

IAG Gold Standard assessment – Wilberforce Sixth Form College

**External Assessment carried out on 10.09.2008
Assessors – Vince Barrett and Maureen Kelham**

Overview

Wilberforce College is a sixth-form college situated on a single site to the east of the city of Kingston-upon-Hull. The college serves approximately 1600 mainly full-time 16-18 year old learners who principally progress from east Hull and Holderness secondary schools. The college's natural catchment area has a predominantly white population with high levels of both urban and rural deprivation and relatively low levels of academic achievement at age 16 (See Element 5.2). The curriculum offer ranges from entry to advanced level in a wide range of vocational and academic courses and programmes, designed to meet the needs of incoming learners. The college's philosophy is to continue to widen participation in learning by providing this broad curriculum and associated support which meet community needs, fulfil individual potential and increase aspirations and achievement.

Assessment

Prior to the formal assessment, the Connexions Curriculum Adviser for Hull, Annabel Brannan, worked closely with key personnel in the college, assisting in the compilation of a detailed self-assessment form in preparation for external assessment. A portfolio of evidence - containing substantial documentary and pictorial representation of college IAG practice - was provided to the assessors prior to the date of assessment. The results of learner surveys were also included, evidencing feedback from learners and practitioners regarding the IAG systems in place (See Element 8.1).

The formal assessment procedure took a full day. The assessors were provided with a very full programme which included interviews with the principal, senior managers and all key IAG personnel. During the assessment, the following additional activities were undertaken: interviews with learners (randomly selected) and visual inspection of the available facilities for provision of information, advice and guidance. All interviews and observations were later cross-referenced against the portfolio of paper evidence pre-submitted by the college. The relevant collected evidence demonstrating each Element and Component of the Hull Gold Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance is described in summary below:

Element 1 – Accessible and Visible Information

Component 1: There will be one or more information areas, open at clearly displayed times, accessible to all learners and providing a range of appropriate, current and impartial information which meets all needs

The main Student Support Services centre is situated in a modern purpose-built facility on the ground floor of the main complex. This centre has improved the partnership working arrangements for all IAG practitioners and co-ordinated the availability of specialist support staff (e.g. Connexions Personal Adviser, HE advisers, health professionals). The centre is described by the manager as “a one stop shop for all students and for all problems”. Consequently, learners are able to access information on any aspect or issue affecting them - personal, learning, progression or health - and information leaflets are readily

available, located at key points around the site. Learners may access more detailed hard copy, electronic or internet-based information via the college's main library on the first floor which provides a range of services and resources – including clearly-signposted career and lifestyle information - offered in a spacious and calm environment with librarians always on hand to support research and coursework. Both the Student Support Centre and library are accessible to learners and staff at all times throughout the working day.

There are wide-screen monitors situated around the college which relay any new college events or information of importance to learners. The college also has two excellent web-based sites. 'Moodle' contains information for students about such things as enrichment activities, student union issues and available support services and 'Columbus' - a student database that has greatly enhanced communication between staff and learners.

Component 2: All staff involved in providing information will be familiar with its content and purpose

The college claims to carry a stock of over 14,000 catalogued items, which includes books, cameras, CDs, and DVDs and a range of newspapers and periodicals covering a wide variety of topics. There is a well-stocked Careers Library which includes university prospectuses and easy access to professional advice and guidance through strong links with Connexions Humber whose advisers operate from an office within the Library.

The college site has a team of learning support staff; all learners have a named personal tutor and access to a Learning Mentor or Learning Study Support Tutor. All staff with a responsibility for the provision of information, advice, guidance or learner support interviewed as a part of the assessment process demonstrated clear understanding of the breadth and purpose of information available. There are professional development opportunities and cross-team meetings in place to ensure this understanding is maintained and the Connexions Careers PA holds regular briefing sessions with all tutors delivering the careers programme.

Element 2 – Accessible Advice and Guidance

Component 1: Internal and external advice and guidance practitioners will collectively possess the necessary skills, knowledge, training and qualifications to identify and respond to each learner's needs.

All Connexions personnel are professionally qualified in Advice and Guidance; the college librarian has relevant IAG qualifications; the full-time college counsellor possesses high level professional qualifications and the two part-time counsellors are also professionally qualified. There are professional NHS staff providing weekly drop-in clinics on health related topics and there are specialist mentors for learning and behaviour support.

There are regular meetings of the Student Services team to discuss college IAG provision. There is a move towards including at these meetings a case conference framework so that individual learner needs are discussed more fully. This development is being led by the Assistant Principal for Student Services and the next meeting is scheduled to concentrate on looked-after children. Other professionals e.g. social services and the police are to be invited as necessary. There is a strong multi-agency approach in the college and the Connexions service is well integrated.

Learners valued very highly the individual help available to them via tutors, Study Support Tutors and/or Learning Mentors and felt them to be very approachable and non-judgemental. Worthy of particular note is the in-house professional counselling service available to all learners requiring sustained and in-depth support with any personal issues or problems. External Advice and Guidance professionals are all qualified and experienced in practising in their particular fields.

Component 2: All advice and guidance practitioners will know about the work of other IAG providers who may be better placed to meet learners' needs

Internal and external IAG practitioners working in the college come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. All are aware of the remit of others and referrals are made easily between IAG personnel in order to ensure that specific questions on topics such as EMA, UCAS, student finance, accommodation or transition are addressed by the most appropriate practitioner. The Student Services Manager acts as mentor to new staff, ensuring a good understanding of the range of information advice and guidance services and protocols in the college.

Element 3 – Linked IAG Provision

Component 1: The provision of linked advice and guidance will be part of the remit and role of a senior manager within the organisation or service

All information, advice and guidance procedures at Wilberforce College are overseen by Rhys Davies (Assistant Principal: Student Services). He is the first point of contact for all internal and external people and agencies working on the college site and has responsibility for oversight of the whole college IAG provision. The following senior people also have significant roles in the provision of IAG across the college:

David Cooper, Vice Principal

Hilary Clark, Careers Co-ordinator

Component 2: All IAG practitioners will make clear to learners the links between IAG services and support learners in their transition between these services

College teachers, tutors, support teams and Connexions PAs all have access to the huge range of information securely held on every learner within the 'Columbus' database. This includes records of individual timetables, targets, academic progress, health issues and behaviour. Staff have access to confidential information which learners are not able to view, unless they make a formal request to do so. Staff and learners are able to communicate via the internal email system to arrange appointments, provide requested information or simply to check on current position. All of this goes a long way to ensuring that appropriate IAG practitioners work with each individual as appropriate and that each practitioner is aware of all interventions made. The role of Personal Tutors, Learning Mentors and Study Support Tutors is also pivotal in linking all available IAG services. All are clear about what is available from IAG services; advocate on behalf of learners where necessary and help with individual referrals to specialist agencies. Learners interviewed were all able to describe the systems for getting help. Data protection policies and protocols for referral are in place and can also be accessed by staff on the Moodle system.

Component 3: All IAG practitioners will recognise professional boundaries and know which alternative provision is appropriate for signposting or referral to meet each learner's guidance needs

A comprehensive learner handbook is given to all learners at induction. This provides a good reference to all the IAG services available. Connexions, as the principal on-site external IAG provider, has in place a Partnership Agreement detailing the work and boundaries of Personal Advisers based in the college. At least one Connexions PA is available in college at all times during the working day. There are also clear college IAG procedures and protocols in place which define the work of all providers. Referral procedures to internal or external guidance agencies, fed through the Student Support Service, are clear and understood by practitioners.

Element 4 - IAG Responsiveness to the needs of clients

Component 1: IAG provision will promote equality of opportunity and access

Changes to the college's curriculum offer have been made to meet the needs and aspirations of the local community and potential barriers to access identified. The promotion of EMA and the 'Megariders' subsidised transport offer is well established. External national problems with EMA payments have meant that the college has had to respond with free 'Megarider' passes and free or subsidised meals where necessary, provided through the college's contingency Learner Support Fund. There are currently 800 learners claiming on EMA – mostly at the higher £30 rate.

The use of Gender Equality Race Inclusion (GERI) materials in the tutorial programme demonstrates the college's challenging stereotypes and awareness of all options and barriers to choice are addressed. In discussion with the CACHE tutor, it was found that there is still an unwillingness by male learners to embark upon child care courses despite the college's efforts and public promotion by the NHS and other organisations.

