

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: The West of England College

Date of visit: 8 October 2007

Context

The West of England College is an independent specialist college that provides residential further education (FE) and independent training for young people aged 16 to 25. The college forms the post-16 part of the West of England School for children with little or no sight. The West of England College was last inspected in June 2004. The college's overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory. In 2006/07 there were approximately 27 full-time LSC funded learners, and 53 total in the college.

Achievement and standards

What judgments can be made about success rates in 2006-07?	Reasonable progress
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The college judge themselves to have good achievement and standards for the Impact and Impact+ learners. The Impact learners are those with profound learning difficulties aged 16-19 and the Impact+ learners are aged over 19. The Impact learners achieve units of accreditation through AQA. In 2005/06 the average number of units achieved was 3.34 and in 2006/07 the average number of units achieved was 7.45, which is a significant improvement. For learners with severe to moderate learning difficulties and learners working at entry level to level three the college judge themselves to have satisfactory achievement and standards in 2006/07 and inspectors agreed with this judgement. The data for those with severe to moderate learning difficulties looks to be poor in 2006/07 when compared to 2005/06 but this was due to late moderation of learners' work in 2004/05 which rolled into 2005/06. It is not clear from the data presented to inspectors whether achievements for Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) and ILP targets are full or partial achievements.

What information does the college hold about the destination of leavers in 2006-07?	Significant progress
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The college has detailed destination data on leavers in 2006/07 which show that all leavers went into expected destinations. All twelve learners with complex needs moved into lifelong placements. Six out of seven learners with severe to moderate learning difficulties are in paid or voluntary employment or at their local sector college and all seven are living independently. Three learners attended the partner college working at entry level to level 3. Two are living at home and continuing their studies at their local sector college and one is living independently and is in paid employment.

Quality of provision

What evaluation has taken place on the impact of the improved information technology facilities and what is the impact on teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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There have been some good developments in information and communication technology (ICT) across the college since the last monitoring visit in 2006. A steering committee has been formed, which is led by the director of quality assurance, thus ICT has a much higher profile in the college. Its impact is increasingly assessed. The assistant head of college spends approximately half of his time on developments in access technology and there is a tutor who now has responsibility for ICT developments. An audit of all ICT equipment has taken place and it is now centrally catalogued and available for all staff to access. Further audits are planned in 2007 and by the end of the academic year it is expected that every learner will have an ICT profile establishing individual need, resources and strategies. Staff training has already taken place and more is planned. Impact on some learners has been significant. For example, many learners who have the ability to access the internet or office documents, but have little or no sight, learn to use JAWS screen reader to enable them to do so. Learners are being taught to use e-mail, which enables them to keep in touch with family and friends in their home locations. The three learners who run the college office use ICT in a realistic work environment.

<p>The college had undertaken a restructure of the curriculum at the last monitoring visit and created a new post-16 structure but it was too early to judge the impact of the changes. What impact have the changes had on learners' experiences? Is the college meeting the individual needs of learners, especially those with more complex needs?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The post-16 structure now provides a clearer framework of provision for learners from pre-entry level to level 3 by offering four distinctive, inter-related pathways. The staff skills audit that was planned at the time of the last monitoring visit identified that some staff did not feel they had sufficient skills or expertise to meet the wide range of complex needs of all learners. However, professional development activities have reassured some staff and given them confidence to work with learners with multiple and profound learning and sensory disabilities. The curriculum framework is designed to offer a flexible, co-coordinated programme, individual to all learners. However, it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness and flexibility of the curriculum.

<p>How well are the work placement developments progressing?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college used expertise developed during the multi-national Globe project to improve and increase work experience opportunities for learners. The job coach now provides more consistent support and demonstrates a good understanding of employer and learner needs. Links between employability and the curriculum are stronger, with activities becoming increasingly integrated. Good use is made of college resources to provide simulated work experience. Organisations such as Connexions and the local education business partnership are used effectively to support work experience and work related learning. The introduction of the NVQ programme supports the acquisition of specific employment skills well, although it was not possible to evaluate the quality of learners' work during the visit. Learners develop a clearer understanding of what is required in the workplace and can demonstrate their achievements to employers. The number of learners on external work placements is relatively low (6) at present but the college plans to increase this and in particular develop more effective links with the local council.

Monitoring of learners' progress was inconsistent at the last monitoring visit. What progress has the college made in this area?	Reasonable progress
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Since the last monitoring visit the college has formalised the assessment of learner needs and the setting of individual learning plans (ILPs). The co-ordination of transition assessments and in particular the establishing of base lines for learners is improving. Multi agency assessments are used more consistently to develop learning goals. Teaching assistants are now more formally involved in the setting and monitoring of learning goals. A system to ensure the quality and consistency of ILPs is developing with senior managers initially monitoring plans. The college intends to introduce a formal moderating process, using tutors, to ensure compliance with agreed systems, identify areas for improving the process and highlighting good practice. Tutorials are not currently observed for quality assurance. Learners are involved in agreeing and negotiating their learning targets but ILPs do not always record their comments on their progress and achievements.

Leadership and management

What work has the quality assurance committee undertaken and what is the impact of new quality assurance arrangements on improving the learner experience?	Reasonable progress
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The quality assurance committee has been slow to get off the ground. However, there is now a clear quality assurance/improvement plan calendar in place. The calendar identifies all the key quality annual improvement activities and when they will take place. All policies and procedures have been rewritten and the impact of the effectiveness of some of these has already been noted by the college, for example in dealing with complaints. Complaints are now fully followed through with clear actions and timescales. The planning process also includes a detailed school improvement plan for 2007/08 which covers the school and the college. The plan is detailed in its aims but does not, as yet, identify milestones and deadlines or lead staff for each area of improvement.

Since the last monitoring visit there has been a clear focus on teaching and learning and the college has seen improved grades. The observation of teaching and learning scheme is to be extended to the learning support assistants later this year.

There is also a strong focus on staff training. A skills audit of staff was completed and the results used to form a training plan. Training delivered since the last monitoring visit include training in British sign language, ICT and care planning. All staff will be trained to level 1 in Braille. Future plans include a training day in October 2007 for all staff on 'capturing learning'. A quality improvement team has been convened, made up of a wide range of staff, but so far has had limited impact.