

# Oaklands College

## Reinspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130723

**Name of lead inspector:** Paul Joyce HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 12 October 2011

**Type of provider:** General Further Education college

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## REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Oaklands College is a large general further education college with four main campuses in mid and south Hertfordshire. It offers courses in all 15 subject areas. The college has its own work-based learning contract and also provides Train to Gain, Entry to Employment and informal adult learning provision. Its mission is 'To realise the potential of our communities'.

Inspectors conducted a partial reinspection of Oaklands College in January 2011 following a full inspection of the college in November 2009 when employer responsive provision in construction was judged to be inadequate. At the partial reinspection inspectors judged that managers were making significant progress against one of the themes explored, reasonable progress against three themes and insufficient progress against one theme. Employer responsive provision in construction was judged to be inadequate for a second time. This report focuses on the progress made to improve employer responsive provision in construction and other themes linked to the findings of the original inspection and subsequent monitoring visits.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

<b>What progress has the college made in rectifying the areas for improvement identified in the 2009/10 self-assessment report?</b>	<b>Reasonable progress</b>
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The college accurately identified several key areas for improvement in its self-assessment report in 2009/10. A detailed quality improvement plan was used to monitor closely the actions aimed at improving the performance of six key areas of activity; achievement rates, completion rates on work-based courses in engineering and construction, functional skills, employer engagement, curriculum management and equality and diversity.

During 2010/11, college data shows the overall achievement rate has improved by one percentage point and that achievement rates for learners aged 16 to 18 and for adults at all levels, other than on foundation level courses, improved. Completion rates for learners on construction and engineering apprenticeship programmes have continued to rise although currently remain below national rates. Several changes made to the management and teaching of functional skills has had limited impact on learner outcomes and success rates in 2010/11 were low. The restructuring of the college management team has improved the consistency of both employer engagement and curriculum management across the college although the effectiveness of management does vary between curriculum areas. Equality and

diversity is now more consistently promoted across the college with policies and procedures more familiar to staff.

### **Outcomes for learners**

#### **How much progress has the college made in raising success rates across the provision? Reasonable progress**

Overall long course success rates have improved since the last inspection and in 2009/10 remained above corresponding national averages. College data for 2010/11 show a one percentage point increase in overall achievement rates but a two percentage point decline in retention rates to give an overall success rate one percentage point below that of the previous year. In 2010/2011 success rates on long courses improved at foundation and intermediate level and remain above corresponding national rates, while on advanced level courses success rates declined, primarily due to low retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18, and remain below corresponding national rates.

On work-based learning courses, in-year data for 2010/11 show an improvement in the proportion of learners successfully completing all the requirements of frameworks. While in-year data show success rates remain below corresponding national levels, college records suggests that year-end data for 2010/11 will show further improvements in framework completions and indicate success rates will be close to national rates. Success rates for learners on train-to-gain courses have continued to improve and the proportion of learners successfully achieving qualifications is now above average with a high proportion also achieving within the timescale set.

### **Quality of provision**

#### **What progress has the college made in improving the monitoring of learners achievement on work-based courses in construction? Significant progress**

The last inspection identified the monitoring of learners achievement as an area for improvement as too few learners were completing all apprenticeship framework requirements. Since then, the college have introduced comprehensive monitoring arrangements that track the progress of each individual learner against all aspects of framework requirements. Records are updated frequently and indicate that the majority of learners are making at least satisfactory progress. College managers and staff meet frequently to discuss and review learners' progress and intervene where necessary to support individual learners to help them succeed.

In-year data for 2010/11 show a significant improvement in overall completion rates and a continuing improving trend in the proportion of learners that achieve within

the timescale set. College monitoring records indicate overall success rates will be very close to national averages by the end of the reporting year.

**How much progress has the college made in improving assessment practice and in the completion of reviews for learners on work-based courses in construction?**

**Reasonable progress**

The last inspection report stated that assessment practice was inconsistent and some progress reviews insufficiently timely. Following inspection, more effective arrangements ensure the majority of reviews are now completed within required timescales. Staff completing reviews have a good understanding of qualification requirements and are knowledgeable about the extent of individual learners' progress. However, on occasion, staff completing reviews miss opportunities to further develop or test learner's knowledge and understanding, especially relating to equality and diversity. Employers are satisfactorily involved in the review process.

Assessment practice is now more consistent although differences still exist between subject assessors. Assessment planning, although improved, remains variable with access to assessment opportunities for some learners better than for others. Evidence contained within portfolios for learners in carpentry and joinery is not always assessed in a timely manner. Feedback provided to assessors by internal verifiers is not always useful or developmental and is not used well to improve assessment practice. In isolated instances minor health and safety infringements are not routinely identified by assessors when assessing evidence.

**Leadership and management**

**What progress has been made in implementing robust quality assurance arrangements to ensure work-based provision in construction is effectively monitored and managed?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection, the college have revised the department's management structure and more clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Communication between managers and staff and between staff teams has improved and good practice is shared more extensively. Quality assurance arrangements are improved and more effective monitoring of provision is having a beneficial impact on the quality of provision and outcomes for learners.

Success rates are rising and learner progress is more effectively monitored. Regular meetings are held to review achievement data, to update quality improvement plans and for standardisation activity. Staff feel well supported and informed and learners interviewed during the monitoring visit are satisfied with their learning experience to date. Improvements in management and monitoring of provision are starting to benefit learners although it is too early to judge the impact of these positive changes before the full extent of learner outcomes is known.

**How much progress has the college made in implementing the revised estates strategy to improve accommodation and resources for teaching and learning?****Significant progress**

At the last inspection, inspectors identified that some teaching accommodation was in a poor state of repair. The college had well advanced plans for the building of a new college campus, however, following the withdrawal of grant funding these plans were unable to progress. Since then the college have carefully revised its accommodation strategy and have made significant improvements to aspects of accommodation and resources that were previously not fit for purpose. Access to the Welwyn Garden City campus and the heating system are significantly improved. Beneficial improvements have been made to some accommodation at the Smallford campus and work has commenced on new sports pitches and a sports hall and teaching block.

The revised estates strategy is well considered and has the potential, when implemented, to significantly enhance accommodation and resources for teaching and learning. The college continues to invest a significant amount of college capital to improve accommodation and resources. Development planning is well advanced although a considerable part of the college estates improvement strategy is dependent on the successful outcome of planning applications. Accommodation in some curriculum areas, especially on the Smallford campus, remains in a poor state of repair.

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