

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Westminster Kingsway College

Date of visit: 26 September 2007

Context

Westminster Kingsway College is a large general further education (FE) college in central London. The college was formed from the merger of Westminster and Kingsway colleges in September 2000. The college is based in two London boroughs: Camden and City of Westminster. The college operates on a number of sites across these boroughs and is currently re-building and significantly improving the estate. The college offers a broad curriculum and recruits from a wide geographical area. In 2005/06 the college enrolled a total of 14,487 learners of whom some 84 per cent were adult learners. There is a growing programme of work-based learning (WBL) including Train to Gain. A significant number of students speak English as an additional language. Some 64 per cent of learners define their ethnic origin as being other than white.

The college was last inspected in May 2004. It had made good progress since inspection in 2002 when the college was judged inadequate. Provision was good in one curriculum area and satisfactory in all of the other areas. Good progress had been made in WBL and inspectors identified significant improvements in most retention and pass rates, effective strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and strong leadership with clear strategic direction. Areas for improvement included attendance and punctuality, the use of information and learning technology (ILT) to enhance learning, the quality of accommodation and the provision of key skills.

The annual assessment visit (AAV) in November 2006 identified that attendance had risen significantly to 81 per cent in 2005/06 and that there were significant improvements in success rates for WBL, in particular in hospitality. At that visit provisional college data indicated that retention rates had fallen slightly and although success rates remained high they had also fallen slightly at some levels. Overall success rates had improved in key skills. The visit noted that the college had taken effective steps to reduce the amount of inadequate teaching, although too much remained satisfactory rather than good or better. It also noted that a third of all subject sector areas identified key and basic skills as an area for development.

The new curriculum management structure had rationalised responsibilities across the college.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve retention and success rates including some low success rates in specific areas, and success rates on short courses?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

In 2005/06, aggregate success rates on long qualifications remained above national averages for all learners, although there had been a decline since 2004/05, largely a result of some weaker retention rates in specific areas. Provisional college data is still incomplete for 2006/07, although indicative data demonstrate that there are some significant improvements in success rates. For example, AS success rates have improved by some 6 per cent and there are overall improvements in A-levels although A2 success rates appear to remain static at 86 per cent. Improvements in success rates are particularly good in access courses to hotel and catering studies, travel, tourism and leisure and business as well as in the first diploma in travel and tourism. However the college recognises that poor performance continues in science and there has been a decline in success rates in some parts of the key skills programme. The college recognised poor short course performance in 2005/06 and undertook some re-structuring of programmes. 2006/07 data were not available to assess progress.

The overall framework success rates in WBL continue to improve and are high for hospitality at 72 per cent at period 12, 2006/07. Timely success rates are also high. Success rates of apprentices have improved from 17 per cent in 2004/05 to 55 per cent in 2005/06 and 68 per cent in 2006/07. Most Train to Gain learners are still in learning. Progress has been slower than planned for many learners with 94 continuing beyond their expected end date. Of those learners who have left or completed their level 2 course the success rate is 77 per cent.

There is a clear indication that the college continues to make reasonable progress to improve success rates. Strategies to improve retention, attendance and punctuality are increasingly consistent across all areas. However attendance has only improved marginally in 2006/07 to 82 per cent. Performance at course level is closely monitored and subject to close scrutiny and rapid interventions.

What progress has been made to improve the internal progression rates on two year programmes from first to second year and between level 1 and level 2?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The 2005/06 self-assessment report recognised that the progression rates of full-time learners between levels of qualifications were too low. Staff reflect a good awareness of progression rates at the curriculum level and progression days have been very effective, particularly supporting English as a second or other language (ESOL) learners to progress from discrete ESOL programmes. Staff identify a wide range of strategies that the college has implemented to improve the quality of provision, particularly in areas judged inadequate by the college. These strategies are also having an impact on progression rates and for example, this year there is 90 per cent progression from the first diploma to national diploma or access programmes in travel and tourism. Progression rates from AS to A2 have also improved. However the college does not produce progression data at college level and there is no systematic analysis of progression for different groups of learners. The skills for life team do not analyse the impact of support on progression. Although the college is increasingly knowledgeable about progression rates, it does not systematically survey learners who do not progress to support closer interventions.

Quality of provision

What improvements were made to teaching and learning in 2006/07, including strategies to support underperforming SSAs?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Reasonable progress has been made in developing appropriate strategies to improve teaching and learning. However, the strategies have not yet improved the overall teaching and learning grade profile, which has remained static between 2005/06 and 2006/07. The number of inadequate sessions remains very low and there are a large proportion of satisfactory sessions. Improvements have been made to the standard of teaching by agency staff with provision of better information to support their work. The use of agency staff is also decreasing in some areas. Individual development sessions for staff have improved the quality of provision in the chef programmes. However, there are variations in the quality of teaching and learning across the college and significant issues remain in science.

