



# City of Bristol College



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

Better  
education  
and care

## Inspection report

Audience  
Post-sixteen

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## Contents

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Basic information about the college	3
Background of the organisation	4
Scope of the inspection	5
<hr/>	
Summary of grades awarded	6
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Overall judgement	7
Main findings	10

## Basic information about the college

Name of college:	City of Bristol College
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Keith Elliott
Address of college:	College Green Centre, St George's Road, Bristol BS1 5UA
Telephone number:	0117 3125000
Fax number:	0117 3125053
Chair of governors:	Neil Middleton
Unique reference number:	131094
Name of reporting inspector:	Noelle Buick, ALI
Dates of inspection:	30 January – 3 February 2006

## Background of the organisation

1. City of Bristol College is one of the largest general further education colleges in the country. It was formed by a series of mergers culminating in January 2002 with the merger of Soundwell College. In August 2005, the college took over the large Adult and Community Learning (ACL) contract previously run by Bristol Local Education Authority.
2. The College has nine main centres across Bristol and South Gloucestershire and also offers provision in a large number of outreach sites and Information Technology (IT) centres. Bristol is a prosperous city but also has areas of serious social and economic deprivation. The college recruits from schools in the greater Bristol area. In 2005, only 36% of Bristol school leavers achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-C, significantly below the national average.
3. Programmes are offered in all 15 subject sector areas and at all levels, from pre-entry to higher education. In 2004/05, there were 35,830 further education funded enrolments. Of these, 15% were full-time learners. Some 74% of full-time students were aged 16-18 years. However, the majority of learners, 85%, were adults. About 20% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds compared to 8% of Bristol's population.
4. There are nearly 800 work-based learners and the college delivers off-the-job training to 800 more. There are almost 1,000 higher education students. An extensive programme of skills training with 20,000 enrolments is sponsored by over 1,200 employers.
5. Vocational programmes in 12 areas of study are offered for 800 learners aged 14-16 years in partnership with 30 local schools. About 120 learners aged 14-16 years who are not attending secondary schools, attend the college full-time.
6. In 2004, the college was awarded learning and skills Beacon status and in 2005 it received a Beacon award through the Association of Colleges for the successful use of learning resources. It has Investor in People status. The college has three Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in aeronautical engineering, supervisory management and hospitality services.
7. The college's mission states its intention to work collaboratively, stimulating lifelong learning through high quality learning which is accessible to everyone. A set of core values ensures learners are central to its mission. Approximately 2,000 staff are employed at the college.

## Scope of the inspection

8. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
- achievements and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good : grade 2
Capacity to improve	Outstanding : grade 1
Achievements and standards	Good : grade 2
Quality of provision	Good : grade 2
Leadership and management	Outstanding : grade 1

*Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.*

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good : grade 2

9. Achievements and standards are good. College data for 2005 show success rates continuing to improve mainly due to high and improving pass rates. Success rates for long courses are above the national average except for adults at level 3 where they are at the national average. Success rates improved significantly at levels 1 and 2 and are also good for short courses, GCSEs, A/AS levels for 16-18 year olds, NVOs for 16-18 year olds and NVOs at level 3 for adults. Achievement of frameworks for work-based learners is satisfactory.
10. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good with a robust internal lesson observation system which accurately assesses the quality of teaching and provides teachers with useful developmental feedback. Most learners' work is comprehensively assessed. Resources are mainly good.
11. Education and social inclusion are outstanding. The college's outstanding range of programmes meets the needs of individual learners, employers and local communities. The extensive range of provision has helped the college to widen participation. The proportion of black minority ethnic learners in the college is well above that in the local population. Enrichment is satisfactory but there are insufficient opportunities for sport on all sites.
12. Guidance and support for learners are good. Support to meet learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs is good overall but on a few of the main sites and in the community, some learners experience delays receiving it. Individual support in tutorials is good but the provision of group tutorials on important socially related topics is inconsistent across faculties. Attendance is above the national average.
13. Leadership and management are outstanding. Since the last inspection, there has been a period of significant growth, a merger and change of principal and many of the senior management team. Despite this, the college has improved success rates and the quality of its provision. Strategic leadership is strong and partnership working is outstanding. Management across the nine sites and many community venues is good. Financial management and value for money are very good.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

14. Inspectors agree with the college that its capacity to improve is outstanding. Accountability for quality improvement and raising standards is high and clearly defined. Quality improvement processes are highly successful. Learner

performance is very closely monitored, teaching and learning is constantly improved through the robust internal lesson observation system and staff development is excellent. Comprehensive strategic planning sets a very clear direction and context for the college. The self-assessment process is outstanding.

15. The college's self-assessment report is outstanding. It is particularly evaluative and very accurate. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and provides a full overview of the college's performance. It is carried out at devolved faculty, sector subject category, cross college service area and whole college level. It identifies correctly the main strengths and areas for improvement. Very good use is made of accurate data, views of stakeholders and the outcomes of quality monitoring activities. Resultant action plans are thorough. Some actions identified had been completed by the time of inspection.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

16. Improvements made since the last inspection are outstanding, despite considerable growth in student numbers. The number of 16-18 year olds has increased by 35% and adults by 10%. The college is more diverse and spread over a larger number of sites. Accommodation and resources have improved significantly. Access to and the quality of computers is now very good. Success rates are above national averages in most cases. The quality of provision remains good overall. In areas self-assessed as satisfactory, for example, construction and leisure, travel and tourism, significant improvements have already been made. Work-based learning framework achievements have improved in a period of considerable growth and the acquisition of national contracts in motor vehicle. The CoVEs in aeronautical engineering, supervisory management and hospitality services are very effective.

Key strengths of the college

### *Strengths*

- high and much improved success rates at levels 1 and 2
- good teaching and learning
- highly effective work with partners and employers
- excellent provision for 14-16 year olds
- very good guidance and support for learners at the main sites
- outstanding strategic leadership by governors and senior managers
- very strong curriculum management through a devolved faculty structure
- outstanding education and social inclusion and widening participation activities
- rigorous self-assessment and quality improvement processes
- high quality accommodation and resources in many areas
- very good financial management.



## Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- declining success rates in a few areas
- success rates at level 3 for adults and work-based learners
- inconsistencies in meeting the needs of all learners in lessons
- opportunities for enrichment, particularly in sport
- untimely provision of support for some learners including those studying part-time at community sites.

## Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

*Contributory grades:*

*Work-based learning*

*Satisfactory: grade 3*

17. College data for 2005 confirm success rates are good and continue to improve mainly due to high and improving pass rates. Success rates for all long courses are above national averages at all levels except for adults at level 3 where they are at the national average. Data from Soundwell College was merged with City of Bristol college data in 2003. This led to reduced success rates at some levels in that year.
18. At levels 1 and 2, success rates increased significantly in 2005. At level 1, success rates for 16-18 year olds increased by 8 percentage points to 4% above the national average while for adults they increased by 11 percentage points to 7% above the national average. At level 2, success rates for 16-18 year olds improved and were 6% above the national average.
19. On all short courses, success rates are above national averages at all levels apart from adults at level 3. For the largest minority ethnic group, black African learners, success rates are high. Overall success rates are better for adults from minority ethnic groups, than for 16-18 year olds, particularly Indian and Asian learners. Success rates are high for 14-16 year olds and progression on to further study or employment is good.
20. Pass rates are significantly above national averages at all levels apart from level 3 for adults where they are at the national average. In 2005, at level 2 for both ages they are 83% while at level 3 for 16-18 year olds they are 85%. Retention is at, or above, national averages at all levels.
21. Most learners produce practical and written work of a high standard. Learners achieve high levels of work-related skills and improve their confidence, and communication and interpersonal skills. Key skills achievements are above the low national averages at all levels except at level 3 which has small numbers. Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) is at an early stage of development in adult and community learning but overall learners make good progress. The majority of learners enjoy their work and comply with health and safety regulations. Attendance is above the national average and is closely monitored.
22. Since the last inspection an A-level centre has opened at College Green and the number of learners studying A/AS levels has increased from 100 to 800 in 2005. Success rates are above national averages for 16-18 year olds in 2005 but are below and declining for part-time, mainly adult learners. Value added

data show learners achieve at the level expected. The proportions of high grades increased further in 2005 and are well above national averages, particularly for 16-18 year olds. Success rates on NVQs are good, with improvement at all levels in 2005 for 16-18 year olds and at level 3 for adults. GCSE achievements continue to improve and are above national averages in 2005.

