

**This document was archived in January 2017
as it no longer reflects current policy.**

Getting from good to outstanding: Walsall Adult and Community College

URN: 55258

Area: West Midlands

Date published: 7 October 2013

Reference: 130220

Brief description

When Walsall Adult and Community College (WACC) was judged to be outstanding for overall effectiveness at its inspection in 2012, its leaders attributed this achievement to a shared vision and commitment to sustainable development. The college's stated core purpose is to contribute to the economy of the local community by providing excellent provision for all its learners.

Overview – the provider's message



'At Walsall Adult & Community College we are committed to implementing sustainable development through our management of resources, the learning opportunities we provide and our engagement with the local community. By doing this, we aim to be a leader in education for sustainable development and support our community and partners achieve their sustainability objectives.

This commitment to building a sustainable community is something we all share and it has been a vehicle for us to improve. When the college was formed, our long-term plan was to be outstanding by September 2013, our shared commitment and focus enabled us to achieve this target sooner and in December 2012 we were delighted when Ofsted graded us outstanding.

Economic and social sustainability is what we do; it is the point of what we do. It was crucial that sustainability was embedded in all our core functions rather than an add-on or additional process. Our take on sustainable development is to focus on the social and economic impacts of our provision which best serve our community – and therefore all our learners. A positive impact on the environment is a consequence of this. This focus on sustainable development has changed the culture of WACC; we believe that the college now leads the sector on this and we have not had to compromise on our ideals or values.'

Maria Gilling, Principal

The good practice in detail

The journey to excellence

WACC was formed from the merger of two organisations in 2009. The journey to excellence and sustainability started as a vehicle to unite the two groups of staff. The college set its objectives to be a beacon in the community and, to do this, it needed to be an outstanding and sustainable organisation. As the [inspection report](#) says: Learners gain a very good range of additional skills that helps them improve their quality of life and their employability. Learners significantly improve their confidence and ability to work on their own.

Why sustainable development?

As Joanne Keatley, Deputy Principal explains: 'We needed something positive which staff and the community could buy into and support that would make them feel good about themselves and about WACC. The impact of any development also needed to focus on providing good-quality outcomes for learners. Sustainability ticked a lot of boxes.'



Whole-college approach

The first stage in the journey to excellence was to standardise all the policies and procedures across the provision as the two organisations merged. Managers also focused on monitoring costs, minimising duplication and waste, rethinking and evaluating systems and bringing about improvements to the quality of provision. Sustainability was the ideal vehicle for this. All the systems that related to teaching and learning and to the college as a whole were revised to incorporate sustainability and to strive for excellence. Learners make outstanding progress, because of outstanding teaching and support.

Investment in staff

Staff are crucial to the success of any organisation and WACC invested in all staff, not only those involved in teaching and learning, throughout the following process.

The first stage was a sustainable leadership course for all managers, followed by a project 'turning negative into positive' for all staff. This project had many spin offs, especially in

terms of improving staff morale and improving teaching and learning. Happy teachers invest into their learners, relationships with learners improve and it paves the way for improvement in teaching and learning and outcomes for learners. All staff achieved the ACENTIS level 1 award in sustainability, to raise awareness and help embed sustainability into teaching. This

SEDIS, SUSTAINABILITY		
TODAY I WALKED TO COLLEGE Natascha	I ONLY BOIL THE AMOUNT OF WATER I NEED Bev, Natascha	I HAVE MY HEATING ON A TIMER Bev, Natascha
I BUY LOCAL PRODUCE Paige, Bev, Giedde	I TAKE SHOWERS INSTEAD OF BATHS Bev, Natascha, Steacy	I RECYCLE FOOD WASTE AS MANURE Giedde
I RECYCLE AT HOME Giedde, Natascha, Paige, Emma, Natascha, Steacy, Emma, Bev	I RECYCLE CHRISTMAS CARDS Bev	I GROW MY OWN PRODUCE Bev
I USE LOW ENERGY BULBS Natascha	I BUY FAIR TRADE PRODUCE Emma, Natascha	I HAVE SOLAR PANNELLING Emma
I SWITCH OFF ALL PLUG SOCKETS EACH NIGHT BEFORE I GO TO BED Emma, Bev	I HAVE GIVEN CLOTHES TO CHARITY Bev, Paige	I SWITCH OFF LIGHTS EACH TIME I LEAVE A ROOM Natascha, Bev
I'VE CAR SHARED IN THE LAST WEEK Bev	I USE PUBLIC TRANSPORT Paige, Emma	I RECYCLE AT COLLEGE Emma, Bev, Natascha, Paige, Natascha, Giedde, Steacy

training, not only covered basic concepts in sustainability but crucially for the college an understanding of what makes up a sustainable community, is now part of the induction for new staff. More group training which focused on embedding sustainability into teaching and learning followed. This helped build staff teams and rapport and share good practice. Conversations in the staff room were then about teaching and learning and sustainable development.

