

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Wirral Metropolitan College
Date of visit: 30 January 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

Learners' achievements in 2005/06

- In 2005/06, success rates for adult learners increased at all levels and were well above 2004/05 national averages at levels 2 and 3, and slightly above the national average at level 1. Retention and pass rates at all levels were at least satisfactory, and some were significantly above national averages. Success rates for learners aged 16-18 improved at levels 2 and 3 but declined slightly at level 1. Success rates at all levels were below the 2004/05 benchmarks, and at levels 2 and 3 significantly so. Retention rates at levels 1 and 2 were above average, but retention was below average at level 3. Pass rates were well below average at levels 1 and 2 and slightly below average at level 3.

What progress has been made in improving the success rates of 16-18 year old learners?

- Although the overall success rates for learners aged 16-18 show that there has only been a small improvement, this is due to a mixed picture where some areas have made significant progress but others have made very limited progress. This can clearly be seen if success rates are analysed with two categories removed: results for courses that are being discontinued and those for the weakest performing curriculum area. The adjusted analysis shows improvements of 7 per cent at level 1, 11 per cent at level 2 and 12 per cent at level 3, with success rates being above the 2004/05 national averages at level 1, broadly in line at level 2 and below at level 3.
- The college is fully aware of the areas where progress is slow and has rigorous actions plans in place to address the issues. This issue is a priority for the college and progress is a standing agenda item at governors' meetings. The college is continuing its strategies of improving or removing courses, sharing good practice between areas, making sure all learners have effective induction so that they are placed on the most

appropriate course, thorough monitoring and focussing on improvements in teaching and learning.

What actions has the college taken to support the high success rates of adult learners and what has been their impact?

- The college has worked hard to ensure programmes are suitable for adult learners. There are very flexible modes of delivery to meet needs, for example, distance learning and there are effective support structures in place such as childcare support, financial assistance and welfare. In addition, the adult learners benefit from the strong focus on improving teaching and learning in the college. The impact of these actions is shown in the improving trend in adult success rates, which has been seen over the last four years, and the positive comparison with national averages at levels 1, 2 and 3.

What does the value-added system used within the college indicate about the progress made by learners?

- The college uses the gold card system, which was chosen to act as a support mechanism as well as a means of progress monitoring. The system is used to monitor a wide range of criteria and acts as link between pastoral and academic staff. It is used in all parts of the college, although some areas use it to greater effect than others. Its main function is to monitor the progress of individual learners and ensure that interventions can be made, where necessary, and it does this effectively. It is being further developed to strengthen the use of SMART targets.

What progress has been made in the success rates for basic/key skills, the latter being a key focus for action in the SAR?

- Overall performance of key skills in 2004/2005 for learners was poor, with many rates well below national levels. Consequently, key skills within the curriculum have been a focus of action with the college quick to identify and address the underpinning issues. A range of strategies are in place such as one stop registration, increased use of on-line testing and better analysis of learner readiness for enrolment. Recent analysis of awarding body data has given the college a 60% achievement against a national rate of 50% for 2005/2006 with work still under claim. The college is implementing a strategy to embed key skills across the college with a dedicated Skills for Life trainer.
- Skills for Life qualifications for literacy and numeracy at levels 1 and 2 were at or above national rates for 2004/05 and showed an improving

trend for 2005/2006. The college has been successful in delivering Skills for Life qualifications in the community, enabling neighbourhood renewal targets to be met.

- Data for 2004/2005 showed ESOL as an area of concern. This is in line with the college analysis that reports ESOL retention and achievement as being below national rates in 2005/06. The main reason for this is the college changing awarding body status, resulting in claims for partial rather than full achievements for many learners. The college has now addressed this issue.

Quality of education and training

A college focus for action point is to improve the proportion of good or better teaching and to reduce the proportion of satisfactory teaching. What progress has been made in this area?

- The college has strong systems for supporting improvement through the observations of teaching and learning. In February 2006 the observation policy was renewed with support from the unions. It now links to the appraisal system, staff development and training and includes systems to support underperformance with appropriate interventions. Data from the observations carried out across curriculum areas are used effectively to plan individual and generic staff development and training. Evidence shows the specific work of learning and teaching champions is impacting positively on particular programme areas selected for support.
- Unsatisfactory teaching has decreased overall by 7% and the learning and teaching champions are now focussed on the satisfactory grades of teaching and learning. A core development programme engages both teaching and support staff and includes guidance and training on standards and best practice. External observations are used as a profile to benchmark internal consistency and a moderation process ensures consistency of grading.

Employer engagement is a strong focus for action in the SAR. What are the recent developments in this area and what is their impact?

- Employer engagement is a key priority for the college. The vice principal for quality, learning and skills has developed a curriculum strategy and rationale which outlines the curriculum potential and resource implications for developments in this area. Overall responsibility for customer relationship management is led by the vice principal for finance and

resources. The college is now working closely with its subsidiary company Scientiam to consolidate a joint strategy for employer engagement. Under the banner 'College for Business' both organisations plan to share good practice and develop a co-ordinated approach to funding applications in order to rationalise delivery and reduce competition. A joint bid for Train 2 Gain was recently submitted to the LSC.

- The college has very good employer engagement at curriculum level through the health and social care, and construction subject areas. The two Centres of Vocational Excellence have been successful in developing a range of flexible and responsive programmes customised for employers. Good use has been made of cross department links to provide additional qualification in Health and Safety and Basic skills. These areas have very good links with industry, partner and other relevant organisations and have been successful in delivering full-cost recovery programmes with good results.

How are strategies in the care, guidance and support of learners being developed to promote high levels of success?

- There is a wide range of strategies used to promote the success of learners. Firstly, information is used well to ensure learners are enrolled on the most appropriate courses with on-line enrolment enabling staff to identify on support issues quickly and to put appropriate support in place early. The linking of learning mentors to curriculum areas has raised the awareness of all staff to the support available for learners and this has resulted in quicker referrals, better identification of support needs, and support being put in place more promptly. Issues are more often picked up early, before they become major problems, and there is less demand for the crisis team to deal with emergencies. In addition there are strong links with other agencies to support learners. The impact of support is monitored, for example, on attendance and retention, and this shows positive results.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the issues raised at the last annual assessment visit (consistency and rigour of quality assurance,

college data in certain areas, learner attendance and punctuality and its monitoring)?

- Quality assurance systems are consistent, rigorous and can show impact. The process can be followed through from identification of issues, through action planning and monitoring of actions to the impact on learner outcomes. This can be seen, for example in curriculum areas such as hospitality & catering, and business, management & computing, which have improved their success rates from below to above national averages.
- There is greatly increased confidence in data at all levels and areas in the college. It is used to highlight good practice, identify areas for improvement, monitor progress and show impact of actions.
- An electronic system was introduced to record attendance in autumn 2006. There is now much better access to data and it can be aggregated in a variety of ways, making it easier to monitor and pick up on issues and intervene where necessary. The system can also be used to monitor punctuality. As yet it is too soon after its introduction to see overall impact on learner attendance and punctuality.