

Bradford College

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context

Bradford College is a large general further education (GFE) college. It has two main campuses, two adult education centres and 60 community centres. Courses are offered in 14 of the 15 subject areas funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Agriculture, horticulture and animal care provision are delivered in partnership with Askham Bryan College. In most areas, courses are available from pre-entry to level 4. Provision for higher education is considerable.

In 2009/10, the college enrolled 13,009 funded students, of whom 55% were female. Around 39% of funded students follow full-time courses. Just under 45% of students are enrolled at foundation and pre-foundation levels. Fifty-four per cent of students are White British and 28% are of Asian Pakistani heritage, a much higher proportion than that found locally. Almost two-thirds of the college's FE population are from postcode areas designated as socially deprived.

In the previous inspection in 2008, the college was judged to be good, with outstanding capacity to improve. Achievement and standards, quality of provision, and leadership and management were good. Science and mathematics were outstanding and the other five subject areas inspected were good. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

Has the college maintained its good arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement, including the use of data at curriculum level to monitor and analyse the performance of students?

Significant progress

Self-assessment has continued to develop strongly. The self-assessment process is very inclusive of staff and includes the effective use of students' and other stakeholders' views. Validation panels comprising governors, college managers, staff from peer colleges and students provide rigorous challenge to the proposed grades and evidence. Data on college performance are scrutinised regularly and inform both the strategic and operational quality improvement action plans very effectively. As a result, quality improvement plans are helping to drive up standards. For example, the information technology curriculum area has radically altered its curriculum offer after detailed analysis of why students were underperforming. It continues to assess the impact of the changes through regular monitoring of students' progress and feedback from students. College systems for monitoring progress against targets are rigorous.

Outcomes for students

What progress has been made in improving outcomes for students?

Reasonable progress

Success rates have fluctuated since the previous inspection but the overall trend is one of improvement. The success rate for students aged 16 to 18 increased in 2009/10 and was just below the national average. The success rate for adults remained at a similar level to the previous year and was also just under the national average. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 at entry and foundation level increased to the national average. For adults, the rate fell slightly to below the national rate. At intermediate level, success rates for all students increased markedly in 2009/10 and were at, or just below, the national average. Advanced-level success rates have shown a slight improvement for students aged 16 to 18 but because of low success rates at AS level, they remain well below the national average. For adults, advanced-level success rates are just below average. Success rates, including those achieved within the planned time, for learners on Train to Gain programmes are high. Short course success rates are consistently high.

The college is very clearly focused on improving success rates in areas that declined in 2009/10. Well-targeted actions to rectify underperforming areas are already proving effective. College data, for the current year, indicate a marked improvement in retention to at, or above, the current average. While it is too soon to predict the full impact of the actions taken to improve students' outcomes, college data indicate that challenging targets are likely to be achieved or exceeded.

What progress has the college made in maintaining, or improving upon, the good progress that students were making in the previous inspection?

Significant progress

The college has built on its good work in enabling students to make at least good progress. Extensive college surveys taken throughout the year and feedback from course representative teams indicate a high level of students' enjoyment. The college continues to place significant importance on providing opportunities for students who face multiple barriers to learning and success. Progression between levels and onto other college courses is high, especially from entry and foundation to intermediate level. The proportion of students who progress from entry through to advanced level and beyond is impressive. Striking examples include one visually-impaired student who started at entry level and is now about to complete an advanced-level course very successfully. Another, who came to the college with low self-esteem in addition to very low prior attainment, has just been accepted onto a degree course. Increasing students' confidence and encouraging their personal development underpins the college's work and evidence of this is celebrated widely across the college and also regionally and nationally.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the focus on learning during the observation of teaching and learning?

Significant progress

Since the previous inspection the college has successfully incorporated a very strong focus on learning into the observation of teaching and learning. Observation recording documentation has been adapted to highlight the importance of learning and the need to evaluate it accurately. Helpful prompt cards have been developed to assist observers in their evaluation of learning in lessons, and learning has a high priority in the college's 'compendium of good practice'. Teachers are very clear about the focus on learning in lessons and speak enthusiastically about the changes in their own practices to ensure that learning is given a high priority.

The college has a wide range of quality assurance mechanisms to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of the lesson observation process and to ensure that it focuses appropriately on learning. These include joint lesson observations and rigorous moderation of observations, including the use of external peers. The outcomes from observations are used very well to inform training on an individual level, at programme level and across the college. Teaching and learning facilitators support individual staff very effectively and lead on training.

What progress has the college made in ensuring that individual learning plans are focused sharply on planning learning and monitoring students' progress?

Reasonable progress

Processes have been developed to ensure a clear focus on planning and monitoring students' progress within individual learning plans. Initial and diagnostic information and students' overarching aims when they join the course are included in their individual learning plans. Progress is reviewed regularly and targets that are appropriate and timely are set. Targets are related closely to the individual students, the progress they have made to date and what they need to do to ensure that they keep on track. Personal tutors and course tutors are involved effectively in the process. However, in a few examples it is not clear from the documentation that the targets set at one review are followed up at the next review.

Students find their individual learning plans useful in helping to show how well they are doing and where they need to improve. They also find the individual review sessions supportive and helpful. Individual learning plans are adapted, where appropriate, to ensure they are accessible to all students.

What progress has been made in ensuring that the provision of assistive technologies is timely and appropriate for those students with sensory support needs?

Significant progress

A very wide range of assistive technologies is available in college. The college has strong links with schools, the local authority and community groups. These allow staff to identify local and individual needs promptly. The technology and support that staff put in place are tailored closely to the specific needs of the individual. Students

have access to assistive technologies in the classroom and also around the college. Equipment is also available on loan so that students can use it at home to keep up-to-date with coursework.

Students receive an induction whenever they receive new apparatus to ensure that they are fully aware of all of its functions and can use it to greatest effect. College staff keep up-to-date with assistive technologies and inform students of how new developments or ways of working may help them further in their studies. They strongly encourage students to use assistive technologies to help them do things for themselves and develop independence. Students are full of praise for the benefits of assistive technology and the difference it has made to them. The college can demonstrate many instances of students making great progress in their studies, for example moving from entry to advanced level, and of moving on to higher education.

Leadership and management

Has the college maintained its strength in promoting community cohesion and working with hard-to-reach groups?

Significant progress

The promotion of harmony and respect both within the college community and beyond remains clearly at the heart of the college's work. Governors, senior managers, staff and students take seriously their role in promoting good community relations and in the social and economic regeneration of the area. All staff work very productively with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to ensure that students are safe while in college. The strength, noted in the previous inspection, of supporting those students who face many barriers to learning, continues to be significant. The college has worked hard to maintain and extend its successful community provision where significant numbers of adult students are helped to re-engage with learning and to build their confidence.

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