Impact of this training on staff

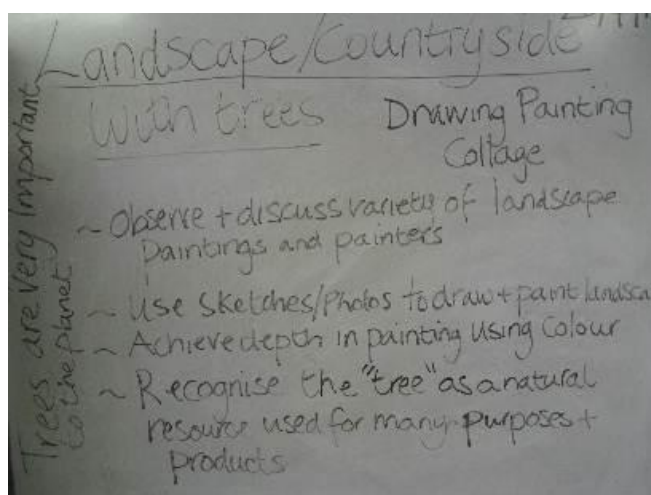
- They could see that the initiatives had a genuine and successful focus on improving the environment throughout the college and on improving the quality of the provision for learners.
- They could also see the positive impact this training has had on developing the new college and on improving the quality of provision for learners.
- They could also see that the new senior management team was successful and true to its values. Staff were empowered to make changes in their approaches so that [sustainable development](#) was embedded in the curriculum. Their successes are celebrated through an annual sustainability award and of course through the inspection result.

Getting teaching and learning to outstanding

Embedding sustainability into lessons was not as difficult as it seemed at first. Not everyone was on board in the beginning, but there were some dissenters. Mathematics teachers couldn't understand how they could connect their subject with sustainability, but now, some of the best examples of [embedding sustainability in teaching](#) are in mathematics lessons; for example when developing learners' ability to understand and use large numbers.

Other examples of improving teaching and learning while embedding sustainability included:

- Workshops for staff that involved identifying positive and negative impacts of their subject on the environment. For example, in hospitality, teachers incorporated into their curriculum the negative impact of food miles against the social and economic benefits of agriculture and horticulture in disadvantaged countries.
- Reducing the reliance on workbooks and handouts led to more practical hands-on learning activities which



required learners to take a more active role which in turn, often accelerated their learning. Recycled materials were used on courses, such as jewellery and gardening, and college's kitchens used the vegetables the students had grown

- Students on courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) not only discussed how they travelled to college but also developed useful language skills as they explored the impact of different methods of travel on the environment and their health.
- An art lesson involved painting trees and the lesson included a discussion about the benefits of trees and why they are so important to life.
- An enterprise element was added to the curriculum to encourage learners who developed good standards of work in their subjects, such as sugar craft or floristry to consider self-employment or set up community-based projects.
- The outstanding promotion of equality and diversity has created a community within the college where everyone is welcomed and valued. The college has developed very successful programmes for young people who are not in education, employment or training to prepare them for success.
- Managers frequently evaluate the impact of their initiatives to promote sustainability as part of their routine quality assurance processes. They consider how well teachers promote sustainability when they observe learning sessions and they explore with learners the impact of sustainability measures on their everyday lives.

The not so small stuff!

'Sustainable development can't just be something we teach. We need to walk the talk and demonstrate that our new business practices benefit our learners. These improvements need to be sustainable and to last the long term, which means a real commitment from staff – all staff and not just teachers,' says Maria Gilling.

Sustainability now shines through all the college's processes. For example, it is embedded in job descriptions, recruitment interviews for staff and the induction, and staff appraisal.

The college has also implemented **sustainable procurement practices** by only buying resources and materials that are needed and by operating fair trade principles.'

Changes to the infrastructure for information and communication technology (ICT) has given teachers time to focus **on improving teaching and learning** instead of preparing paper-based materials. It also provided easily accessible management information and gave learners better access to learning materials.

Savings from sustainability initiatives through prudent procurement and ICT are re-invested into teaching and learning and supporting learners who most need additional help to engage and succeed.

Key features of Walsall Adult and Community College's journey to outstanding while promoting sustainability are:

- Keeping it simple - having a clear objective



- Agreeing values which are shared by all staff
- Using existing processes where possible – valuing what you have and saving time by tweaking and embedding and not starting from scratch
- Investing in staff through training and support and making sure that new staff buy in. Teachers need to feel confident in their ability to adopt new approaches
- Maximising financial savings - using sustainable development well and reinvesting savings into teaching and learning
- Ensuring that everything benefits learners and the community
- Making it a whole-college approach and ensuring all teams and processes are involved.
- Leading by example – walking the talk
- Measuring the impact - including the changes to culture
- Celebrating success – through staff awards and displaying learner work
- Keep going!

Provider background



Walsall Community College was formed in 2009 when, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council rationalised its adult learning service into one organisation. The college has a main site in Walsall and a number of other locations in the borough. It provides a range of programmes for learners, including structured pathways to help learners progress to further education or employment. The borough is the fourth most deprived authority, out of 34, in the West Midlands and the 45th in the country. Twenty seven per cent of the children in the borough live in poverty.

The number of key benefit claimants is one third higher than the national average and 17% of the population is from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch.