

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Westminster Kingsway College
Date of visit: 16 June 2009

Context

Westminster Kingsway College (WKC) is a large general further education (FE) college in central London, formed from the merger of Westminster and Kingsway colleges in September 2000. It is based in two London boroughs, Camden and City of Westminster, and operates on five main sites and in 50 centres providing community provision. Its rebuilt Kings Cross site opened in February 2009. However two further phases of redevelopment previously agreed are now on hold due to financial pressures within the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college is funded by London Central LSC and also receives funding directly from the Higher Education Funding Council in England (HEFCE) for its higher education programmes. It holds contracts for Train to Gain, apprenticeships for adults, young people and students aged 14 to 16, and adult learning. The college 14-19 Diplomas in Hospitality, Creative and Media, and ICT are due to start next year. Of 13,500 learners who enrol each year, 77% study part-time. Over 63% of students are over the age of 21. Approximately 15% are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has the college made in maintaining its good success rates?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in maintaining good success rates. Overall success rates for most long courses remain above national averages. The strong upward trend in achievement rates continued in 2007/08 for students aged 16 to 18 at level 2 and 3 and for adults at level 1. Achievement rates on A2 and AS courses rose significantly in 2007/08 but remain below national averages, particularly in science and mathematics. However, whilst success rates for students aged 16 to 18 at level 1 remain high, they declined by 2 percentage points last year. Although achievement at GCSE is high, too many students fail to complete their course. Success rates for adults on level 2 courses declined significantly and achievement is 9 percentage points below the national average. Pass rates on ESOL courses improved significantly in 2007/08.

Success rates on apprenticeships were high in 2007/08 but have declined slightly in 2008/09. More apprentices are completing their qualification in the time allowed, and the college is successfully narrowing the gap between national vocational qualification (NVQ) achievement and completion of a full framework. However 15% of apprentices fail to complete their framework despite achieving the NVQ. Train to Gain success rates for the college's own provision are satisfactory. Subcontracted provision in hospitality, which had poor retention rates, has been discontinued.

How much progress has the college made in implementing measures to improve punctuality and attendance?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in implementing measures to improve punctuality and attendance. Staff make good use of improved technology to record and monitor students' attendance more accurately and to inform and involve parents. Procedures to counter lateness and follow up absence are rigorously applied. The college has good arrangements to support learners and to ensure that they can keep up with work if they are unavoidably absent. Attendance is good on many courses, but it is inconsistent across departments. Some departments have developed particularly innovative approaches to support easier recording, and reward good attendance. The college is evaluating these and has plans to identify and share good practice.

How much progress has been made in improving key skills provision?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in improving key skills provision. Success rates were very low over the three years to 2008, peaking at 39%. The college has changed its entire approach to key skills. Projected success rates for 2008/09 have risen by more than 20 percentage points. Students' initial assessments are now used appropriately to ensure they aim for achievable qualifications rather than basing the key skill on their main qualification aim. The college offers good support to tutors, attaching key skills subject specialists to vocational areas. Many staff have received training and now include appropriate opportunities to generate key skills evidence in assessments. Differentiated key skills sessions are included in curriculum planning and timetabling. Improved systems to monitor progress have been effective in enabling timely intervention to ensure students succeed, with workshops focused on areas of difficulty. The college is extending its initial assessment processes to encompass a greater range of indicators, and is assessing applicants well before they enrol for next year to put support in place. Further work continues to improve induction and embedding key skills into vocational areas.

Quality of provision

How much progress has the college made in improving the proportion of good or better teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The quality of teaching and learning was judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection, with too many lessons that were no better than satisfactory. The college has made reasonable progress to improve this. Comprehensive procedures for the observation of lessons are in place and these have focused on improving the quality of individuals and curriculum teams judged as requiring the greatest amount of support. The latest information from the college indicates that the proportion of teaching and learning judged to be inadequate has decreased and a higher proportion of lessons are now good or better.

