

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Weston
Date of visit: 6-7 February 2007

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

What do enrolment and results data show for 2005/06?

- Enrolments for students in 2005/06 continued to grow for students aged 16 to 18. There was a planned decline in adult enrolments although numbers of adults designated by the government as priority areas (full level 2 courses and basic skills) grew further. The college has exceeded its planned budget numbers of students on roll by around 100 full-time students in both 2004/05 and 2005/06, and has curtailed some adult provision in order to accommodate this growth in full-time students aged 16 to 18.
- For students aged 16 to 18, success rates on all long courses were two percentage points above the national average in 2004/05; retention was average and pass rates were above average. This showed a picture of relative decline because improvements at the college had not kept pace with national improvements: in 2002/03 success rates for this age group had been 10 percentage points above the national average. In 2005/06 success rates rose further at all levels except on long courses at level 2. College data for 2005/06 show that at level 1 success rates improved significantly and are now well above the national average for 2004/05; at level 2 success rates fell one percentage point but remained above the national average for 2004/05; at level 3, which represents the largest volume of students in this age group, success rates rose four percentage points to well above the national average for 2004/05. Success rates on short courses also improved significantly and are well above the national average for 2004/05. Success rates on AS courses rose by two percentage points to just above the national average for 2004/05; and on A level courses they rose by five points to nine points above the national average for 2004/05.

- For adult students, success rates on all long courses were average in 2004/05 and had not recovered to the level of 2002/03 when they were well above average. In 2005/06 success rates rose to well above the national average for 2004/05. College data for 2005/06 show that at level 1 success rates improved by six percentage points to well above the national average for 2004/05; at level 2 success rates improved by seven percentage points to well above the national average for 2004/05; at level 3 success rates improved by one percentage point and are now just above the national average for 2004/05. Declining trends have been markedly reversed at levels 1 and 2, which represent by far the largest volume of adult students.
- Since the last inspection in 2005 the number of young people enrolled on work-based learning programmes has increased by over a third. The college is developing new work-based learning opportunities in animal care, information and communications technology (ICT) and sport and on teaching assistant programmes. The number of adult learners has declined steadily. Overall, learners' achievement of full apprenticeship frameworks has improved from 24% in 2003/04 to 55% in 2005/06 and is now above the national average for 2004/05. Overall and timely success rates for advanced apprentices have risen significantly to 76% and 74% respectively in 2005/06 and are now good, well above the national averages for 2004/05. Between 2003/04 and 2005/06, success rates for apprentices have risen from 23% to 49%, and they are now just below the national average. A number of measures are in place to improve this position further in 2006/07, with a particular focus on improving timely success rates. These include the better tracking of learners' progress, online assessment for technical certificates and key skills and an increase in the number of workplace assessors.

What do value added and distance travelled measures show for 2005/06?

- In 2004/05 value added measures showed that students made above average progress in their A levels when measured from their starting points after general certificates of education (GCSEs), placing the college in the top half of colleges of a similar type by this measure. On national diplomas, students made particularly good progress in visual and performing arts and media, but poor progress in ICT. Distance travelled

measures for 2004/05 showed that students made particularly good progress on national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2 in construction but poor progress in hairdressing and beauty therapy. In 2005/06 value added data for the three main qualification types at level 3 all show improvement, and for A levels and national diplomas the improvements are considerable. The AS positive value added score rose from 1.6 in 2004/05 to 1.8 in 2005/06. The A levels score rose from 1.8 to 6.0. For national diplomas, taken by the largest number of students, the value added score rose from 11.3 to 17.8. No subjects had statistically significant negative value added in 2005/06. Specific actions to improve the poor performance of students on national diplomas in ICT and public services have been effective, and the progress made by ICT students is now good. Distance travelled measures for 2005/06 were not available to the college at the time of this annual assessment visit.

- The college no longer subscribes to any commercial system for measuring students' progress against their starting points. It finds the national system (still in its pilot stage) for measuring value added and distance travelled very useful as a tool for indicating degrees of progress and for bringing about further improvements in students' performance.