23. For work-based learners, achievement of frameworks is satisfactory overall. It is better in motor vehicle, which has large numbers, and hairdressing than in construction. Because of the difficulties in merging data from Soundwell College that related to work-based learners on four year programmes, with data for the original college, it was not possible to produce a work-based learning table for the inspection report.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

*Contributory grades:*

*Work-based learning*

*Satisfactory: grade 3*

24. At the last inspection in 2001, teaching and learning were considered good. The quality has been maintained through a period of merger, sustained growth in learner numbers and the acquisition of Bristol's ACL contract. The college has improved how it judges teaching and learning and has a clear and reliable picture of its quality. Previous inconsistencies in the number of observations carried out in each faculty have been addressed and all teachers are now observed regularly. An effective moderation system ensures consistency in the observation process across the devolved faculty structure.
25. Where inspectors carried out joint lesson observations with the college's trained observers, there was close agreement on the quality of teaching and learning. Feedback by the college's observers to teachers is supportive and provides clear guidance on areas for improvement. Development needs which are identified through the lesson observation process are included in a comprehensive staff development programme. Surveys of learners and discussions with them show that learners are very satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are well qualified and have a wide range of industrial and commercial experience which is highly valued by learners.
26. Lessons are well structured. Teachers use a good variety of resources and learning activities in lessons but, as is recognised through self-assessment, they could be better used to meet individual learners' needs. Teachers support learners well. In ACL lessons, teachers work skilfully with a diverse range of learners and provide appropriately challenging tasks. Work-based learners' portfolios of evidence are well structured and contain evidence from a range of sources, including well produced photographs. Feedback to learners on their work is supportive and generally provides good guidance on how it can be

- improved. In a few examples, however, the guidance is minimal or too vague. Internal verification is fit for purpose.
27. Resources are good in many areas. ILT is beginning to be used more widely and learners' access to computers and learning resources is good.
  28. Overall, the college provides an outstanding range of provision for the learners it recruits. Its extensive and diverse range of courses provides excellent progression opportunities. Learning programmes are flexible, responsive and accessible for learners, employers and local communities. In ACL, the college works in partnership with 17 community organisations and offers courses at 35 venues. This extensive range of provision has widened participation effectively.
  29. The college works closely and very successfully with schools, to help them widen their curriculum for 14-16 year olds. In addition, learners for whom attendance at school is not the most appropriate route can take part in an extensive range of high quality full-time or part-time provision.
  30. The college's responsiveness to the needs of employers is outstanding. Most faculties have productive links with employers and offer a range of qualifications and bespoke training which is delivered at a time and place to suit employers. The college has been particularly successful in gaining national contracts from large motor vehicle companies for work-based learning.
  31. Although enrichment opportunities are available to many learners, the quality and comprehensiveness of the enrichment programme varies too much across the college. There is insufficient access to sporting activities for learners.
  32. Advice, guidance and support for learners are good. On the main sites, learners get comprehensive guidance to help them choose the most appropriate course. They have easy access to good careers advice. Information, advice and guidance in the community venues are less accessible.
  33. Welfare services are good and meet learners' health needs. Sound arrangements are in place, including child protection procedures, to ensure the safety, well being and progress of the growing number of 14-19 learners and vulnerable young adults.
  34. Induction arrangements are satisfactory. Individual tutorials provide good support for learners especially on the main sites where they are used effectively to monitor attendance, punctuality and academic progress. Group tutorials in a few curriculum areas are not well structured.
  35. Initial assessment identifies the literacy, language and numeracy support needs of full-time and substantive part-time learners effectively. Most learners receive good individual and in-class additional support, but this is not provided quickly enough for a significant minority of learners at a few of the main sites

and in some community venues. Students with disabilities and learning difficulties are well supported.

36. Individual learner progress, including progress of work-based learners, is reviewed regularly. In most cases this is very effective. In a minority of individual learning plans and progress reviews the targets identified are not sufficiently precise and the actions needed to achieve these are not clear. For most work-based learners an overview of their progress can only be judged by looking at their portfolios. There is no external tracking to monitor their performance as part of a cohort or compared to a learner with another employer.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

*Adult and community learning*

*Good: grade 2*

*Work-based learning*

*Good: grade 2*

37. Leadership and management are outstanding. The college has grown since the last inspection and has successfully managed a further merger plus acquisition of the city's ACL contract. The quality of provision has improved and is good. In 2005, success rates are above national averages at all levels except for adults at level 3 where they are at the national average. In work-based learning framework completion has improved significantly.
38. The college has improved the quality of its accommodation significantly through a comprehensive property strategy which includes high quality refurbishment and impressive new buildings. General resources are of a high quality and some specialist resources are excellent. The college has maintained its financial health category as grade A and provides very good value for money.
39. Strategic leadership is outstanding. The principal, governors and senior managers provide very clear direction and promote a culture of quality improvement. The strategic plan addresses local priorities and meets the college's own mission statement. Governance is outstanding. Governors bring many high level skills to the college. Meetings are well focused and the committee structure is used well to monitor the college's performance thoroughly.
40. The college contributes strongly to the improvement of educational opportunities in the Bristol area through successful partnership working. It plays a key role in local 14-19 strategies and promotes excellent learning and progression opportunities for pupils at Key Stage 4, many of whom come from underperforming schools. The college's responsiveness to the needs of employers is outstanding.
41. Quality improvement processes are highly effective and linked to a well established quality assurance cycle. The college uses a range of very effective

