

# The Oldham College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130505

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**Last day of inspection:** 30 March 2011

**Type of provider:** General further education college

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

The Oldham College is a medium sized general further education college, operating from a main site in the town centre, an adjacent construction centre and a business development unit. A large proportion of learners come from areas that are categorised as disadvantaged. The proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSE grades at A\* to C is below the national average. The college specialises in vocational provision and offers courses in a wide range of vocational areas from pre-entry to advanced level. In 2009/10 the college enrolled 4,909 adult learners and 3,169 students aged 16 to 18, the majority of whom were full-time learners. In addition, the college delivered apprenticeships in twelve subject areas and 3,600 trainees started on a Train to Gain programme, much of which was delivered by subcontractors. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is above that of the local population. The college sponsors one of the three academies that have been established in Oldham.

The college was inspected in 2007 and found to be outstanding overall. Outcomes for apprentices were good and satisfactory for Train to Gain programmes. The college is currently undergoing a period of significant strategic and management change in response to local, regional and national priorities. A new principal took up post in February 2010 and further staff restructuring is underway. The monitoring visit focused on the following themes.

### Themes

**To what extent has the college maintained an effective self-assessment process?**      **Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection, the college identified that the self-assessment process was not giving a clear enough picture of areas for improvement on specific courses. In order to address this, the college has revised the process and implemented extensive training for staff at curriculum level. Staff now have much greater ownership of self-assessment, as a real tool, to drive improvement rather than a college system with which they complied. Evidence to underpin judgements is moderated rigorously, leading to lower grades in a few subject areas in the 2009/10 self-assessment report than in previous years. Actions put in place to address areas for improvement now have sharp targets and progress is monitored regularly throughout the year. Evidence from attendance and retention data in 2010/11 and from students' feedback demonstrates improvement in most subject areas that were identified as underperforming in the previous year.

**What progress has the college made in maintaining or further improving success rates?****Reasonable progress**

In 2009/10, the college made substantial progress in improving the success rates on short courses, which was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. It has also improved success rates in apprentice and Train to Gain provision. These are now above the national average, both in terms of overall success rates and the extent to which trainees achieve within their planned timescale. Success rates on long courses for students aged 16 to 18 and for adults remain above the national average but to a lesser degree than at the last inspection. The strongest performance is at foundation level, whereas at advanced level success rates are much closer to the national average. The college has recognised the need to strengthen systems to measure the progress made by learners against their starting points on entering the college. Measures put in place to address this are providing staff and managers with much improved data on the progress of individual students, but it is too early to see an overall college analysis from this work.

**To what extent does the college system for monitoring teaching and learning promote improvement?****Reasonable progress**

The college's lesson observation process identifies areas of underperformance, where the proportion of good or better teaching is lower than for the college overall. Teachers receive high levels of support, including help from learning coaches, to improve their lessons following observation. Specific targets are in place to promote and measure improvements. The college's grade profile for good or better teaching shows year-on-year improvement. Students' feedback is positive about the quality of teaching in the majority of lessons. Joint observations with inspectors, carried out during the visit, indicate that college judgements are broadly accurate. The college's moderation process has identified some confusion between judgements on teachers' input and the extent to which learning is taking place. There has been some improvement in the grades for lessons delivered by agency staff but this remains below the college's overall profile. The framework for observing teaching and learning has been extended recently. It now includes key learning processes such as information, advice and guidance sessions and support lessons. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this development.

**What progress has the college made in improving the consistency of tutorials?****Reasonable progress**

Joint observations carried out during the visit indicate reasonable progress to improve the effectiveness of tutorials. A comprehensive action plan, to promote consistency of content and delivery, is being implemented and monitored rigorously. The college now observes group tutorials and individual progress reviews. A traffic-lights system is used to identify where inconsistencies remain in the quality of tutorials. Progress review coordinators provide a high level of support for tutors to improve target setting for learners and recording of progress. This is supported by an extensive range of staff development activities to improve the tutorial processes.

Review of a sample of learners' records during the visit identified there is still some variation in the clarity of personal targets and the depth of recording progress. Feedback from students about tutorials is mainly positive. They highlight an increase in their tutorial time and a more structured approach to group tutorials, including useful inputs from external speakers.

**To what extent has the college maintained strengths in the promotion of equality and inclusion?**

**Significant progress**

The college continues to have a strong focus on equality and inclusion. It recruits a high proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Data are monitored rigorously to analyse the achievement of these learners, as well as comparing success rates by gender, ethnicity and disability. The college has maintained significant strengths in ensuring that, for the majority of learners, there is very little difference between the success rates of different groups. Where issues are found, reasons are identified and appropriate action put in place. For example, in 2009/10 success rates for male adult learners were lower than for females. Actions taken have led to increased retention of these students in 2010/11. Different groups of learners work well together in lessons. The college plays a significant role in the promotion of equality and inclusion within the local community. For example, since the last inspection the college has sponsored an Academy, which brings together two schools in Oldham that served the needs of different communities. One of the main aims of the Academy is to improve attainment for all the learners. Results from early entry for examinations in the current year indicate that strategies to achieve this are proving successful.

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