

Boston College

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130761

Name of lead inspector: Shaun Dillon HMI

Last day of inspection: 22 June 2011

Type of provider: General Further Education college

Address: Skirbeck Road
Boston
Lincolnshire
PE21 6JF

Telephone number: 01205 365701

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Boston College is a medium-sized general further education college with three main campuses in Boston and Spalding. It has provision in 14 of the 15 subject areas from foundation level to level 5. The college manages its own work-based learning contract and has Train to Gain and Adult Safeguarded Learning provision. Its mission is 'Boston College: A learning organisation raising aspirations and meeting the skills needs of individuals and employers through high quality education and training'. Approximately 5% of its students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 9% are from Eastern Europe and have English as their second language. In 2009/10, the college enrolled 10,350 students, of whom 57% were female and 20% were aged 16 to 18.

The most recent inspection report was published in November 2008. All aspects were judged good, except for achievement and standards which were judged satisfactory. Health, public services and care, information and communication technology, hairdressing and beauty therapy and preparation for life and work were judged good. Arts, media and publishing were judged satisfactory.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made through its self-assessment process to improve its provision?

Reasonable progress

Managers have used the self-assessment process and its associated action plan to instigate improvements in their evaluations of capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, users' engagement and self assessment. The grade for user engagement has increased from satisfactory to good, following specific actions arising from the self-assessment report which led to improvements in the collection and analysis of users' feedback and subsequent actions. Managers have self-assessed the other key aspects of the provision over the last three years as good. They have judged students' attainment and progression as good whereas data indicate they are satisfactory. The self-assessment report refers to changes in success rates, but gives insufficient emphasis to comparisons with national averages.

The self-assessment process includes users' views and their impact is very evident in the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. Programme and business support staff produce comprehensive self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans which validation panel managers moderate thoroughly. The college self-assessment report contains judgements supported by evidence, but lacks evaluation of the effectiveness of actions on students' outcomes. The reporting of the analysis of students' outcomes by different groups is underdeveloped. The

emphasis given to capacity to improve and the rationale for the evaluation of capacity to improve as outstanding are insufficient.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made to increase the success rates of, and the progress made by, students on learner-responsive provision? **Insufficient progress**

Overall success rates on long courses and overall success rates for students aged 16 to 18 have increased and are close to national averages. Overall short course success rates have decreased significantly to below average, because of a deliberate strategy to reduce the number of very short qualifications. Success rates for adults on long courses, apart from those on advanced level courses, have increased at higher rates than the national increases, albeit starting from a lower base. Although they increased between 2007/08 and 2008/09, they remained static in 2009/10 and are well below average. They are also low when compared with those of students from similar areas of deprivation. At intermediate level, adults' long course success rates increased in 2009/10 and are average. At foundation level they increased in 2008/09, but declined in 2009/10 and are very low. At advanced level, they have declined for three years and are low. Managers have made insufficient progress to improve adults' success rates. The success rates of students on the diploma in childcare course have increased significantly over three years, but remain very low.

The progress made by GCE students compared with their prior attainment has declined over the last three years and is low. The progress made by advanced-level students in 2009/10 is the lowest for three years.

What progress has the college made to increase the success rates and the completion rates within the expected timescale of students on employer-responsive provision? **Significant progress**

Overall success rates for students on apprenticeship courses have increased significantly in the last three years to national average. The proportion of completions within the expected timescale has also increased significantly and is high.

The proportion of completion rates within the expected time for students on Train to Gain courses has increased significantly and is high. Overall success rates have increased to average. The overall success rates on apprenticeship provision in the subject areas of engineering and construction declined in 2009/10 and were very low, especially in engineering. In 2010/11, in-year overall success rates and the proportion of completions within the timescale increased significantly and are high.

The proportion of completions within the expected timescale on Train to Gain provision in the subject areas of agriculture, horticulture and animal care, information and communication technology and retail and commercial enterprise

were very low in 2009/10. In 2010/11, in-year completion rates within the expected timescale for retail and commercial enterprise increased and are high. Overall success rates are already above those at the end of 2009/10. Provision in the land-based and information and communication technology areas has ceased.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made to ensure that more able students are challenged sufficiently well?

Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, managers, the teaching and learning forum team and advanced teaching practitioners have focused on improving the quality and timeliness of group profile information. This is to improve the information teachers need about their students' diverse needs. Lesson observation outcomes and the college's overall evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement indicate improvements in how well teachers use group profile information in their lesson planning. In about a quarter of lesson observation reports, observers note that students receive sufficient stretch and challenge. Managers and advanced practitioners recognise this remains a key area for development.