monitoring tools to maintain and raise performance. The self-assessment process is outstanding and includes all staff. Although work-based learning is self-assessed comprehensively in the faculty self-assessment reports, unlike its 14-16 provision, there is no overview of the quality of all work-based learning. The process for observing teaching and learning has improved and the quality of most teaching is good.

42. Curriculum management is very good in most faculties. It is outstanding in hairdressing and beauty therapy and the college of business which provides courses to full-time and a large number of part-time learners. There is a very clear commitment to developing managers working in the devolved structure. Middle managers have undertaken a development programme to strengthen and enhance their roles. In work-based learning and in ACL management practice is still developing but it is good overall. Appraisal is good and is linked to wider college improvement. Staff development activities are excellent and meet both organisational and personal needs effectively. The college has exceeded its targets for the number of qualified teachers.
43. The promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding. Respect for difference and diversity is central to the life of the college. Many initiatives exist to promote diversity in lessons. Staff and governors are trained in equality of opportunity issues including the requirements of the Special Educational Needs Discrimination Act and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The race equality scheme is updated annually.
44. The college has not met a few of its targets in its ambitious skills for life strategy. It is a pathfinder for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) but, although part of the strategy, it has been slow to provide literacy and numeracy support for a significant minority of students through their main subject of study.

## Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2001/02 to 2003/04, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	01/02	1,226	58	53	5	3,568	55	50	5
	02/03	1,125	55	56	-1	5,927	61	55	6
	03/04	1,419	56	60	-5	7,403	55	59	-4
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	96	61	54	8	3	67	41	
	02/03	101	74	60	15	23	22	47	-26
	03/04	80	70	65	5	1	100	52	
NVQs	01/02	284	65	52	13	184	60	49	11
	02/03	221	71	56	15	156	63	57	7
	03/04	230	63	61	3	88	65	62	2
Other	01/02	846	55	53	3	3,381	54	50	4
	02/03	803	48	56	-8	5,748	61	55	6
	03/04	1,109	53	60	-7	7,314	54	59	-4

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2001/02 to 2003/04, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	01/02	1,828	60	50	10	2,424	56	48	7
	02/03	1,942	57	52	6	3,787	54	49	5
	03/04	2,156	58	56	2	4,667	58	53	5
GCSEs	01/02	314	73	54	19	223	59	53	6
	02/03	485	54	57	-3	401	64	55	8
	03/04	695	56	61	-5	397	59	59	1
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	233	54	56	-2	14	93	50	43
	02/03	220	73	59	14	12	42	53	-11
	03/04	148	80	63	17	4	50	57	
NVQs	01/02	627	61	43	18	756	51	45	6
	02/03	652	65	42	22	1,472	49	49	0
	03/04	564	70	52	18	1,914	63	53	10
Other	01/02	654	56	49	7	1,431	57	48	9
	02/03	585	46	50	-4	1,902	56	48	7
	03/04	749	48	54	-6	2,352	54	52	1

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2001/02 to 2003/04, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	01/02	2,355	56	60	-4	3,308	45	50	-5
	02/03	2,862	65	62	3	3,680	53	51	2
	03/04	3,312	65	64	1	4,435	53	53	-1
A\A2 levels	01/02	367	80	80	0	239	55	57	-2
	02/03	704	80	82	-1	343	59	63	-3
	03/04	689	76	84	-8	377	60	66	-5
AS levels	01/02	1,226	50	60	-10	167	52	47	5
	02/03	1,168	64	61	3	276	62	48	14
	03/04	1,496	63	63	0	333	56	50	7
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	415	49	47	2	198	56	43	13
	02/03	607	52	50	2	214	49	45	3
	03/04	237	61	52	9	81	52	43	9
NVQs	01/02	116	74	49	26	801	38	41	-3
	02-03	139	68	51	18	917	52	45	8
	03/04	154	75	54	22	1,267	51	47	4
Other	01/02	231	50	54	-4	1,903	45	54	-9
	02/03	244	56	55	0	1,930	52	54	-2
	03/04	736	56	56	0	2,377	52	56	-4