

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Wakefield College

Date of visit: 19 June 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

The November 2006 inspection showed an improving trend in success rates and overall achievement and standards were judged good. What indications are there that the college's good achievements have continued into 2006/07?

- It is too early to judge whether success rates and overall achievement and standards have improved in 2006/07. However, early indications are that strategies for continuous improvement are having a positive impact on retention - see below.

Retention rates were low on levels 1 and 2 for adults and on GSE AS courses in 2004/05, but college data seen during the inspection indicated some improvements in 2005/06. The college was judged to be taking appropriate action to improve this, and the low success and retention rates of some adult learners of minority ethnic heritage. How effective have the college's actions to improve retention rates for adults at levels 1 and 2, GCE AS levels and for adult learners of minority ethnic heritage?

- A range of strategies have been adopted to improve retention especially for adult learners at levels 1 and 2; the appointment of a Skills for Life attendance administrator to contact non attenders and encourage them to come back to college, smaller group sizes and greater investment in individual tutorials to meet the specific support needs of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners. The impact of these strategies has been positive so far. College data for in-year retention indicates an overall improvement in key areas identified from the inspection in November 2006. There have been significant improvements in adult retention at Level 1, from 66% in 2005/06 to 79% in 2006/07\*. Although improvements in retention for adults at levels 2 and 3 are less

significant, they do indicate an upward trend of improvement to around national average figures.

- On GCE AS level courses, college retention data indicates an overall improvement to around national average: from 76% in 2004/05 to 82% in 2005/06.\* There has been a significant improvement for learners aged 16-18 on AS level courses: from 76% in 2004/05 to 83% in 2005/06\*. For learners aged 16-18 years old on level 2 courses, retention has improved from 76% in 2004/05 to 80% in 2005/06, which is slightly above the national average.
- Small numbers of minority ethnic learners make year on year comparisons difficult. However, average retention of 'other Asian' learners is currently 90% compared with 56% for 2005/06.

The inspection identified that achievements in Work Based Learning (WBL) provision showed significant improvements in 2005/06 from a very low overall success rate base of 0% for advanced apprentices and 14% for apprentices in 2004/05. Have the improvements in WBL apprenticeship framework completions continued? What further actions are in place to improve framework completion for advanced apprentices; how effective are they?

- The improving trend in WBL apprenticeship framework completion has been maintained since the last inspection. Provider Performance Report (PPR) data for January 2007 confirms further significant improvement for apprenticeships, where learner numbers are the greatest. Overall success rates were 59% in 2005/06, six percentage points above the national average and a 35% improvement on the 2004/05 overall success rates. The number of apprentices who completed their apprenticeship frameworks in the planned programme time shows similar improvement. In 2005/06, 45% of apprentices completed their framework qualification within the planned programme, 12 percentage points above the national average and 37% more than the previous year. Apprentices are making faster progress and the gap between overall and timely completions is closing. In particular, college data for hairdressing apprentices in 2005/06 shows framework completion of 85%, all of which were timely. Apprentices are expected to complete their key skills early in their programme. PPR data also indicates improvements for advanced apprenticeships, but these remain well below national averages. Overall,

advanced apprentice success rates were 26% in 2005/06 compared with a 44% national average. Advanced apprentices success rates are particularly low in engineering and manufacturing technologies, at 11%, but learner numbers are low. The college has introduced a wide range of strategies to improve success rates, including increased focus on selection, an improved induction process, better employer involvement, more flexible workplace assessment and the prior completion of apprenticeship qualifications as preparation for progression to level 3. The college anticipates further improvements in success rates from the larger cohort of advanced apprentices planned to complete in 2006/07.

The inspection indicated low progression rates on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes in 2005/06, but with early signs of improvement in 2006/07. Have the early signs of improved progression rates from E2E continued?

- The early signs of improvement on progression rates for E2E programmes have continued. Learning and Skills Council data for period 9 in 2006/07 shows 52% of leavers progressed to a positive destination, compared with 33% for the year 2005/06. The college has introduced effective strategies to support retention of at risk learners through the appointment of a transition mentor in April 2007. Well over 70 interventions since then show early signs of success in supporting the most vulnerable learners to remain in learning.

At the inspection key skills success rates were beginning to improve in 2005/06 to around the low national average. They remained an area for improvement. Have the actions to improve key skills success rates continued to be effective?

- There are clear indications that the improvements in key skills achievement have continued. The full key skills team is now in place and the college's policy for every learner to take key skills is becoming established. Key skills enrolments in 2006/07 have improved by 12% this year, to nearly 3500 learners. In year retention shows a 10% improvement since last year to 71%. So far this year, more than 1000 learners have passed key skills tests. Further test results are awaited in the next few months. The college is proactive in making all test proxy claims. Interim interval verification of key skills portfolios, throughout the year, ensures that portfolio concerns are addressed at an early stage.

Overall attendance at key skills classes is good at 85%, and actions are in place for further improvements.

## Quality of education and training

Overall, the quality of provision was judged good at the inspection, and there were many examples of improvements. The proportion of inadequate teaching fell from 11% in 2004/05 to 4% in 2005/06. Almost all directly employed staff had or were working towards a teaching qualification but the proportion of agency teaching staff who were qualified teachers was much lower at 56%. Has the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching decreased further?

- There continues to be considerable investment in improving the quality of teaching and learning. A rolling programme of lesson observations is carried out by a specially trained team of observers. The team undertakes regular training, discussions and standardisation. All teachers, whose lessons are graded as 3 or 4 are given an action plan, significant support and training on key areas for improvement and are re-observed at a later date. A team of advanced practitioners are on hand to provide support and mentoring for all staff. Teachers new to the college spoke highly of the induction and support they receive. The teachers spoken to during the visit spoke positively of the culture of improvement in the college. There is a drive for excellence in teaching and learning and all staff are clear about this.
- There have been improvements in the standard of teaching and learning from 2005/06. In 2006/07, the proportion of good or better teaching in the college improved by 5% to 73%. Satisfactory teaching fell to 22% and the amount of inadequate teaching fell by 1% to 5%.
- In addition to the observation of vocational provision, the college has introduced 'themed' observations. In May 2007 the college undertook a week of lesson observations which focussed on establishing the quality of group tutorials and assessing the impact of a recent review of tutorial provision. Analysis of the outcomes of the observations indicates that 72% of tutorials were graded good or better. A learner perception of courses (SPOC) analysis indicates that learners are now overwhelmingly positive about the quality of group tutorials.

At the last inspection, improvements to arrangements for literacy and numeracy support for key skills learners were beginning to prove successful. What further improvements to, e.g. key skills have resulted from the changes to literacy and numeracy support?

- The college is working well to ensure well-integrated key skills support. Each key skills centre leader holds a key skills specialism. The appointment of a dedicated WBL key skills tutor has been effective. Key skills are vocationally contextualised in WBL. The appointment of a WBL key skills assessor is planned soon. The key skills team promote the value of key skills well to staff and learners across the college. A joint approach to literacy and numeracy between key skills and Skills for Life intends to ensure that vocational tutors are fully aware of the role they can play to support learners to develop their skills. Awareness raising sessions have taken place with all the college academies. The Skills for Life strategy group is about to start work with a strong focus on developing the staff skills and qualifications that will support them to be confident in building Skills for Life into their individual programmes. Some good development work, to ensure that tutors have ease of access to initial assessment results for their individual groups, to support differentiation in teaching and learning, is at pilot stage. Learner perceptions about the value of key skills show marked improvement over the last 3 years.

Mentor appointments and easily accessible counsellors were improving attendance. Changes to the monitoring arrangements of tutorials, the tutorial curriculum, and learner involvement in setting the agenda for individual reviews and consultation about tutorial content was showing early signs of success, but the work was too new to evaluate fully at the inspection. How have the improvements attributed to mentor appointments and counsellor access been sustained? How effective have the changes to the tutorial system proved?

- The college has recently reviewed the provision for group tutorials, incorporating learners' own views into this review. This has resulted in a tutorial curriculum that is tailored to meet the needs of individual courses and groups of learners. All learners place a high value on the wide range of support they receive through tutorials, counsellors and many other support systems provided by the college. They feel actively engaged in

informing the content of tutorials and have very good access to support from approachable staff whenever they need it. Adult learners who have mentors to support them through individual learning programmes are particularly appreciative of the responsiveness of their mentor and the good access to course specific guidance.

## Leadership and management

The college had introduced a range of quality improvement strategies that were beginning to prove successful in raising achievement and standards and the quality of teaching and learning. However, it was too soon to judge the impact of other strategies, such as improvements to retention rates. The college had a vacancy for a learner governor at the time of the inspection. Have college improvement strategies continued to prove successful? What further improvements has the college made? Do learners now have representation to the Board of Governors?

See above for details about retention strategies, comments about achievement and standards and the quality of teaching and learning.

- A learner has been elected to the board of governors. However, many learners are unaware that there is learner representation on the governing body.

The college had obtained funding to analyse the impact of its work with employers, but the inspection report made no judgements about this. What progress has the college made to evaluate the impact of its work with employers? What are its findings?

- A new system for collecting and evaluating employer feedback has been introduced this academic year. Feedback is collected from both employee learners and their employer. Questions include: whether training has met the aims and objectives agreed at the start of the programme, whether the assessment of skills needs prior to training was effective and if the employer would recommend the college.

In the first year of this evaluation system, the college has scored in the top category against the New Standard Assessment.

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

- In E2E the team are working hard to engage with black and minority ethnic (BME) employers who can provide positive role models to E2E learners from those groups. They have been active in networking and information sharing through participation at a BME community consultation event. Although the college's overall profile for participation from BME groups is higher than the local profile, this is not the case in E2E. The team have set a target of 10 BME employers to offer placements to learners.
- Regular sharing of good practice takes place within the E2E partnership. The college holds the E2E contract for Wakefield and its use of practitioner focus groups has been adopted by other E2E partnerships in West Yorkshire. Other examples of sharing good practice include the use of standardised documentation and implementation of the five-stage process for recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning, within E2E passports. Clearly identified milestone targets are used to ensure that overall objectives are achievable in the planned time.

\* college data.