

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Wigan & Leigh College

Date of visit: 21 February 2008

Context

Wigan and Leigh College is a large general FE college with around 4,000 full-time learners, 80% of whom are aged 16 to 18 and 6,500 part-time students who are mostly adults. In 2006/07 the college recruited around 500 apprentices, mostly in construction and engineering, 100 entry to employment and 1,600 Train to Gain learners. The college offers courses in all of the LSC areas of learning and they are available from entry to degree level in many curriculum areas. The college is a partner in CoVEs in logistics, computer networking technology and construction regeneration.

Wigan is one of the ten boroughs in Greater Manchester and there are two schools with sixth forms and two sixth form colleges. In September 2006, 59.3% of the borough's 16 year olds were in full-time education compared to 70% nationally. In summer 2007 60.8% of school leavers in Wigan gained 5 or more A*-C GCSE grades compared to 62% nationally. In December 2007 the proportion of young people who are NEET in the area had fallen to 8.7%. The College has five sites in the two towns and provides community courses in over 75 venues. The college's mission is "Wigan and Leigh College will strive to be the best inclusive general further and higher education college in the North of England."

Wigan and Leigh College was last inspected in February 2007. At that inspection, the overall effectiveness of the college, leadership and management and capacity to improve were judged to be good. Achievements and standards were judged to be satisfactory. In curriculum areas, hairdressing and beauty therapy was judged outstanding, 3 other areas were graded good and 2 satisfactory. The quality of provision, guidance and support and educational and social inclusion were judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

What progress have the college made in improving the success rates on long courses?	Insufficient Progress
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Overall the college's long success rate in 2006/07 was similar to 2005/06 and broadly in line with the national average. However there was a 4 percentage point decline in the success rate of learners aged 16 to 18 to 64%. The college recognises in its self assessment report that success rates for learners on level 1 courses are below national average. The strategies in place in 2006/07 did not impact on success rates at level 1 and the success rate on level 1 courses declined. The college now monitors underperforming courses more closely and each has an action plan to improve retention and pass rates but it is too soon to judge the impact.

What progress have the college made in improving high grade pass rates on GCSE courses and the success rates on AS and A2 courses?	Insufficient Progress
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High grade pass rates (A* - C grade) on GCSE courses have improved from 59% to 63% in 2006/07. The A* - C pass rate for GCSE English was good. The college has recognised the need to improve the high grade pass rate in mathematics and has introduced several changes including new staff, change of curriculum and revised entry criteria.

The success rate on AS courses was low in 2005/06 and declined further in 2006/07 to 56%, significantly below the national average. Progression from AS to A2 is low but was not recognised by the college as an area to improve in its self assessment. The overall A level success rate in 2006/07 was around the national average. A range of strategies are now in place to improve the AS and A level provision. These include a new management structure, new accommodation, revised entry criteria, closer monitoring of student attendance and progress against target grades through monthly tests and individual student reviews. Value added data is being used more effectively to monitor students' performance. College data indicates that retention has improved this year by 2% but overall it is too soon to judge the impact of the range of strategies implemented.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the quality of employer engagement?	Insufficient Progress
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Success rates on work based learning (WBL) programmes are low and below national averages. In 2006/07 the success rate on advanced apprentice programmes declined by 3 percentage points to 47%, 11% below the national average. The timely success rate at 22% is well below the national average. Success rates on apprentice programmes in 2006/07 improved to 54%, 7% below the national average. The timely success rate of 34% is 10% below the national average. The college has not fully recognised work based learning success rates as a key area to improve in the self assessment report. However, the college has made a number of changes to the delivery of WBL since September 2007. These include the early assessment of key skills, an increase in the number of dedicated assessors, increased on-site training, reviews and assessment, increase delivery hours for technical certificates and revision sessions to improve the pass rates. The proportion of learners that have currently passed key skills has increased on previous years but it is too early to judge the impact of the recent changes.

Of the 1206 learners on Train to Gain programmes in 2006/07, 63% successfully completed their programmes. Learning and Skills Council data indicate that 96%, of the 407 Train to Gain leavers in 2006/07, successfully completed.

What improvements have been made to improving the quality of provision in preparation for life and work courses?	Reasonable Progress
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A clear action plan is in place since the last inspection and underperforming courses are more closely monitored. Enrolment criteria and guidance to students on the expectations of courses has been improved. The college has invested in improving the quality of students individual learning plans and teachers have been well supported by advanced teaching practitioners. Attendance and monitoring students' progress is closely followed up by managers. The appointment of an e-learning champion and the purchase of laptops for classroom use has improved the use of ILT to support learning in the classroom and enabled students to complete on line tests in community

venues. College data indicate significant improvements in in-year retention since September 2007.

What progress has been made in improving key skills?	Reasonable Progress
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Key skills success rates improved in 2006/07 by 9 percentage points to 41%. The college recognises key skills as an area to improve and has developed the work of three key skills specialists who are supporting curriculum staff in embedding key skills into the curriculum. Assessment is now through vocationally relevant assignments. Initial assessments have been improved and are used more effectively to identify the appropriate key skill level for individual students. The college has recently introduced on-line testing and students must pass practice tests before they entered for an online test. Test results taken since September 2007 are much improved but it is too early to judge the overall impact.

Leadership and management

What progress have managers made in monitoring the college's actions to improve attendance? How effective have the strategies been to improve attendance?	Reasonable Progress
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The college has established an attendance and punctuality group and electronic registers are now used to provide prompt and regular reports on individual student and class attendance to teachers and managers. Student liaison officers follow up student absences promptly. The advanced practitioners have completed a series of observations at the start of lessons. Their findings have helped develop a more consistent approach in dealing with low attendance and poor punctuality.

What actions have been taken to follow up on the outcomes from lesson observations to further improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable Progress
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The lesson observation scheme has been modified since the last inspection. All observers have received additional training and complete paired observations with senior managers or with staff from a partner college. A

formal moderation day is planned to further monitor the outcomes from lesson observations. Staff development has focussed on improving the quality of teaching and learning, including lesson planning to challenge learners more effectively. The cycle of lesson observations is not due to be completed until mid April 2008 so it is too early to judge the impact.

What progress has the college made in improving the accommodation that was judged to be unsatisfactory at the inspection in February 2007?	Reasonable Progress
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The college has improved the quality of its accommodation. In September 2007 a new training restaurant and kitchen was opened on the college's main site in Wigan and a new sixth form centre, including sports facilities opened in Leigh. The college has invested in information technology, including electronic white boards, to improve access to learners on all courses across all college sites. The maintenance team has been expanded and planned programmes of general refurbishment are being completed on time. The governors are to receive proposals for the college's next accommodation strategy in April 2008.