The college has a very large number of trained observers. Moderation of the judgments of lesson observations is carried out through scrutiny of the observation proforma and by joint lesson observations, which provides staff with the opportunity to compare their judgments with another colleague. External consultants are also involved in observing lessons, to ensure college judgments are benchmarked appropriately. Peer observations take place throughout the college, and quite extensively in some curriculum areas. These enable teaching staff to observe each other's lessons and share good practice. Staff development covers a broad range of teaching and learning issues that are identified through the lesson observation process. Group training sessions are arranged and much effective individual coaching also takes place between teachers and advanced teaching practitioners, curriculum managers, subject learning coaches and training and development staff.

Observers grading lessons provide the teacher with comprehensive feedback that evaluates aspects of teaching, learning and attainment. Action plans are developed that highlight areas for further improvement. Most of these plans contain specific and time-bound targets, but a few lack detail and fail to recommend the specific action required for improvement.

How much progress has the college made in improving individual target setting and monitoring for learners?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made since the previous inspection to develop target setting procedures for monitoring the individual progress of learners. Learners are kept well-informed about their progress by teachers and tutors. They greatly value the regular individual meetings at which individual learning plans (ILPs) are reviewed and appreciate the support provided by staff. Targets set with learners incorporate subject specific skills and cover attendance and punctuality. More general aspects of personal development are covered in some ILPs and the college plans to place more emphasis on this aspect of an individual's progress in the next academic year, as part of a more widespread focus on personalised learning.

The ILPs of learners identified as requiring additional learning support contain specific targets set for them. The quality of these review meetings is evaluated through observations by college staff.

Most learners have electronic ILPs that are stored on the college's virtual learning environment. This provides easy access to them for learners and staff, and enables managers to monitor their completion and quality by on-line scrutiny. The quality of ILPs is also evaluated during twice-yearly tutorial audits and through the college's standard quality assurance procedures, such as departmental reviews and curriculum team reviews. A broad range of training and development has taken place to help staff to produce effective ILPs with specific, time-bound targets for learners.

How well has the college continued to develop its employer responsiveness?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in continuing to develop its response to employer needs. It achieved the Training Quality Standard award last year. It has good links to many local employers and has developed a very flexible approach to training their staff. Strong and effective local partnerships are used well to benefit apprentices and employers. The college has responded well to the twin challenges of expansion and changing sector demands. It is building its capacity to adapt to a fluctuating market through the London Assessor Academy. The new college structure promotes an enterprise culture more widely. Staff are working towards 'Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector' (PTLLS) awards and the college is developing blended learning packages to improve learners' access to study. Systems to plan and monitor progress are improving although some learners are progressing too slowly. Vocational staff are working with basic skills experts to improve and accelerate apprentices' achievement of key skills.

Leadership and management

What improvements have been made in dealing with areas of poor performance?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection reported the slow implementation of plans to tackle areas of poor performance. The college has made reasonable progress to ensure any poor performance is identified and dealt with swiftly. Procedures for self-assessment and quality assurance remain rigorous. Quality improvement plans include targets covering learners' outcomes. Departmental reviews take place three times per year, where senior managers monitor the progress made by curriculum teams against the targets in their quality improvement plan. Where under-performance is identified, special support is put into place. This support takes many forms, for example, external consultants have worked with teachers to improve aspects of teaching and learning. The effectiveness of this work is reflected in the significant increase in success rates for ESOL programmes and the improvement in the quality of provision for science which is now reported in the self-assessment report as satisfactory. College systems for collating the attendance of learners through electronic

registration are now improved, although capturing the punctuality of learners accurately still requires improvement.

Under-performance by individual members of staff is also dealt with in a supportive yet swift fashion. The quality of teaching and learning is evaluated through the lesson observation scheme and satisfactory or worse performance by individual teachers is dealt with successfully. Feedback from lesson observations informs an individual's performance appraisal and support is given when appropriate. The college has well-formed plans for each department to develop a teaching and learning development plan during the 2009/2010 academic year.