progress to date.

Background:

The Seren network was set up in Neath Port Talbot in 2016. It was part of the Welsh Government initiative aimed at guiding the brightest students to applications to Oxbridge and other top (Russell Group) universities. Neath Port Talbot started within the Bridgend/Neath Port Talbot/ Powys Hub. In 2018 during a restructure of Seren it was recognised as an individual hub. From 2023 it will also be part of the South Central Wales Seren region.

In 2016 47 students in year 12 claimed places on the Seren programme. The eligibility then was based on having at least 4 A*s and 4 A's out of their best 8 GCSE results. As the majority of students in NPT attend either 3-16, or 11-16 schools it was apparent very early that a programme of guidance for students prior to entry into 12 was required. As a hub leading on developments in pre 16 NPT became part of the national pilot of the Seren Foundation programme (years 8-11) in 2019. From 2021 the NPT

coordinator was also asked to lead on the development of the National Foundation programme across Wales.

The programme is based on 2 strands:

1. Supporting students with advice and guidance on choosing and applying to Oxbridge, Russell Group Universities and other competitive courses.
2. Providing stretch and challenge sessions for students that support the development of 'Super curricular' thinking in students (a requirement when applying for competitive courses).

Seren activities

Seren provides students in NPT with a unique programme of activities from year 8-13. These are extra-curricular activities built around extending what learners experience in the classroom to help students develop and extend the skills they require to make applications to highly competitive universities and courses. These include:

- Critical Thinking
- Problem Solving
- Presentation skills
- Academic flair – often called super curricular, which is building a passion for a subject through reading and research beyond that of the curriculum
- Strategies for achieving the top grades at GCSE and A Level
- Preparing for the time pressures of Admissions tests to many Russell Group universities
- Developing the confidence at presenting and building an argument required in interviews for Russell Group Universities

Some students will join the programme in year 8 and continue until year 13, while others will join later or finish earlier. The programme has been designed to allow students in each year group to develop and enhance their 'seren skills'. The activities include:

- Visits to top universities (Russell Group) e.g. Bath, Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham and Cardiff.
- Collaboration with Welsh universities to help provide students with guidance on what courses are available and to build their 'super curricular' understanding e.g. Swansea University have provided a day for year 9

pupils looking at post graduate medicine degree options, Aberystwyth University provide a series of Maths sessions for year 12 students.

- Critical thinking workshops.
- Year 9 Debate competition
- Use of Talk the Talk workshops in all schools to help build confidence in Oracy in year 8
- Seren masterclasses in year 10 developed to help students understand A Level courses in subjects not offered at GCSE
- Masterclasses for all year groups offered by MIT
- Allowing students access to the national Seren programme devised by Welsh Government and hosted through the Gofod website.
- Support for year 12 students facing additional application stages e.g. early entry of UCAS forms, admissions tests and interviews

(The full NPT programme for years 8-13 for 2023/4 is attached at Appendix A)

Progress to date

- Collaboration exists across all schools to provide a programme of bespoke opportunities for Seren Learners. This collaboration has worked across all schools and NPTC Group of Colleges to provide support and advice and guidance for all students.
- More links have been established with universities in delivery of the Seren programme. However, these universities have also worked with schools individually to provide advice and guidance to students not in the Seren programme.
- In September 2023 164 Students in NPT have gained the results to be offered places on the NPT Seren programme (though some may have chosen to take up places for post 16 study in other hubs and NPT do have students from schools in Swansea on their post 16 Seren programme). This is 10% of the overall cohort and above the average in most hubs. This has seen an increase of 71% on the number of students achieving high enough grades in NPT to be offered a place on the programme

- Of the 164 students, 100 students have achieved 6A*s or more. The breakdown of the total number this school is:

School	Total students	Percentage of school cohort
Cefn Season	14	7%
Cwmtawe	24	11%
Dwr Y Felin	45	21%
Llangatwg	12	7%
St Joseph's	15	13%
Ysgol Bae Baglan	11	5%
Ystalyfera	24	12%
Ysgol Cwm Brombil	19	9%

- The number of students on the Seren Foundation programme in 2022/3 is:

Year	Total number of learners
Yr 8	225
Yr 9	196
Yr 10	203
Yr 11	214

- The numbers in Foundation indicate that NPT should be able to maintain higher numbers of learners on the Seren programme. Learners in year 13 were among the first on the pilot Foundation programme (launched in 2019) and have indicated in evaluations that the programme has helped inspire them to university choices through various visits and with masterclasses they have been able to make more effective choices for A Level study and when choosing universities to apply to.
- Seren students will often support younger learners in a number of ways, many in the Academy (years 12-13) will attend masterclasses and events held for Seren Foundation students. They have also helped out with events that are not aimed at Seren learners e.g. a number of Academy students attended the Future Female Leaders of NPT event for year 9 in Margam Orangery.

- More students are now making applications to Oxbridge. Currently there are 4 students in NPT holding offers for places either in Oxford or Cambridge out of the 20 students that applied. This is an average of 1 in 4 students. The average number of offers compared to applications for Oxbridge is 1 in 6. This year 3 of the offers have been for languages courses.
- The destination data of all Seren learners has shown that students are now making more applications to the top Russell Group/Sutton trust universities (on average 80-90% per year).
- In 2023 year 9 pupils in 3 Seren Hubs (NPT, Carmarthen/Ceredigion/Pembrokeshire and Swansea) competed in an inaugural regional debate competition. NPT schools achieved first and second place at the competition.

Next steps for Seren:

- To continue to build the programme, with a more bespoke programme for students wishing to make applications to medicine, dentistry and Veterinary Science to begin in September 2023 (due to the increasing numbers of students wanting to apply to these courses).
- To continue to work collaboratively across all schools to provide more opportunities for students across Seren (but that can also be used in schools for other students).
- To embed the new Seren national programme that will begin for year 8 in January 2024. This will include a new programme for Creative Arts and Sports students.

Financial Impacts:

- No implications

Integrated Impact Assessment:

- The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to “pay due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- There is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment as this is a matter for information

Valleys Communities Impacts:

All Neath Port Talbot schools are included within this report

Workforce Impacts:

- No implications

Legal Impacts:

- No implications

Consultation:

- 'There is no requirement for external consultation on this item'

Recommendations:

- Matter for information. No recommendations are required.

Implementation of Decision:

- Matter for information. No decisions are required.

Appendices:

Appendix A – an overview of the Seren programme 2023/4

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Appendix A - Overview of Seren activities NPT 2023/4

	Autumn Term 1	Autumn Term 2	Spring Term 1	Spring Term 2	Summer Term 1	Summer Term 2
Year 8 – focus on developing Oracy		Welcome Meeting and critical thinking masterclass (Dec) ending with an elevator pitch	Talk the Talk days – workshop for each school (developing Confident Communication)		GCSE Choices talk – what is asked for by top universities?	NPT debate camp – preparation for year 9
Year 8 National programme (WG)	Seren Award		Seren Star Challenge			
Year 9 – focus on building critical thinking skills and ability to speak publically		NPT Debate Competition – ability to present ideas, think critically and build a counter argument ‘on the go’ (mimic of an interview)	Online Philosophy course – developing thinking skills	National Seren debate Final	Bath University Visit – courses at a Russell Group University National Film and Television School visit – top careers in the Creative industries in production and post production.	
Year 9 National programme (WG)	Seren Award		Seren Star Challenge			
Year 10 – focus on developing knowledge of A Levels to help bridge the gap between GCSE and A Level	Masterclass sessions 4.30-6pm every week (6 weeks). These will be offered in; Biology, Chemistry, Law, Psychology and Sociology				Visit to Oxford University – Myths of attending Oxbridge and developing your thinking skills. A Level choices talk (before summer taster events) on what a Russell group university will say are facilitating A Levels	
Year 10 National programme (WG)			Seren Star Challenge			
Year 11 – focus on preparing for A Level and GCSE preparation	Masterclass sessions 4.30-6pm every week (4 weeks). These will be offered in; Physics, Maths, History and Geography (not for current year 10 when going into year 11)		Aim High session – developing knowledge of how to achieve A/A* at GCSE			
Year 11 National programme (WG)			Seren Star Challenge		Summer Schools – Oxford, Aber, Stemhaus, Aber Vets	
Year 12 – focus on developing super curricular portfolios and making the correct	Welcome Meeting and critical thinking masterclass	1.Workshop Evening Nov/Dec – students will chose 1 workshop from a	1.Workshop Evening Jan/Feb students will chose 1 workshop from a range of STEM,	1.Workshop Evening March students will chose 1 workshop from a range of	1.UCAS Exhibitions visit (mix of Seren and year 12 students)	1.What to do with your summer? Conference day (to include admissions test and personal statement talks for competitive universities)

choices for university applications		range of STEM, Humanities, Social Sciences often delivered by University Academics 2.Oxbridge preparation talk 3.Applying to Seren summer schools session 4.Medicine applications talks	Humanities, Social Sciences often delivered by University Academics 2.Aberystwyth Maths sessions 3.Oxford University Visit	STEM, Humanities, Social Sciences often delivered by University Academics		2.Visit to Cambridge University 3.Workshop on developing interview confidence 4. Day of specific Admissions test preparation
Year 12 National*		National Conference	Seren Award London Visit		Cambridge Webinars and talks	Summer school – Jesus College, Oxford and International in collaboration with MIT/Yale/Harvard Admission Test prep
Year 13 – focus for students who need additional application stages e.g. admissions tests and interviews or who need further support with UCAS applications*	Interview Preparation and second half of workshop on developing interview Mop up for admissions tests	Seren events often end by the Spring Term of year 13 to allow for a concentration on A Levels but bespoke opportunities can be offered as and when needed.				

*There are often more National opportunities in years 12 and 13 which students are made aware of directly through the Seren Space (Gofod) website.