Staff development activities have an appropriate emphasis on developing challenging learning objectives and activities. Advanced practitioners support teachers' improvement through an individual and, increasingly, a curriculum team approach. The teaching and learning forum team does not use success rate data to target development. High-grade achievement has improved for foundation and intermediate level students over the last three years and in 2009/10 was above the national average for foundation students aged 16 to 18 and for adults on intermediate level courses. Students on the BTEC national certificate and IFS diploma in financial studies courses make good progress compared with their prior attainment.

What progress has the college made to improve the quality and consistency of students' individual learning plans?

Reasonable progress

Managers have developed individual learning plans appropriately to meet the needs of different groups of students and more recently to include a focus on students' progression routes. The inclusion of targets based on prior achievement to promote higher attainment for students on advanced-level courses is improving. From the sample of individual learning plans analysed, most students record detailed information on their background, personal strengths and areas for improvement to use as a basis for target setting. They agree targets for educational and personal development and review them termly. The usefulness of targets to help students improve specific aspects of their performance varies. In the best examples, such as those seen in the sports area, targets are detailed. In the less effective cases, they are too general. Most individual learning plans, including those for apprentices, contain feedback from tutors and assessors on how students perform against their targets, but few contain constructive advice on how they could improve further.

Individual learning plans for GCE A-level students are amongst the least effective analysed and this is confirmed by the college's internal audit. The current paperwork restricts the number of targets that can be agreed each term. Most students value their progress reviews and the help they receive to achieve targets highly.

How well has the college progressed with its virtual learning environment since the last inspection? Reasonable progress

The virtual learning environment (VLE) used at the last inspection was not liked by the staff and students who used it, since it was very complex, difficult to use from home and was very slow. Consequently, managers instigated support and staff development which encouraged an increased use of the VLE in 2009. However, a survey of students and staff in 2010 found that many of the initial difficulties remained. The use by staff and students had again declined and was low.

Managers invested heavily in improving the quality and quantity of information and communication technology resources and systems to support a new VLE, which they agreed to pilot in a few areas. Staff and students like the increased interactivity, versatility, speed, ease of access and ease of use of the new system. In the more advanced areas, staff and students use it very effectively for uploading assignments, on-line marking, for safeguarding purposes and for links to a wide variety of resources. It is expected that individual learning plans will be part of the new system. Managers have planned considerable staff development to appraise all staff of how to make optimum use of the new system which will be available from September 2011.

What progress has the college made since the last inspection with increasing the quality and range of its curriculum enrichment activities? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, more students take supplementary courses to aid progression and employment opportunities. In arts and media, students benefit from increased opportunities to work on 'live briefs' to broaden their knowledge and skills. These include arts shows, filming local events, providing support for other curriculum area events and designing promotional material for the college. Where work experience is hard to obtain, curriculum areas have focused on increasing work-related experiences such as winter car checks and supporting hardware and software maintenance on the college's IT bus. The continued development of sports-related activities has increased students' participation. Staff use the tutorial programme successfully to seek the views of underrepresented groups. They have organised sessions on fitness testing and healthy eating for health studies students. Through the Olympic 'Get Set' network, staff explore how to promote the opportunities available to a wider audience. Senior managers receive reports on enrichment activities monthly. Programme area staff evaluate the effectiveness of enrichment through their self-assessment reviews. Most students consider that their course offers additional activities or access to other cross-college activities. Managers do not

evaluate the overall impact of enrichment activities on students' success rates and students' satisfaction.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made since the last inspection to improve its lesson observation system to capture information on the quality of learning and feedback from teachers? **Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection, managers have developed the lesson observation reports to capture the quality of students' learning more effectively. Observers have placed an increased emphasis on learning in their judgements in order to emphasise good practice, improvement planning and staff development activities. Following inspection, managers undertook a pilot exercise in which they obtained teachers' feedback on their lesson observation outcomes and grade. Feedback between teacher and observer is now focused on a continuing dialogue about the support needed to help the teacher improve. Much of this is through the development work carried out with advanced teaching practitioners and also through the peer observation process. Managers have introduced a thorough system to moderate observation outcomes, which includes the involvement of peer college representatives. Managers intend to involve students more fully in commenting on the quality of teaching and learning and to inform lesson observation. They also aim to examine the correlation between success rates and the quality of teaching and learning. Most students who responded to the 2009/10 college questionnaire consider that the quality of teaching and training and the variety of teaching and learning methods they experience are good.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk