

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Leeds College of Music  
Date of visit: 6 May 2009

### Context

Leeds College of Music is a higher education institution (HEI) which offers a wide range of specialist music programmes in further and higher education. It is housed in recently constructed, purpose-built accommodation in the city centre. Community education outreach classes are delivered at various centres throughout the region. Leeds is the largest metropolitan district in West Yorkshire and has a diverse economy. The area has a lower than average unemployment rate but areas of the city have high unemployment rates. A number of inner city wards within Leeds are amongst the 10% most deprived wards in the country. The number of young people leaving Year 11 with five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE in Leeds is improving but lower than the national average (60.8% compared with a national average of 64.6%). The local education authority sub-contracts most of its adult and community learning music provision to the college. The Governing Body, in reviewing the college's future, has expressed a preference for merger with another higher education institution. The college's mission is 'to be the conservatoire of choice for forward-thinking musicians; renowned for the quality, distinctiveness and relevance of our provision, and the contribution that we make to the cultural life and economic prosperity of our city, our region and the wider world'.

### Achievement and standards

What further improvements are there to success rates, including on level 3 courses, and in internal progression from further education to higher education in music technology?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, success rates at level 3 were low but improving. Progression from music technology courses to higher education was low. The college has made reasonable progress through a range of effective strategies. These include timetable changes to ensure that students have fewer gaps in study during the day and dedicated time for tutorials. Course leaders have clear responsibilities for monitoring performance trends and arrangements for monitoring students' attendance have been strengthened. Standardised interview procedures for music technology courses ensure that students meet agreed entry criteria. There is improved use of the college's virtual learning environment and a better standard of

information technology (IT) equipment for staff and students. However, some students, including those on music technology courses, indicated that they have insufficient access to studios and IT facilities to meet deadlines in completing their assignments. On some courses, assignments are poorly planned with too many at the end of the course.

The overall success rate has improved over the last three years, from 69% in 2006, to 81% in 2008. The rate on long courses improved from 66% in 2006 to 80% in 2008. On short courses, although it dipped from 89% in 2006 to 84% in 2007, it improved to 87% in 2008.

On long courses for students aged 16 to 18 the success rates have improved at all levels to around the national averages. For the small numbers aged 19 and over, the success rates at levels 2 and 3 have improved to above the national average. However, at level 1 the rate fell by 6% in 2008 and is below the national average. The success rate on short courses at levels 1 and 2 have improved significantly over the last three years and are high.

On music courses, success rates have improved or remained at high levels. However there is insufficient improvement on music technology courses. Improving success rates over the last three years were not sustained on all courses in 2008. At level 1 rates have remained high for the last three years, but at level 2 they have declined. At level 3, rates have improved from a very low level in 2006, but remain below the national average.

Good progress has been made in improving the proportion of students from music technology courses who progress internally to the college's higher education provision, with a significant increase in numbers during the last three years.

What further improvements are there to key skills and Skills for Life success rates since the 2007 inspection?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving success rates on key skills and Skills for Life qualifications. Good progress has been made in improving success rates at levels 1 and 2 in key skills, but too few students have the opportunity to achieve accreditation at level 3. The management and delivery of key skills has improved with well qualified staff and more rigorous monitoring of students' attendance, progress and examination entries. On key skills qualifications, success rates improved significantly in 2008 and are high. For communications at level 2 and 3 the rates were 100% in 2008. On information technology level 2 the rate improved significantly and is above the national average.

Good progress has been made in improving success rates on Skills for Life qualifications. On the certificate in adult literacy, rates have improved at levels 1 and 2. On the certificate in adult numeracy, the level 2 rate improved in 2008 to 80%, but

dipped slightly at level 1 to 73%. Overall level 1 rates are below but at level 2 they are above the national averages.

## Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of tutorials and individual learner reviews?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection attendance at tutorials was low. Inconsistent use was made of individual learner reviews and additional learning support was slow to be implemented. Reasonable progress has been made in addressing these.

Attendance at group and individual tutorials has improved significantly through the good use of attendance tracking software and more stringent monitoring. Attendance at group tutorials in the current year is higher than 90% on all full-time courses, except for the National diplomas in music technology year 2 and the Pop Music year 2. Through the revised timetabling arrangements, group tutorials are scheduled as an integral part of teaching programmes so that attendance can be monitored more easily. This encourages better attendance. Group tutorials cover appropriate 'Every Child Matters' themes and enhance the knowledge and skills of students on aspects of their courses such as managing their learning and setting up performance venues. Individual tutorials, offered to students three times a year, are supplemented by regular checks on students' progress. There is good use of an 'at risk' register for students causing concern. The individual learning plan has been redesigned in an electronic format and better use is made of more sharply defined learner targets to monitor progress. Students claim that they receive good feedback and progress reports from tutors on how well they are meeting their targets.

Students take appropriate adult literacy and numeracy diagnostic tests as part of their key skills assessment during induction. The college's identification of additional learning needs is good and some progress has been made in evaluating its impact on student achievement. Study skills workshops are used increasingly to enhance students' literacy and study skills. The college has plans to integrate more fully additional learning support into the teaching programme and to improve further its response time. A number of measures have been introduced to raise the awareness of part-time students of the range of support services. Support has a higher profile in the handbook for part-time students. Publicity leaflets are more easily seen and there is increased take-up of services, including counselling.

What progress is there in improving the sharing of best practice in teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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There is reasonable progress in increasing the sharing of best practice between teachers including between those from different subject areas, an area for

improvement at the previous inspection. Good and increasing use is made of the college's virtual learning environment by teachers to share teaching methods, lesson plans and assignment briefs. Teachers collaborate well on arrangements to standardise the formats for assignment briefs using features of the best examples from individual teachers. Increasingly, individual teachers are sharing their approaches to improving students' writing and oral communication skills and to revision aids. The sharing of practice is further extended at staff conferences and through team teaching. There are some examples of good practice in group work, the teaching of theory and peer assessment. The college has modified its teaching observation scheme to improve the recording and dissemination of good practice but recognises the need for further work on this. Students report that there is variation in the quality of teaching and learning in some subjects. The observation scheme has given higher priority to supporting further improvement by teachers whose lessons are judged to be satisfactory.

## Leadership and management

What progress has there been in improving arrangements for quality assurance?	Reasonable progress
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Overall, since the previous inspection, there is reasonable progress in improving arrangements for quality assurance. Progress has been much more rapid during the last year. Since then arrangements for risk management have been introduced that have significantly enhanced the college's ability to plan, monitor and evaluate at strategic and operating levels. The restructuring of academic management in September 2008 has clarified the management and reporting lines for the further education provision and enhanced course leadership.

Arrangements for self-assessment have been enhanced through revised course review procedures that make increased use of data, for example students' attendance and progress, to monitor the quality of the provision. Focus groups and questionnaires available on the virtual learning environment have increased the use of student feedback. Governors and senior managers monitor progress against key performance indicators regularly. However, the college recognises the need to do more to analyse year-on-year trends in student performance.

What measures are in place to protect provision for FE learners in the further development of the college?	No judgement
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The college has made good arrangements to consult and communicate with staff over the proposed merger with another higher education partner. This includes detailed consideration of how best to safeguard further education in the next phase of its development by consideration of a closer link with the new Leeds City College. A dedicated head of further education in the college was appointed from September 2008. Staff morale is generally positive and interviewed staff state that they feel well

informed about proposals and options. The college recognises that it will need to ensure that the current good progression opportunities from part-time community and outreach provision through further education and to higher education are safeguarded in any new system.