

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Wigan and Leigh College
Date of visit: 25 – 26 February 2009

Context

Wigan and Leigh College is a large general further and higher education college. The college operates from a number of sites across Wigan; Parsons Walk and Pagefield are in the town centre. Other college sites, including the sixth form college, are situated in Leigh, several miles away. The borough of Wigan consists of 14 towns and villages spread across 77 square miles of which 75% is open countryside. Some 55% of wards in Wigan fall within 20% of the most deprived wards in England, and 16% of wards are amongst the 105 most deprived. Unemployment in Wigan is lower than the Greater Manchester average but higher than the national average. Approximately 98.7% of Wigan residents are white, which is higher than the Greater Manchester average.

The 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. Achievement and standards were judged to be satisfactory. The quality of provision, guidance and support and educational and social inclusion were judged to be good. Of the six curriculum areas that were inspected, one was judged to be outstanding, three were good and two were satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What progress is the college making in raising success rates on long courses?	Significant progress
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Overall long course success rates have improved markedly from 62% in 2006/07 to 71% in 2007/08, which is at the national average. Improvements in success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 have been significant. At level 1, the rate improved by eight percentage points to 72%; at level 2 by sixteen points to 72%; and at level 3 by eleven percentage points to 73%. All rates are at or around the national average. For adult learners the improvements have been more modest, except at level 1 where the success rate increased by sixteen percentage points in 2007/08 and is now above the 2006/07 national average. Improvements in the accessibility and use of data by teachers and managers have been instrumental in helping the college to increase success rates and to eradicate underperformance in almost all curriculum areas.

What progress is being made in improving the success rates on GCE AS and A-level courses?	Significant progress
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Overall GCE AS success rates increased to 75% in 2007/08 which is 6% above the 2006/07 average for general further education and tertiary colleges. The GCE A-level success rate increased to 96% which is slightly above the national average. Pass and retention rates are high in most subjects. The low number of students progressing from AS to A2 level is an area for improvement which is recognised by the college.

What progress has been made to improve success rates in work-based learning?	Reasonable progress
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The overall success rate for work-based learning shows an improving trend and at 57% in 2008 was just below the national average. There has been significant improvement on advanced apprenticeships programmes and more specifically in engineering provision. In 2008 the overall success rate on advanced apprenticeship programmes was broadly average at 62%; the timely success rate was also broadly average but at 42% overall represents a significant improvement on 29% in 2007. The overall success rate on apprenticeship programmes remains low at 54% and the timely success rate was very low at 31% in 2008.

The college has restructured its work-based learning provision and management of this area is much improved. There is a clear understanding of what needs to improve and how to bring this about in a more timely fashion. The restructure has also secured greater involvement of the college's curriculum areas in the strategic and operational management of work-based learning. Steps taken to bring about improvement are also evident in the higher number of learners who achieve the relevant technical certificate. The college recognises the need for more stringent monitoring to ensure more trainees attain all components of their framework. The college has increased the number of learners on Train to Gain provision with around 1,900 starts planned for the current year. In 2008 the overall success for Train to Gain programmes was just below average at 58%.

Learners' outcomes on Entry to Employment (E2E) provision have also improved considerably and the overall success rate in 2008 was 67%.

The college has recently gained national recognition for its research on good practice in employer responsiveness.

How well are data on learners' prior attainment used to accelerate students' progress? What do the value data say about progress?	Insufficient progress
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There is now better use of data on students' prior attainment to set minimum expected grades (MEG). Teachers and tutors monitor students' progress against their target grades regularly; students generally know how well they are performing. Managers have oversight of performance both at individual student and at course level. However, there is insufficient impact of the college's actions; value-added data for 2007/08 indicate that too many students do not achieve the grades they are capable of. In the main this is because information on prior attainment and data on value-added are not used systematically by managers or teachers to inform practice, including teaching practice, or to evaluate quality of provision as a whole. It is also because actions which follow the review of students' progress are vague and insufficiently focused to enable them to achieve the grades they are capable of.

Leadership and management

What actions has the college taken to improve attendance? How effective are these actions?	Reasonable progress
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The self-assessment report indicates that overall attendance improved by two percentage points to 83% in 2008. College data for the current year, which compares attendance patterns for the previous year, indicate further improvement with overall attendance close to the college target of 85%. Systems and procedures for monitoring and challenging poor attendance or punctuality are rigorous and well-established. Nevertheless there remain pockets of poor attendance on some courses.

What progress has been made in ensuring a more rigorous lesson observation procedure that can be used to ensure all teaching is of a consistent quality?	Insufficient progress
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Systems and procedures for the observation of teaching and learning are clearly formulated and understood well. However, there has been too much focus on the system itself rather than the strategies required to raise the quality of teaching and learning. More recently senior managers have taken steps to raise the profile of teaching and learning. A number of initiatives involving both college staff and external consultants are currently being implemented. There are also pockets of good and outstanding practice. All this remains largely uncoordinated and there is a lack of strategic steer on prioritising where to start, where to target specific interventions and how to evaluate and measure the impact of steps taken.

The college has yet to ensure that it gains a full and true picture of the quality of teaching overall as not all staff have been observed. There are plans in place to address this in the current year. Procedures to moderate judgements about the

quality of lesson observations are becoming more rigorous and are beginning to address the issues of over grading in some areas. Training has already taken place to raise observers' awareness of the need to focus on the quality of learning that takes place in lessons rather than commenting on the teaching strategies employed. There is much sharing of good practice within some curriculum areas but there is insufficient sharing of good practice across departments.

The overall evaluation of the quality of teaching lacks precision and fails to accurately pinpoint key weaknesses. Where weak teaching has been identified as an issue in some curriculum areas this has not been identified as a key weakness in the curriculum self-assessment report; consequently there are no clear plans to tackle these weaknesses.

What progress has been made in improving the accommodation that was judged to be unsatisfactory in the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Several improvements have been made to secure better teaching accommodation. For example, there has been a greater investment in information technology, including interactive whiteboards. Teaching rooms are generally well maintained and well-equipped. However, the college recognises the limitations of the current main site in Parsons Walk and capital investment plans are in place to remedy this.