

## RE-INSPECTION OF WEST THAMES COLLEGE

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### Outcome of Re-Inspection

The overall provision in business, and in information and communications technology (ICT) remains **unsatisfactory**. The provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy work-based learning (WBL) is now **satisfactory**.

### Background

West Thames College was inspected in December 2003. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all curriculum areas inspected, except in business, ICT, and work-based learning in hairdressing and beauty therapy, which were found to be unsatisfactory.

Ofsted and the ALI have particular duties in relation to colleges where their inspection report indicates that individual curriculum and/or work-based learning (WBL) areas are unsatisfactory or very weak or where leadership and management are unsatisfactory or very weak. Where a college has been judged to have less than satisfactory leadership and management, or less than satisfactory provision in solely WBL, inspectors from Ofsted or the ALI will visit the college to carry out monitoring inspections of the less than satisfactory areas. As a result of the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors may judge that previously less than satisfactory areas of provision, or leadership and management, are now satisfactory and that no further visits are required. Where leadership and management are satisfactory, but there is curriculum provision that is less than satisfactory, there will be no monitoring visits. All less than satisfactory provision will be re-inspected, normally during one week, within two years of the original inspection.

If, after approximately 24 months, the college has not made sufficient progress to justify a judgement that the curriculum or WBL area or leadership and management are satisfactory, the original grade for the area that continues to be unsatisfactory will remain on the college's record until the next full inspection within the cycle. Ofsted will inform the local LSC that provision remains unsatisfactory and the reasons why.

### Date of the Re-Inspection

In accordance with the above procedures, re-inspection of business, ICT and hair and beauty therapy [WBL] took place during the week of 6 -10 December 2004. At the college's request, the re-inspection took place one year after the full inspection.

### Business

In the December 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report

### **Strengths**

- effective pastoral support for students
- good assessment practice
- good opportunities for progression.

### **Weaknesses**

- low pass rates on most courses
- dull teaching
- poor punctuality and attendance
- insufficient links with business.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that insufficient progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area remains **unsatisfactory**.

Pass rates improved on some courses in 2003/04 and in a few cases were above the national averages. On a significant number of other courses pass rates remained below the national averages. Retention rates in the same period declined on the majority of courses, and in some cases fell to significantly below national averages.

There has been no improvement in the quality of teaching. At the re-inspection the number of lessons observed that were good or better was significantly below the national average for this curriculum area, and there was a considerable proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. The better classes are characterised by a businesslike and purposeful approach. Students are enthusiastic and attentive, and are developing a good range of vocational and personal skills. However, in many classes teaching is unimaginative and uninspiring. Learning is not put into a realistic business context and too little attention is paid to the development of appropriate skills for business. Teachers make few demands on students and students are not working to their full potential. Teachers have little opportunity to use ILT effectively in lessons.

The college has put in place new systems for monitoring and improving students' attendance and

recent college data show that these are beginning to have an impact. Students' attendance has improved since the last inspection. In some lessons students arrive promptly and eager to start work, but lack of punctuality continues to affect other lessons.

The curriculum area is beginning to forge new links with business. Work experience has been put in place for the E-business students and the first cohort has already undertaken a work experience period. The college intends to build on the links created to extend this opportunity to other groups of students. The restructured management team is enabling closer liaison between previously separate areas of the curriculum, and plans are being advanced for jointly improving business contacts. These plans have yet to come to fruition and currently there is little active employer involvement in the curriculum.

## **ICT**

In the December 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

### **Strengths**

- high and improving pass rates on the AVCE ICT single award course
- wide range of courses for students aged 16-18
- good progression from entry level to HE.

### **Weaknesses**

- low pass rates on GCSE IT, GCE AS computing and CLAIT
- poor attendance and punctuality
- much undemanding and uninspiring teaching
- outdated computer software
- few opportunities for commercial computing experience for students.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that insufficient progress has been made in addressing all of the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area remains **unsatisfactory**.

Pass rates on the AVCE ICT conversion to double award and the city and guilds advanced diplomas and diplomas for IT practitioners are above the national average, but pass rates on the AVCE ICT single award have declined and are just below the national average. There are poor pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate ICT, and the GCSE ICT (A\*-C). Retention rates on the AVCE single award, GNVQ foundation ICT, intermediate ICT, GCSE ICT, and AS level ICT are below the national average and declining. During the re-inspection attendance was low, at 69%. Students' lack of punctuality disrupted some lessons.

The quality of teaching has not improved since the last inspection. A significant proportion of teaching remains unsatisfactory, and less than half of the lessons observed were good or better, which is well below the national average for this curriculum area. Teachers are trying out new teaching methods and employing different strategies for engaging students. This meets with varying degrees of success. In level 3 lessons there is successful use of question and answer techniques to involve students and to develop links to previous knowledge. Students are encouraged to think for themselves, and to discuss issues. However, in many other lessons students are not challenged and do not fully participate in the lesson. Teachers fail to check on students' progress and on their understanding of the subject. Students are often inattentive, and at times they are disruptive.

ICT resources have improved. The college has made a major investment in updating computer hardware and ensuring that software is to industrial standards. However, there is still little use of ILT in the classroom.

A new manager was appointed in September 2004, and policies have been put in place to improve retention and achievement. An action plan with clear targets arising from the previous inspection is carefully monitored, but many of its objectives have yet to have an impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

### **Hairdressing and beauty therapy WBL**

In the December 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

#### **Strengths**

- high retention and pass rates on beauty therapy level 3 and media make-up courses
- high quality specialist make-up and hairdressing courses
- wide range of provision with good progression
- extensive range of enrichment activities

- good teaching in beauty and holistic therapy.

### **Weaknesses**

- poor retention rates on the hairdressing level 2 programme
- inadequate client base for hairdressing students
- weak target setting
- poor attendance and punctuality
- poor management of work-based learning.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now **satisfactory**.

Retention rates on level 2 hairdressing courses are improving. During the year 2002/03 the retention rate for the one year courses was 86%, compared with a national average of 73%. On two-year courses, retention is satisfactory. In 2003/04 the retention rate for work-based learners was satisfactory and on-course retention in the current year is good at 89%.

The client base has improved. There are still insufficient models for all students to practise on at the skills centre. However, more are now available than at the last inspection. The attendance pattern for work-based learners has changed so that more of the practical training is undertaken in the workplace where access to models is better.

There has been a significant improvement in the monitoring and tracking of progress, together with a more robust system for reviewing students' progress and undertaking action planning. This is now a strength. Students have reviews every 8 to 10 weeks to discuss what has been achieved since the last review and agree targets for the next review period. Teachers also review progress in their individual practical lessons and can update the review accordingly. These lessons occur every 3 to 4 weeks, so focus on progression is stronger. Assessors undertake more assessments in the workplace. They, too, have progress discussions with the students, partly to plan the assessment due and partly to agree a course of action before the next assessment. From these three approaches, the students can expect to be reviewed and their progress monitored monthly.

Target setting and action planning is more detailed than at the last inspection. Units are now broken down into their constituent parts and strict timescales agreed for achievement. Both employers and students are actively involved in the monitoring and review process and agreement is reached with employers on the training needed in the salon over the next review period. In this way, students and

employers are more aware of the progress being made and what still needs to be completed.

Attendance on work-based learning programmes has improved from 50% at the last inspection to 68% at re-inspection. The average attendance for 2003-4 was 83% and is currently at 81%.

The management of the work-based learning provision has improved. A training manager has been appointed. There is more teamwork than at the last inspection. Systems and procedures have been introduced to deal with problems of slow or poor progress of students, and improvements have been made to teaching and learning, assessment, target-setting and attendance.

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