Component 2: IAG will be accessible to all, with specific resources directed to learners identified as having additional needs.

Wilberforce College is extending its provision of level 1 and 2 courses, reflecting the needs of learners. This year, there is a large cohort undertaking BTEC Introductory programmes and five learning mentors have been assigned to support students specifically on level 1 programmes. They are located near to one of the students' social areas. Induction interviews identify students who have learning or emotional issues. The college does not have a large number of learners who are deemed to be 'looked-after' but there are some who are identified as needing additional support due to the pressures of living independently for the first time – there are approximately 50 learners currently receiving this additional support.

The recently re-furbished Study Support Centre has a welcoming environment and is easily accessible across the corridor from the library. The Study Support Manager has close working relationship with SENCOs in feeder schools and is well-informed before learners start at Wilberforce College.

There is a learner disability register available on the 'Columbus' system for all staff together with brief helpful hints about teaching people with a range of disabilities or conditions.

The top 30 gifted and talented students receive mentoring and talks related to critical thinking and study skills

The developing electronic Individual Learning Plan and regular tutorials means that learners are closely tracked – distance travelled and outcomes monitored. Students are given notices to improve and targets for short, medium and long term. They can access these on the 'Columbus' system.

All tutors are trained on the college's Child Protection Policy

Element 5 - Quality and Delivery of IAG

Component 1: IAG will be underpinned by a development programme of planned personal learning based upon national recommendations

Every full-time learner is allocated a personal tutor to whom they can refer for help and support with any aspect of their learning. Such is the importance the college places on effective tutoring that staff are selected for the role of tutor on the basis of skill, interest and commitment to supporting young people. Remission is given in the teaching load of teacher/tutors in order that they may undertake the role fully and additional tutors are recruited specifically to this role. There is a tutorial programme devised and issued by Richard Hurrell, (Tutorial Manager) and linked to the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes. A very useful spin-off for Level 3 learners from this programme is that they may use the course to contribute to their work towards the 'A' Level General Studies examination.

This tutorial programme runs alongside the careers education programme written by Careers Co-ordinator, Hilary Clark in collaboration with the Connexions Careers PA. The programmes are extensive and prescribed. Evidence demonstrated the use of these programmes within the Health and Social care and IT courses. The Connexions PA has input that allows her to meet learners at appropriate times. In addition, the college offers extensive enrichment activities including an annual careers fair that gives information on options, employment, training and higher education.

Component 2: IAG will be targeted at the needs of learners and informed by social and economic priorities at local regional and national levels

Wilberforce College is situated in a city that has a high percentage of its wards ranked in the top 25% of most deprived in England and Wales and is also very high in the national rankings for local concentrations of multiple deprivation. The proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C is amongst the smallest in the country and Hull often appears close to or at the bottom of the national league GCSE attainment table. At the same time, however, the college serves learners from the southern edge of the East Riding which is consistently at the upper end of the GCSE table and, has fewer areas that can be described as disadvantaged. Some learners also join the college from the independent school – Hymers College - which is situated to the west of Hull. The learning offer provided by the college is correspondingly broad with a wide range of vocational and academic programmes up to Level 3. Consequently, the need for robust provision of information advice and guidance for such a diverse clientele is essential. Wilberforce College acknowledges its responsibility to provide this and all IAG is given in the context of learners' backgrounds, interests and aspirations.

Element 6 - Impartiality of IAG Provision

Component 1: IAG will promote all available options based on the needs and circumstances of each individual

As indicated throughout this report and especially in component 2 below, there is no coercion for young people to make particular choices. There is a wealth of information available throughout the college on all available progression options and teams of people to provide support and guidance to learners in making choices. There is particularly strong support for those learners who choose to move on to Higher Education because many of these ambitious learners are from families where there is no history of any previous experience of university.

Level 3 learners who are not moving into HE are prepared for job search through the careers tutorial programme and referred to Sue Barnett – Connexions PA - for information, advice and guidance.

Component 2: IAG will support learners in making informed decisions and not led by institutional targets or goals.

Impartiality of information, advice and guidance, especially with regard to career and progression is seen to be very important within the college. As mentioned above, IAG is offered to learners in line with their academic ability, career aspirations and interests. All the college's learners are post-16 and normally progress on to work, further study or higher education. Information and advice on options for progression from all courses is impartial – e.g. IAG for progression includes information about provision available at other colleges and work-based learning providers. Wilberforce College does not have any vested interest in retaining learners on courses or programmes that are not matched to their needs or ambitions.

The College's Schools Liaison Officer, John Millar, works closely with all feeder schools and offers taster days for learners who are at the end of year 10. The college is also represented at all local school options evenings. John has worked in secondary education locally for many years and is familiar with all options open to learners post 16. He is keen to ensure that the college enrolls every student with integrity.

The college organises HE visits for students and has found that letters to parents informing them of the visit calendar has increased the numbers attending. The college works hard to try and involve parents but local tradition is still resulting in lower than average progression into Higher Education.

Element 7 – IAG for Learning, Work and Progression

Component 1: IAG for learning, work and progression will support learners in exploring the implications of possible career choices when planning their futures.

There is a thriving CACHE programme in place at the college which requires all learners to undertake a work placement as an integral element of their studies, and local employers are actively engaged in working on projects with the college. Learners on many other courses are also able to undertake periods of work experience and all placements are tailored to each learners' timetable in order to ensure that college work is not missed. The entire college placement service is ably overseen by Wendy Macadam (Work Placement Co-ordinator).

The college provides access to the 'Adult Directions' and 'Course Finder' programs and will soon have a station for 'Funder Finder'. There are a significant number of HE prospectuses and other career-related materials located in the main library, including the 'Working In' series and periodicals.

Reference has been made to the careers education and tutorial programmes (5.1), action planning via the emerging eILP (4.2) and access to impartial guidance from Connexions (3.3). Applicants for HE are supported in the summer months by specialist HE counsellors.

Component 2: IAG practitioners with a career focus will work closely with local employers to ascertain up-to-date LMI

Labour market information is available to learners via the Careers specialist PA in college who keeps up to date with local and national employment trends and is able to advise learners accordingly. Some LMI is also available via the Moodle and Columbus sites. Vocational courses with large amounts of work placement time offer significant and current LMI to their learners.

Component 3: IAG provision will ensure that all learners have access to the information they need to make informed choices

The college has listed all its course provision in the local Area-Wide Prospectuses (AWP) www.learnhull.co.uk / www.learneastriding.co.uk and receives applications via the inbuilt common application process (CAP). The college is working to develop this facility as it means that learners making applications to the college should be more informed about their choices and are more likely to embark upon appropriate provision. As for access to information for learners already at the college, the 'Moodle' system has a careers information section which signposts learners to relevant websites. The careers fair allows learners to talk to relevant providers; 47 providers have attended in the past. The next fair is in February 2009. There is sound evidence of ample opportunities in college for learners to access all they need regardless of proposed next destination (See also Element 1).

Element 8 – Evaluation of IAG

Component 1: All IAG practitioners and learners are able to feed back their views on the provision within the organisation

Learners may offer suggestions for improvement or complimentary comments regarding the service (the latter being more often the case) via the central Student Support Centre. The college also has an in-house periodical 'Learner Voice' where learners may record their views about college life. The "helpfulness and accessibility of support staff" has been recorded here. All staff and external providers are given opportunities to feed back views via team meetings.

Learners interviewed demonstrated knowledge of the variety of support offered in the college and expressed satisfaction with the help available to them. Although most learners choose Wilberforce College because of its location, one student from Bridlington said she had chosen on the basis of course choice and welcoming atmosphere. The Annual Quality review for the college demonstrates the continuous improvement philosophy of the senior staff and this is borne out by the Ofsted 2007 report which states "Students feel that their views are listened to and that action takes place where necessary", "new teachers commented positively about their induction" and "staff are very positive about the effectiveness of communication"

Having spent a full day at the college, interviewing, questioning and observing - in addition to consideration of the submitted paper evidence supporting the quality of IAG at Wilberforce College – the two assessors agree that the college should be recommended to receive the Kingston-upon-Hull Gold Standard Award for IAG.

Vince Barrett and Maureen Kelham
16.09.08

Date of Award: 14th October 2008

Date for re-assessment: September 2011