

RE-INSPECTION OF WALSALL COLLEGE OF ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

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Outcome of Re-Inspection

The overall provision in construction is now **satisfactory**.

The overall provision in engineering is now **satisfactory**.

The overall provision in information and communications technology (ICT) is now **satisfactory**.

Background

Walsall College of Arts and Technology was inspected in May 2003. 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 satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in construction, engineering and information and communications technology curriculum areas which were found to be less than satisfactory.

Ofsted and the ALI have particular duties in relation to colleges where their inspection report indicates that individual curriculum and/or work-based learning (WBL) areas are unsatisfactory or very weak or where leadership and management are unsatisfactory or very weak. Where a college has been judged to have less than satisfactory leadership and management, or less than satisfactory provision in solely WBL, inspectors from Ofsted or the ALI will visit the college to carry out monitoring inspections of the less than satisfactory areas. As a result of the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors may judge that previously less than satisfactory areas of provision, or leadership and management, are now satisfactory and that no further visits are required. Where leadership and management are satisfactory, but there is curriculum provision that is less than satisfactory, there will be no monitoring visits. All less than satisfactory provision will be re-inspected, normally during one week, within two years of the original inspection.

If, after approximately 24 months, the college has not made sufficient progress to justify a judgement that the curriculum or WBL area or leadership and management are satisfactory, the original grade for the area that continues to be unsatisfactory will remain on the college's record until the next full inspection within the cycle. Ofsted will inform the local LSC that provision remains unsatisfactory and the reasons why.

Date of the Re-Inspection Visit

In accordance with the above procedures, re-inspection of construction, engineering and information and communications technology took place on 16-20 May 2005.

Construction

In the May 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- excellent facilities at the Green Lane campus
- good employer links.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention and pass rates
- poor teaching
- inadequate support for learners
- unsatisfactory access to IT resources on the St Paul's Street campus
- poor curriculum management.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now **satisfactory**.

Pass rates are satisfactory. On the majority of courses pass rates are around the national averages. The pass rate for NVQ brickwork declined in 2002/03 but improved significantly in 2003/04 to 100%. Pass rates on a few courses remain low. Retention is satisfactory. Retention rates on the majority of courses have risen to around the national averages and are high on NVQ painting and decorating, sign making and the national certificate in building.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The college has standardised its approach to developing schemes of work and lesson plans and lessons are now well planned and prepared. However, in many lessons, not enough is done to ensure that all students make the most of their potential. There are no strategies in place to ensure that students who progress quickly with their practical work receive timely theoretical teaching to underpin their practical progress. Low attendance and disruption caused by students who are late to lessons is a feature of some courses.

Support for students is now satisfactory. All students have a personal tutor and they are entitled to a weekly review. Students speak highly of the personal support received. However, the group tutorial programme is often less effective and students do not regard it as relevant to their main course of study.

Access to IT resources on the St Paul's Street campus is now satisfactory. The range and quality of the resources available to students at this campus have been extended and alternative arrangements have been negotiated for gas and plumbing provision. Brickwork courses have relocated to the Green Lane campus where the already excellent ICT resources have been extended and further improved. The college plans to relocate its electrical installation provision to the Green Lane campus.

Management of the curriculum area has improved significantly and is now satisfactory. Roles and responsibilities are clear and communications with members of staff have improved. A range of initiatives to improve performance and accountability has been introduced. Quality assurance systems have been improved and there is now sound action planning, target-setting and monthly monitoring of performance by curriculum team leaders. The new lesson observation scheme has raised the level of support provided to teachers and participation in staff development activities has increased significantly. Assessment and internal verification are satisfactory but there is still some variation in the quality of management of individual courses.

Engineering

In the May 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- high pass rates on electrical, electronics and national certificate courses
- good resources
- good links with industry.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on motor vehicle and mechanical engineering courses
- poor theory teaching
- poor attendance and punctuality
- unsatisfactory curriculum management.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now **satisfactory**.

Pass rates have risen significantly and are now satisfactory overall. Retention has also risen on most courses, but remains low on a minority. The standards of practical work of the majority of learners are good. Written assignments are of a satisfactory standard and many learners make significant progress relative to their prior attainment and their diagnosed level of basic skills at the start of their course. The average attendance at lessons has risen to 75%, and is now at the national average for engineering. Effective measures have been put into place to combat absenteeism and most absences recorded are authorised.

Teaching is well planned. Schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed. However, few lessons take account of the differing needs and abilities of individual learners, other than through the provision of extra tasks for more able students. In most lessons students increase their knowledge and skills and make satisfactory progress, although much teaching is unexciting. In practical classes instruction is careful and positive and teachers make good use of questioning to reinforce health and safety and underpinning knowledge. Teachers make effective and sometimes innovative use of ICT in presentations. These are supported by handouts, which often contain exercises to reinforce the learning. In a minority of classes some learners are inattentive and slow down the pace of the work. In practical classes these learners are often unsure what they have to do. Teachers are well qualified and experienced and have benefited from extensive staff development aimed at rectifying the shortcomings identified in the 2003 inspection.

Leadership and management are now satisfactory. Action planning and self-assessment since the 2003 inspection have led to improvements in all aspects of the performance of the curriculum area. Consistent structured approaches have been introduced to ensure effective planning of learning. These have been supported by staff development. Teaching observation has been implemented.

Information and communications technology

In the May 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- high pass rates on short IT courses for adults
- good support to integrate students with disabilities into ICT programmes
- broad provision that effectively widens participation.

Weaknesses

- poor retention and pass rates on full-time courses
- unsatisfactory teaching
- insufficient exposure to realistic working practices for students
- inadequate IT resources on the main site
- ineffective use of quality assurance processes to improve teaching and learning.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now **satisfactory**.

Pass rates on the new full time courses introduced since the last inspection are satisfactory and around the national averages, although retention on the BTEC first diploma was below the national average in 2003/04. Retention and pass rates on the GCE AS-level IT remained significantly below the national averages in 2003/04. The new management team have put in place strategies to raise retention. Major curriculum changes have been undertaken. A pre-foundation course has been introduced, entry criteria have been reviewed and data on students' performance are regularly monitored. Retention for the current year at the time of the re-inspection is good.

Overall, teaching is now satisfactory. In the better lessons, teachers make good use of information and learning technology (ILT) and provide a variety of teaching methods and activities which engage and maintain students' interest. In the weaker lessons teaching is unexciting and students make slow progress. In the community learning centres students gain confidence and make good progress in developing their IT skills. Students' progress is regularly reviewed through individual tutorials and monitoring of achievements against set targets. Support for students is good. Students with hearing impairment receive support from both a signer and a note taker in lessons. Students with disabilities are effectively integrated with others on mainstream provision.

Work-related activities have increased. Students have undertaken visits to local companies and guest speakers have been invited to the college. Students have enjoyed these activities and have used their experiences in assignments and course work.

The standard of accommodation is now satisfactory. Many of the ICT rooms have data projectors and smart boards. Rooms have been re-arranged to facilitate group work and improve classroom management, and air-conditioning has been installed in many. The

newly-developed managed learning environment (MLE) is being used effectively by teachers and students.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new head of school is supported by curriculum leaders who provide specialist operational leadership. Team meetings are held regularly with a clear focus on the quality of teaching and learning. Effective quality assurance procedures to improve the quality of teaching and learning are now in place. However, there are variations in the quality of the tracking of individual students' progress in workshop sessions. The lesson observation scheme is now effective. Action plans are drawn up to support teachers, and mentoring and staff development are put in place as appropriate.

There will be no further re-inspection of the college because there are no remaining unsatisfactory areas.