

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Walsall College  
Date of visit: 14 November 2006

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

### Achievement and standards

#### Current achievement and standards

- The 2004/05 college performance report indicated some aspects of performance were below national averages. Based on college data, the college has made significant improvements in performance in 2005/06. The overall success rate has improved to from 60% in 2004/05 to 74%. The success rates for learners' aged 16 to 18 on long courses have all shown significant improvements. At level 1 the success rate increased by 17% at level 2 and 3 by 9% points. Level 1 and 2 success rates are now above the national average and level 3 is broadly average. The success rates for adult learners on long courses have all also shown significant improvements. At level 1 the success rate increased by 32%, at level 2 by 21% and level 3 by 24%. Level 1 and 2 success rates are now above the national average and level 3 broadly average. The improvement in success rates is also reflected in the improved performance of males and females and learners from minority ethnic groups.
- The improvement in success rates reflects the college's detailed review and remodelling of the curriculum. The curriculum review has ensured provision is more appropriate to the needs of learners and providing value for money. Learners are increasingly provided with better guidance to enable them the access the right course.
- Key skills success rates declined in 2005/06 by 5% to be at the low national average.
- Attendance in 2005/06 improved from 72% in 2004/05 to 82%. This improvement highlights the focus at senior and course level on regular monitoring of attendance data. Attendance data is available to all staff via MIS. In 2005/06 the college employed attendance monitors to improve attendance. This academic year the college is no longer using the attendance monitors. Responsibility rests with course teams to monitor

and follow up attendance. The college now has clear procedures in place to tackle attendance and punctuality.

- The college uses Pro-achieve to compare and judge its performance. The college provides a detailed analysis of data at many different levels but the data analysis does not always incorporate the Ofsted college performance report.
- Success rates for learners aged 14 to 16 as part of the Increased Flexibility Project improved from 54% for cohort 1 to 66% for cohort 2.
- Overall success rates for work-based learning have improved and currently stand at around 50%. College figures suggest that the improvements are much greater. Apprentices in construction-related occupations have made the greatest progress. Their achievement of frameworks stands at around 60%. Key skills achievement is in line with the framework achievement. The college has consolidated workforce development training, including work-based learning, into a college company that has been very successful in driving up the demand for work-based learning as well as raising achievement levels and standards. Work-based learning has been rationalised. The managers have taken effective action to improve the management of the provision. Many new appointments of trainer assessors and contract managers have had a very positive effect on meeting challenging targets for recruitment and achievement. They provide effective assessment promptly to the learners. For example, e-portfolios are being developed in hairdressing, and learners are encouraged to produce a good range of evidence in a variety of media such as mobile phones and digital cameras. Achievement rates on level 2 qualifications on Train to Gain programmes, particularly in care and security industries, are very good at 83%. Entry to employment learners are making satisfactory progress.

## Quality of education and training

How effective have steps been to improve teaching and learning?

- The Advanced Practitioners carried out a range of staff development activities in 2005/06 to improve teaching and learning. These are well documented. However, there is no overall analysis of the impact of the work undertaken by Advanced Practitioners or an overview of their work in 2005/06. The college has worked closely with consultants to improve teaching and learning. The Association of College's report in May 2006 clearly identifies the college strengths and the further work the college

needs to undertake to embed the lesson observation process, develop the work of Advanced Practitioners and strategies to improve teaching and learning. The college has increased the number of Advanced Practitioners. The challenge for the college is to improve the number of lessons that are good or better. Managers have a clear overview of where the strongest and weakest teaching and learning takes place in the curriculum.

How effective is additional learning support?

- The last inspection identified the inadequate take-up of additional learning support in literacy and numeracy. The take-up of additional learning support has improved significantly; it has trebled in size since the last inspection. Initial assessment to identify the level of learners' literacy and numeracy skills is robust and comprehensive. Full-time learners aged 16 to 18 and adult learners undertaking substantial hours of study are screened before entry to college courses. Staff correctly identify their level of skills and allocate learners to the most appropriate courses. They communicate the results of the learners screening to vocational and course tutors and put in place a variety of study options to develop their skills. Learning support is provided in many formats. The college has invested in much good staff development to raise awareness. Tutors are now more able to identify ways in which they can use the skills of the support staff effectively. In addition, they are encouraged to develop their own skills through good quality, ongoing professional support from the Advanced Practitioners and essential skills staff. Learners achieve well in literacy and numeracy qualifications as well as in their main course of study. In 2005/06, 73% of the learners achieved literacy or numeracy qualifications and 78% also achieved their main qualifications. The main strength of the college's strategy has been to proactively identify the learners most in need and target the support effectively, including embedding it into the curriculum.

How effectively is the Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) performing?

- The college has had a CoVE in Healthcare since June 2005. The college has graded the health and social care and childcare provision as good. It recognises some weaknesses in the area. Some 15 new team members including 10 additional trainer/assessors have been appointed including a new head of school and a contract manager. This sector has a low skills base. The college has developed good partnerships in the local Learning and Skills Council region. A local project to develop the skills of unemployed people is very effective. Train to Gain and European Social Fund (ESF) learners have achievements in the region of 79% and 95% respectively. The number of work placement providers has increased.

Staff are collaborating effectively and the college has invested well in resources. A simulation centre gives learners a diverse range of experiences. Key skills achievement is low at 15%.

## Leadership and management

Update on the curriculum review and future strategic priorities of the college

- Curriculum provision has been reviewed based on performance, value for money and appropriateness. On this basis courses have been withdrawn. The curriculum review has remodelled the curriculum offered to meet the local and national skills agenda. New courses have been set up appropriately. The college has established 7 academies which are an integral part of a school. Academies have a strong focus on the development of industrial standard qualifications. Some innovative approaches to vocational skills development are taking place in the academies. Examples of current academies include the Apple academy, Microsoft academy, the Academy Health Club and Roland academy. Significant investment has been made in staff and resources to improve the learner experience and provide high quality learning environments. The academies have also strengthened employer engagement and the college works in partnership with many prominent industrial organisations such as Wella, Roland DG, Microsoft, and Apple.

Is the 2005/06 self-assessment report rigorous?

- The two curriculum areas graded inadequate in the last self-assessment report have improved and the college no longer judges them to be inadequate. Uniformed services have a different team of staff and community education has been rationalised.
- The revisions to the draft 2005/06 self-assessment report have created an improved and significantly more rigorous evaluation of the college's position on major areas. The 'MOT panels' have been a key mechanism by which to drive forward improvements. Courses with success rates under 60% are given an improvement notice. There are clear lines of accountability. The principal and senior managers demonstrate a clear vision and understanding of the strategies needed to improve the learners' experience and raise standards.

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

- The equality and diversity annual review for 2005/05 is comprehensive and encompasses the college's areas of excellent practice. A good range of monitoring measures is in place. Each school analyses equality and

diversity including an analysis of data by gender, widening participation, additional support and ethnicity.