

# Chichester College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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## **FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Context and focus of visit**

Chichester College is a large general further education college located in the south west of West Sussex. Its main campus is in Chichester, with a second campus in Brinsbury, and outreach centres in Bognor Regis and Littlehampton. The college offers courses in all fifteen subject areas. In 2009/10, there were 9,682 learners, 4,328 were aged 16 to 18 and 5,354 were adults. The college has large numbers of work-based, part-time adult and 14- to 16-year-old learners. In the last year, the college began delivering projects for the Department for Work and Pensions.

At the college's last inspection in February 2008, overall effectiveness, leadership and management, quality of provision and capacity to improve were judged to be good. Achievement and standards were judged to be satisfactory. The college was making reasonable progress in the themes explored during the monitoring visit in February 2009. The college was subject to a notice to improve for its learner responsive short course success rates in 2008/09. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**How well do self-assessment and quality improvement systems lead to improvement across the college?**

**Reasonable progress**

The college has continued to strengthen its good systems for self-assessment and quality improvement. Managers accurately identify key strengths and areas for improvement and are very self-critical in recognising unacceptable quality of provision. However, the most recent draft self-assessment update does not present trend data for outcomes for learners in a consistent format, which can mask where a decline may have occurred in any one year. At the previous monitoring visit, curriculum area self-assessment reports were evaluative, but did not have a sufficiently clear overview of learners' outcomes. Additional self-assessment training for curriculum teams and managers has enabled them to more clearly identify areas for improvement and take appropriate action. They now make better use of data in the regular attendance, retention and achievement and course review and evaluation meetings to inform the self-assessment process. However, a few curriculum area self-assessment reports contain anomalies, where, for example, success rates and value-added data are low, but the proportion of teaching judged good or better was very high.

The college has introduced developmental reviews that provide a peer review of specific curriculum or support areas. Managers use the results of these very effectively for quality improvement. The quality and curriculum sub-committee of the corporation, which was recently established at the previous monitoring visit, receives regular and detailed reports about learner performance and actions being taken to rectify poor performance.

## Outcomes for learners

**How well has the college improved the overall success rates for learner responsive short courses, which was subject to a notice to improve?** **Reasonable progress**

In 2008/09, the college was subject to a notice to improve for its short course success rates, as 17% of the provision was below the success rate threshold for minimum levels of performance. In 2009/10, this figure has greatly improved to 4%. College managers have taken considerable action to improve success rates on the two main courses that led to the notice to improve. They restructured them into two distinct courses, where in the previous year they had been one. The course team who delivered the courses was given extensive, weekly training and examination preparation workshops were re-focused on topics that learners found most difficult. This had some impact on the certificate in fitness instructing, where success rates rose by 14 percentage points in 2009/10. However, success rates on the certificate in personal training failed to improve. College managers took the decision not to offer either of these courses in 2010/11 and have referred prospective learners to alternative courses or training providers.

Success rates on very short courses at foundation and advanced level in 2009/10 are below the threshold for minimum levels of performance, particularly in health, social care and public services and retail and commercial enterprise. The college has identified this within curriculum team improvement plans.

**What progress has the college made in maintaining and improving the success rates following increases in 2007/08?** **Reasonable progress**

The college has continued to improve success rates following the previous monitoring visit. Success rates for learners aged over 19 are consistently high, particularly at foundation level. However, success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 are relatively static around national rates. Managers recognise that this is significantly affected by the low General Certificate of Education (GCE) success rates at A and AS level. A manager has been appointed to monitor and improve these across the college. Some well-devised initiatives to improve initial advice and guidance and the quality of teaching and learning have been introduced but it is too early to see the impact on success rates.

Managers have greatly improved apprentices' overall and timely success rates over the last three years to be well above national rates, by reviewing and strengthening off-the-job training, management and tutoring arrangements. Train to Gain timely success rates are still above national rates, but dipped in 2009/10, being affected by employers who went into liquidation.

The college has considerable variations in success rates across subject areas. In construction, success rates have dramatically increased through successfully redesigning the course. Managers are now starting to share such initiatives across other curriculum areas, but success rates in science and mathematics and social sciences are consistently very low.

**What progress has the college made in improving learners' target setting to improve achievement and value added measures?**

**Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, target setting was insufficiently rigorous. The use of motivational targets to challenge more able learners was at a very early stage of development. The ongoing training and improved guidance have enabled the team of student tutors to improve the quality of learners' targets. Student tutors and learners engage in extensive discussion before agreeing challenging and wide ranging targets. Where available, they make effective use of learners' prior results to agree minimum and aspirational target grades. The college does not yet have a strategy for identifying a target minimum grade for its large number of international learners or those who have progressed from other courses.

Managers recognise that the improved target setting has yet to impact on value added measures, which shows that many learners do not achieve to their full potential. They have been trained to analyse value added reports and develop strategies to improve learners' performance. Some have successfully implemented these, for example in the national diploma in sport. In 2009/10, national diploma learners achieved well when compared with their prior attainment. However, on GCE A- and AS-level courses, improvement strategies have been less effective and value added results are low and declining.

**Quality of provision**

**How well has the college improved the quality of individual tutorials and the monitoring of learners' progress?**

**Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, group tutorials were good but some individual tutorials were less effective, as were the arrangements for the remainder of the group during one-to-one sessions. Since then, the college has routinely reviewed and improved the tutorial system and now has effective arrangements for individual tutorials. Managers made good use of the development review of the tutorial process in 2010 towards improvement. Student tutors, who were relatively new at the last inspection, have increased the range of sources that they use to review learners' progress. This has been further enhanced by the introduction of an electronic system for tracking learners' progress. All those involved in the learner's programme can now readily access targets, feedback and analysis of progress. The effectiveness of learners' progress reviews is very reliant on the quality of what individual teachers have written. Where student tutors have good understanding of the subject, they use this knowledge well to add to the teachers' feedback. In a minority of reviews, student tutors struggle to understand some teachers' feedback to learners which affects the effectiveness of the review.

## **Leadership and management**

### **To what extent has the college improved the quality assurance of lesson observations?**

**Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, inspectors had sufficient confidence in the accuracy and reliability of lesson observations in most curriculum areas, but the quality assurance of the process was weak in some parts of the college. In 2008/09, the college judged that some lessons were graded too generously and that the moderation processes had not developed sufficiently to ensure accuracy and consistency. Since then, managers have improved the rigour of the system, for example by reducing the notice period for lesson observations, to ensure a more realistic view of teaching and learning. They have revised and simplified the observation paperwork, in response to observers' feedback. The college has ambitious plans to strengthen the moderation process and ensure greater consistency by increasing the proportion of lessons observed jointly to 20% and reviewing all records of observations. Managers are starting to explore possible correlations between lesson observation grades and success rates in curriculum areas, but have not yet linked this to learners' prior attainment or evidence of progress made. It is too early to judge the full impact of some of these improvements. The college makes good use of external peer review partners in developmental reviews, but has not yet extended this to the college lesson observation system.

### **What progress has the college made in improving target setting for individual managers to improve performance?**

**Significant progress**

At the last inspection, target setting for individual managers to improve their own performance varied too much across the college. The college has made significant progress in this area. Clear systems for setting recruitment, retention, achievement and attendance targets at corporate, curriculum and course levels are well understood by staff. Performance objectives for individual managers are closely linked to the college's strategic priorities and other quality improvement systems, such as attendance, retention and achievement, course review and evaluation meetings and self-assessment. Managers now have clear and measurable targets set against each performance objective. Individual performance is measured against well-defined and transparent criteria, ensuring a fair and consistent evaluation of performance. However, managers' developmental targets are more generic and do not focus sufficiently on intended outcomes. Managers are benefiting from a management development programme which is developing their skills and confidence in managing their teams.

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