

# Wolverhampton Adult Education Service

## Focused monitoring visit report

---

**Unique reference number:** 55413

**Name of lead inspector:** Andy Harris HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 3 November 2010

**Type of provider:** Local Authority  
Wolverhampton Adult Education Service  
City Learning Quarter

**Address:** Old Hall Street  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 3AU

**Telephone number:** 01902 556556

## **FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Context and focus of visit**

Wolverhampton Adult Education Service (WAES) provides a wide range of accredited and non-accredited courses across Wolverhampton. Courses are run in WAES's own specialist centres and in a large number of community venues. WAES also offers Train to Gain vocational training programmes, including health and social care, and supporting teaching and learning in schools and children and young peoples' workforce, though this is a very small proportion of the service's output.

At the previous inspection in January 2009 the service was judged to be good overall, with all aspects also judged as good. Two of the four subject areas directly inspected were graded as good, two as satisfactory. This monitoring visit was partly triggered by data suggesting some outcomes were below expectations. The report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**What progress has been made in better using learner, partner and employer feedback to improve service and curriculum planning?**

**Significant progress**

Although the previous inspection judged WAES's capacity to improve as good, WAES's 2008/09 self-assessment report identified the need to use learner, partner and employer feedback better. WAES has made significant progress to improve the quantity, relevance and timeliness of learners' feedback, and to act on it, and has maintained a constructive dialogue with partners and employers.

Evaluation of learner feedback is now firmly linked to a mid-term process, rather than an end-of-year system. Improvement actions now benefit the current learners, and can be used to influence the planning for the next cohort. WAES has initiated a two-week focus on learner feedback called the 'Big Chat', with learners being encouraged to provide comments in different ways, including privately through designated suggestion boxes, or through putting comments on sticky labels and adding them to visual displays of feedback themes. WAES was able to feed back to learners about actions which had been taken as a result of their comments, and also ran a focus group to explore three of the key topics further.

This experience has been so successful there are plans to repeat it in the new academic year and use the feedback as part of the self-assessment process.

## Outcomes for learners

**What progress has been made in improving the success rates for long course provision, particularly in ICT, and how far have the rates for completion within planned timescales for Train to Gain learners improved?** **Significant progress**

WAES has made significant progress in improving success rates. In 2008/09 some inaccurate data, as WAES switched management information systems, depressed published success rates slightly. However, whether using the published data or WAES's own material, success rates for 2009/10 show significant improvements in almost all areas. Notable progress has been made in computing courses, driven by thorough quality improvement systems. They include a change from a workshop format to more tutor-led delivery for some courses, and more programmes specifically aimed at learners' needs. Change in accredited preparation for life and work and business administration programmes have also resulted in significant improvements in outcomes, with an outstanding success rate of 92% predicted in the preparation for life and work area for 2009/10. This reflects improvements in initial assessment, classes better matching learners' skills levels, staff development and better attendance monitoring.

For Train to Gain programmes, the completion rate within planned timescales also show a significant improvement, moving from an unusually low level, for WAES, of 41% in 2008/09 to a good 81% at the end of the current year. This mainly reflects the identification of, and dealing with, aspects of the delivery of a new health and social care programme that the service took on in 2008/09.

## Quality of Provision

**What progress has been made in improving individualised learner targets?** **Reasonable progress**

In two of the subject areas where the setting of individual targets had been identified as an area for improvement in the previous report, considerable progress has been made. In arts, craft and media, external training has helped tutor's approaches to individual target-setting and monitoring of progress in non-accredited provision. In the mostly accredited modern foreign languages provision, a peer review approach has been used to help learners choose appropriate individual targets. Arts, craft and media tutors have been able to improve the approach for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, using pictorial rather than written methods where possible. Both subject areas have found that learners and their tutors have welcomed the new approach and found it motivational. However, the new approach has not been shared effectively with other subject areas, except Access courses.

At the time of the previous inspection, target-setting in literacy and numeracy courses was seen as good, but the setting of individual targets, in discussion with the learner, has not developed enough since then. Although achievement of qualifications is good, learners are not benefitting from the setting and monitoring of individual targets which have meaning for their own lives and aspirations.

**What progress has been made in consistently applying attendance policies in some courses to encourage retention?**

**Significant progress**

At the previous inspection attendance was judged as satisfactory. However WAES identified that consistently applying attendance policies could be a key feature in improving retention. There has been significant progress in this area. Tutors are now much more aware of the importance of careful monitoring of attendance, and early intervention after absences. They employ a variety of methods to contact and encourage learners back into lessons after absence. Learners are fully aware of the importance of regular attendance and how their continuation into the next term or progression to other programmes, may be limited if they do not achieve attendance of, for example, 80%. Managers review class attendance directly with tutors on a four-weekly basis, and data is well recorded and analysed. The review is part of the extensive and rigorous quality improvement regime at WAES, and helps lead to both short-term remedial action and better long-term planning. Retention rates in 2009/10 have either remained at high levels or in many areas have improved well on the previous year. For instance retention in ICT has gone from 60% to 93%, business administration from 73% to 85%, and arts, media and publishing has managed to improve from 92% to 96%.

**What progress has been made in extending employability training?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, changes in funding have encouraged WAES to alter its approach to ensuring it meets the employability training needs of the area. This has led to closer work with employers and partner organisations to identify projects which provide training to meet employers' needs and improve learners' prospects of gaining employment or moving into self-employment. WAES now works on projects funded through the Department of Work and Pensions and Advantage West Midlands, the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, other departments within the local council, particularly economic development, as well as the Skills Funding Agency. These partnerships ensure that learners have a wide range of employability training options available through the consortia of agencies which WAES leads and supports. For example, one partner, Access to Business, offers self-employment training to WAES learners, while WAES provides Skills for Life training to their national vocational qualification learners.

As part of the improved emphasis on employability, managers have started to offer literacy, numeracy and language training across the provision, to improve learners'

qualifications and job prospects. Some 'English as an additional language' classes include employability content such as interview skills and creating curriculum vitae, and learners are increasingly opting for further, non-language courses, to improve their employment prospects.

## **Leadership and management**

### **What progress has been made in improving facilities available to learners?**

### **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection WAES has made reasonable progress in rationalising its estate, and improving facilities. In the most recent learners' survey most of the complaints were about heating at one centre, which has now been closed with the provision being relocated to different sites across Wolverhampton. WAES has successfully continued to build on the strategy noted at the time of the original inspection, of providing centres in the deprived areas of the city so that learners could attend classes in their own neighbourhoods.

Extensive renovation has taken place at the sites WAES is continuing to use. Entry phones with integral cameras ensure learners' safety in the different sites. Improved resources are now available for literacy, numeracy and English language courses, although in some sites new interactive whiteboards are not yet fully functional. There is plenty of storage space for bulky equipment needed for art, crafts and media, and extra space has enabled new courses to be offered.

A previous problem of poor acoustics in a newly renovated classroom used for foreign language teaching has been resolved by the addition of a fabric covered room divider, and the provision of better quality loudspeakers.

Despite WAES' commitment to sustainability and the associated encouragement to reduce the use of cars, not all the new sites offer covered, secure cycle parking.

### **What progress has been made in fully implementing safeguarding arrangements?**

### **Insufficient progress**

The previous inspection highlighted concerns with respect to safeguarding, including incomplete criminal record bureau checks. The service now checks new staff, and is working through checks of existing staff using a priority system. It is expected that this will not be finished until March 2011, over two years since the previous inspection and progress on this important work is insufficient. In other safeguarding aspects WAES is making generally reasonable progress. Clear, appropriate policies and guidance have been issued. Briefings, down to tutor level, should have ensured that staff are aware of this material and their responsibilities. Learners now have satisfactory references to safeguarding through material in handbooks, induction and posters. Physical security and health and safety aspects have continued to improve,

and learners feel safe. A designated person has been appointed, and staff and learners are aware of her role. Referrals that have been made have been dealt with appropriately. Good use is made of safeguarding expertise and resources in the wider council. The service properly continues to develop plans, particularly for tutors, for more formal training to develop their basic awareness of safeguarding. However, this review of further training is taking too long to complete and implement.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 1231231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 1231231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2010