Quality of education and training

What progress has been made in improving the provision for construction?

- Provision in construction, found to be unsatisfactory at the last inspection, was re-inspected at the same time as this annual assessment visit and was judged to be good. The re-inspection report gives fuller details.

What progress has been made in improving the setting of targets and the monitoring of students' progress?

- Target setting and the tracking of students' progress through their individual learning plans were judged to be under-developed at the last inspection. The senior tutor team has led developments to improve these

processes and their impact on students' performance. Standardisation of methodologies and documentation has been achieved insofar as the college considers it to be desirable without stifling local enterprise. Teachers and tutors have been trained further in how to set, monitor, use and measure students' progress in their development of a wide range of skills and competences. A small sample of current students' learning plans was scrutinised and found to contain thorough, practical and purposeful targets and goals which were being used effectively to help students make progress.

Has the college improved the quality and extent of the additional learning support that students receive?

- At the last inspection the extent and quality of the support students needed and received was not consistently satisfactory. In particular, some 8% of students who had been identified as needing additional learning support had not taken up the offer of support made in the form of discrete extra tutorials. Effective actions have been pursued to improve this position. The college's own analysis shows that those who do avail themselves of support now achieve success beyond the level of all other students. The success rate of those students identified as in need of additional support but who still do not take it up through the mechanism of discrete tutorials has risen from 3% to 75% as a result of covert strategies to provide support in alternative ways which students can less readily evade: teachers and tutors are better trained in how to be more aware of students' needs and therefore more supportive themselves in their lessons; liaison between teachers and learning support assistants has improved so that the former make better use of the latter in lessons; and sensitive, targeted support is offered more in lessons than outside them so that help is immediate and directly related to the learning at the time.

Leadership and management

How effectively has the college developed links and relations with employers?

- At the last annual assessment visit in 2006 the judgement was made that employers were still insufficiently informed about what off-the-job training entailed. The college's self assessment report for 2005/06 acknowledges that there is still a need to improve aspects of links with employers, including briefing them more effectively about their role in enabling more apprentices to succeed within agreed timeframes. A number of material improvements have been made recently. The college is developing a coherent employer engagement strategy to support the newly established Train to Gain programme for adults, to develop further its apprenticeship programmes and to extend the range of training it offers to employers. This work is now co-ordinated by the business enterprise centre. The college has established an employers' forum, is undertaking research into potential markets and has developed a comprehensive employer database. Managers are developing strategies to improve support for employers and to engage them more actively in supporting apprentices in the workplace. A programme for school students aged 14 to 16 developed in partnership with the college's feeder schools and a local employer provides coherent progression onto an apprenticeship programme for many of these younger students.

Are course reviews better now than they were at the time of the last inspection?

- At the last inspection inspectors found many course reviews to be unsatisfactory inasmuch as they did not focus on improving teaching, learning and students' achievements and did not identify actions to address weaknesses. Since then the college had reviewed the course review process and had put in place revised systems and documentation for the 2004/05 self assessment. At the last annual assessment visit in January 2006 inspectors judged that the process was good, but was not yet fully embedded as the quality of course reviews was uneven on the basis of those sampled. The quality of these reviews is now much less uneven, and the process has been further refined and staff further trained to try and ensure that course leaders write objectively and evaluatively with succinct underpinning evidence to support their judgements. Course reviews have improved as a consequence, and they remained fully owned by course leaders.

How rigorous and comprehensive are the college's overall self assessment and quality assurance processes?