All observers have been involved in reviewing reports from observations to identify common themes and discuss appropriate actions, many of which were implemented in the summer term of 2007. There is greater emphasis on teachers' individual teaching and learning profiles and these will be incorporated into staff appraisals to ensure appropriate staff development. A number of new strategies to improve teaching and learning is planned for this year including teaching improvement programmes. There is insufficient focus on the quality of skills for life and language support and few explicit judgements about this in teaching and learning observations.

<p>What actions have been taken to improve planning, monitoring and assessment, including the embedding of skills for life to support learners' progress?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
---	-----------------------------

The college has made significant progress in improving assessment and in the embedding of skills for life to support learners' progress. The restructuring of management arrangements, including key skills and tutorials, and the introduction of coherent and more consistent assessment systems is welcomed by staff. The key role of curriculum team leaders to monitor practice is effective and helps teachers manage learners' progress and plan rapid and appropriate support. Staff recognise the need to develop a less fragmented approach to assessment in A-levels in order to identify areas for improvement more quickly; to share good practice which has been developed in some areas; and to develop further the use of assessment to challenge learners to achieve higher standards. The introduction of on-line individual learning plans (ILPs) this year is welcomed by most staff, although the impact of this process is too early to judge. Compliance with internal verification processes has improved.

A strong focus on embedding skills for life continues and staff have a good understanding of the need to align skills for life and language support closely to learners' vocational aspirations. The provision of in-class support has improved and stronger links now exist between support staff and programme teams. A range of strategies to integrate skills for life includes staff development and opportunities for joint planning of the curriculum. Staff recognise the need to disseminate good practice in some areas, such as hospitality, across the college. The integration of wider key skills and application of number into tutorials is underdeveloped.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in supporting staff and students during a process of change, including significant redevelopment of the estate?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

Changes across the college are strongly led. Staff report that communication is better, there are fewer blocks to progress, and they welcome the restructuring to improve curriculum management and team performance. Staff have more opportunities to share practice and undertake subject relevant development. Despite significant redevelopment of the estate, staff feel that the college provides a stable and cohesive environment for teaching and learning. College leaders and managers are proactive and the strong scrutiny of underperforming areas has provided opportunities for development and structured support. Staff recognise that although new structures empower managers, there is insufficient understanding and application of new systems by some teachers.

What progress has been made in improving arrangements to promote equality for both students and staff?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Reasonable progress has been made in improving the focus on equality and diversity issues across the college. Management structures have been recently revised and an equality and diversity steering group set up. It is too early to judge the impact of this group in improving the promotion of equality to staff and students. The equality and diversity forum and Black and ethnic minority group forum will now feed into the steering group to provide a higher profile for equality and diversity. A “first steps to leadership” programme is being run to promote and increase the number of black and ethnic minority staff in management roles. A diversity day “vive la difference” has been held with a wide range of discussion topics available for staff to get involved in. All marketing literature has been reviewed to provide positive images. Some adjustments have been made to ensure temporary accommodation is more accessible than the old sites, which are being developed or sold. Insufficient progress has been made to use and analyse data to compare the performance of different groups of students and staff. It is not clear when and how equality and diversity policies and procedures are updated.

<p>What is the capacity of the college to continue the developments in work-based learning and employer responsiveness?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
---	-----------------------------

The college has increased its capacity and developed sound business strategies to increase the number of work-based learners and programmes for employers. Business development activities have been restructured to provide a more streamlined, college-wide approach to sales, marketing and the management of customer relationships. A detailed business development strategy for 2007/10 has been prepared. Objectives have been set for the different business units based on a SWOT analysis and a risk analysis. The business development strategy recognises some of the internal and external challenges the college faces in growing employer responsiveness and achieving ambitious targets. An Employer Training Solutions brand is being developed.

The college is building new partnerships with sector specialists to develop new products and services. These include partnership involvement in two proposed National Skills Academies, for the hospitality sector and audio, visual and digital media industries. The college is also starting to engage with more local employers as well as developing additional services and products for existing employers.

The college started 413 learners on Train to Gain programmes in 2006/07 compared to the projected target of 800. The number of apprenticeships is continuing to grow with cohorts of 26 in 2004/05, 35 in 2005/06 and 51 in 2006/07. Young apprenticeship programmes have been introduced and adult apprenticeships are planned.