

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: City of Westminster
Date of visit: 26 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

What action has the college taken to improve learner attendance and punctuality?

- The college is working towards ensuring a consistent approach to improving attendance and punctuality at course level. New developments to the management information system mean that teaching staff now have easy access to accurate data on attendance. The college has implemented many strategies to improve attendance in 2006/07 including awards for exemplary attendance/punctuality, targets in individual learning plans, increased contact with parents/carers, and better review at tutorials. There has been some improvement in attendance figures compared to 2005/06, although the college will not quite meet its target for attendance this year. There are college protocols in place for lateness but there is still too much inconsistency in their application. However, heads of school are aware of this and many intend to implement stricter controls for the next academic year.

Has the college implemented any new strategies to improve the success rates for Black African and Black Caribbean learners at level 1?

- The college has set clear targets for improvements to success rates for Black African and Caribbean learners in its quality improvement plan. It has implemented a 'Raising Achievement Action Plan' to support these learners working towards qualifications at level 1. Strategies in the plan have included homework clubs staffed by black and minority ethnic (BME) facilitators, learner focus groups, and increased use of learning support assistants. Enrichment activities have been improved and developed to foster learners' general enthusiasm for college, and tutors have spent

more time supporting and encouraging this group of learners. As yet it is too early to judge the impact of these actions on success rates, but in-year retention is much improved.

How is in-year retention looking for the different ages, levels and ethnicity?

- The current in year retention rates for Black Caribbean/Black African learners is 86% which is 2% higher than the overall college average. Overall retention appears to be improving for all ages, levels and ethnicities in 2006/07.

Has the college made any progress in developing distance travelled measures for vocational provision?

- The college is part of a London-wide value-added project which is being managed by the Learning and Skills Council. Each faculty has identified two level 3 courses which will be used for the pilot from 2007/08. The college is aware of the need to develop effective mechanisms to evaluate distance travelled and value-added.

Quality of education and training

What action has the college taken to improve the proportion of good or better teaching? How effective has this action been?

- The college has focussed strongly on improving the quality of its teaching and learning. The number of lesson observations has increased and the new lesson observation system includes the use of peer observations. Data for 2006/07 shows that the proportion of good or better teaching has increased by 4% compared to 2005/06. Teachers greatly appreciate the value of the peer observations and these have proved an effective method for sharing good practice. Faculty teams have also visited other colleges to observe teaching practice in their subject area where these have been graded as outstanding at inspection. Continuous professional development time is being used well to focus on strategies for improving teaching. The lesson observation scheme is rigorous and the records of observations clearly highlight good practice and areas that need to be improved. However, a minority of teachers still do not value the observations as either a tool for improvement or as an accurate reflection of the quality of their teaching.

How has the college improved the consistency of tutorial practice?

- There is still a significant variety of approaches to both group and individual tutorials. In some cases this appears appropriate, reflecting the needs of particular groups of learners. However, many tutors are not fully aware of the college's generic tutorial themes or published tutorial materials. In some faculty areas there have been significant improvements to the management of tutorials since the previous inspection. In these areas communication between tutors and learning support staff has improved and the tutorial programme is more structured. Significant cross-college changes are in hand for the next academic year starting in September 2007. These include the appointment of lead tutors in each faculty to lead on the implementation of a cross-college tutorial programme and to improve careers advice.

How is the college ensuring that learners identified as having additional learning needs receive good and timely support?

- The systems for identifying learners' needs and providing individual support were seen as generally satisfactory or better at the previous inspection. However, there are now additional numbers of learning support staff, and more learners are receiving additional help and learning support. Management of the support has improved during the year. Changes include more effective use of a database, better defined responsibilities, and more meetings between relevant staff. Managers now have a much clearer picture of the extent of learning support, and have improved methods of identifying learners who might not be receiving appropriate support. The college is increasing its use of learning support assistants in classes. It has good plans to increase the number of workshops for literacy and numeracy to augment individual support. The college is aware of the need to evaluate more thoroughly the effectiveness of any support given. It is introducing a reasonable range of activities to address this, including more observations of specialists by specialists, improved analysis of reviews and data, and directed questions in student feedback questionnaires.

What progress has the college made in developing strategies to identify and support 'at risk' learners?

- Good progress has been made in developing and implementing mechanisms to identify and support learners at risk of leaving their courses early. Significant research, including working with and learning from other colleges, has led to the development of a comprehensive strategy. The college plans to implement the main elements of the strategy for September 2007. The new lead tutors are expected to have a significant role in helping with the identification of 'at risk' learners, providing staff support and training, and working with 'at risk' panels. A more detailed system for identifying potential 'at risk' learners will become part of initial assessment and interviews. Some aspects of the support to 'at risk' learners are already in place, such as homework clubs with literacy and numeracy support to help those who are struggling to complete aspects of their courses.

Leadership and management

Are managers now prioritising areas for improvement sufficiently?
Do they now use management information effectively?

- The new management information system has greatly improved managers' ability to access and use data. Staff at all levels are enthusiastic about the improved arrangements for obtaining and using data. Managers are now much more able to set priorities for improvement and to make accurate judgements about the performance of courses. The self-assessment report makes good use of data and course reviews to arrive at judgements. However, as yet there is insufficient validation of the final report by teaching staff. In a few cases the final report may no longer accurately reflect their views.

How is the college preparing for the new inspection judgement on equality of opportunity?

- The college is aware, in general terms, of the new inspection judgement on equality of opportunity. There were no explicit concerns raised in the previous inspection report, and learners remain positive about the college's approach. The current quality improvement plan has only some fairly broad references to changes in the college's approach to equality issues. There continue to be some good developments in social and

educational inclusion. Examples include job coaching for learners with disabilities, better use of practical work on level 1 courses to develop literacy and numeracy skills, and extension of the current work with the homeless. Whilst these initiatives largely reflect aspects of social inclusion, the college is also developing a single equality scheme (rather than discrete gender, race and disability policies) with better links to impact measures. The college is aware of the need to improve its focus on raising learners' understanding of the broader aspects of equality and diversity during teaching.

What progress has the college made in drawing up and implementing a post-inspection action plan?

- The college has made good progress in drawing up and implementing a post-inspection action plan. The existing quality improvement plan was up-dated to ensure that it included action to address areas for improvement identified at the inspection. The college has responded promptly and positively to the results of the recent inspection. The actions outlined in the plan are sensible and realistic and the college has made good progress in meeting the targets set.

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

- None

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

- None