- At the last annual assessment visit inspectors judged the self assessment process to be strong with clear auditable links between different levels of evaluative review and action planning. The draft self assessment report for 2005/06 is clearly structured and makes graded judgements, supported by summary evidence, against each key question and aspect of provision. Several key aspects are now graded as outstanding (curriculum, guidance and support, capacity to improve, leadership and management) or 'good to outstanding' (achievements and standards, overall effectiveness) although teaching and learning remain good. Two curriculum areas are also now graded as outstanding (arts and media and sport and public services) in addition to the outstanding grade maintained from the 2005 inspection by the areas for integrated and foundation studies for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All this points to a much improved college since the inspection of 2005. The endorsement of specific grades lies beyond the scope of the annual assessment, but the college has so far improved significantly in several respects since the last inspection and so the higher grades now awarded are realistic and carry considerable conviction. However, some key underpinning evidence to support some of these grades is not sufficiently highlighted as part of the summary self assessment report; and in a few cases links between the summary grades paragraphs and sections of the summary quality improvement plan are weak or absent. Occasionally, areas for improvement (for example, low retention rates on a number of hospitality and tourism courses) which are prominent in course reviews and division reports lose their prominence at the level of faculty review and summary quality improvement plan, and this risks giving them less attention at those levels than they merit.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

- N/A

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

Character and quality of leadership and management of the college at a time of considerable change

- The principal and senior leadership team set a very clear direction for the college's growth and development, in response to the priorities of both national government and the local community. Staff are fully consulted about change at all levels, and have excellent opportunities to contribute to the processes. For example, visual arts staff have been very closely involved in the design and construction of their purpose-built areas in the new premises at Loxton road. Leaders and managers at faculty, division and course levels have significant autonomy to develop provision in response to demand and there is considerable local delegation and accountability. As a result the college functions, as far as teaching staff are concerned, as an inclusive community led by a very visible and accessible senior team. An example of the principal's commitment to transparent management is the work of the corporate development group, which is charged to consider issues of human resources and relations and the environment of the college community as a whole and to make recommendations directly to the principal.

Accommodation developments

- The brand new site at Loxton Road is progressing to plan and is due for habitation from September 2007. This will house the majority of AS and A level provision and the whole of the visual and auditory arts curricula. Following its opening, significant refurbishment and some relocation (for example, construction) will take place on the main site.



Weston College

Better
education
and care

Re-inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

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Weston College

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Area of learning 05 - Construction

Introduction

Weston College was inspected in February 2005. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be unsatisfactory in construction and Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting unsatisfactory provision within two years of the original inspection.

The unsatisfactory provision in construction was re-inspected on 6/7 February 2007 and the outcome was as follows

Curriculum Area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Construction	4	2

Context

The College offers a wide and responsive range of craft provision at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Current programmes include carpentry and joinery, brickwork and electrical installation. At the time of re-inspection there were 78 full-time learners and 175 part-time learners enrolled. There are 86 work-based learners from the Construction Industry Training Board / Joint Training Limited attending construction programmes. In addition, practical taster courses are provided for school students aged 14 to 16.

Strengths

- high success rates on level 2 courses
- good standard of practical work
- effective use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support teaching and learning
- well developed flexible learning centre

Areas for improvement

- low retention on level 1 carpentry and joinery
- limited enrichment opportunities for learners

Achievements and standards

Achievements and standards are good. The overall success rate on construction courses is above the national average and has improved from 64% in 2003/04 to 71% in 2005/06. Success rates are particularly high on

courses at level 2. Learners' practical work is good. The success rate on the foundation construction award in carpentry and joinery is declining as a result of low retention.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning in construction are good. Lessons have improved since the last inspection with the introduction of interactive whiteboards and, following appropriate staff development; teachers use a good variety of strategies and techniques in lessons. Lessons are well planned. Practical skills are developed well, particularly in brickwork. Key skills are effectively integrated within the curriculum. Learners' individual progress is closely monitored so that they are able to develop in ways and at a pace best suited to them. Some learners are able to complete their courses early because of this carefully tailored approach. Teachers and support staff provide good guidance and support where necessary. Learners have frequent and easy access to ILT including an effective virtual learning environment (VLE) that allows for additional individual study. The flexible learning centre has been well developed to meet the needs of learners in construction; although these learners, based at the separate multi-skills site, currently have limited access to enrichment activities. The practical training workshops have been refurbished and extended to cope with increased demand in the construction trades but space is limited in the brick workshop.

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management are good. Recent changes at management level and a number of new teaching appointments have led to an improved overall performance. New teachers are well supported by an identified mentor to improve teaching and learning. The self assessment report accurately identifies the main strengths and weaknesses of the provision.