Oxford and Cherwell Valley College

Re-inspection report

Introduction

Oxford and Cherwell Valley College was inspected in December 2004. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in business, engineering and work-based learning engineering, which were found to be less than satisfactory. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is less than satisfactory within two years of the original inspection. If inadequate areas of learning or aspects of provision remain inadequate following re-inspection, inspectors will continue to monitor progress at annual assessment visits, but the areas will not be re-graded. They will be re-inspected during the full college inspection.

The less than satisfactory curriculum and work based learning (WBL) areas were re-inspected on 31 October and 1 November 2006. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Engineering	4	2

Context

The college offers full- and part-time engineering and motor vehicle courses up to level 3 across four campuses and up to level 4 on one campus. Apprenticeship training is available in a wide range of engineering disciplines. There are 268 learners on college courses, 241 work-based apprentices and 253 learners aged between 14 and 16 years old.

Strengths

- High success rates on many courses
- Good practical training
- Good resources for motor vehicle and motor sports engineering
- Particularly productive industry and school links
- Strong leadership

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates on the full-time level 2 NVQ in performing engineering operations
- Poor key skills performance on one campus
- Ineffective target setting in tutorials

Achievement and standards

The low pass rates at levels 2 and 3 identified in the original inspection have improved. Success rates on many courses are now high with a three-year trend of improving success rates for long courses at levels 1 to 3. Success rates on level 1 motor vehicle courses remain good. However, the full-time NVQ level 2 course in performing engineering operations has success rates significantly below national averages. Retention rates on national certificate courses, identified as a weakness in the original inspection, are now satisfactory with good retention on the mechanical engineering course.

Learners' performance in key skills varies significantly between campuses. At one campus success rates are good, with nearly 80% of learners gaining their key skills. At another campus, only 25% were successful.

Quality of provision

Practical training is good. Learners on engineering courses develop useful skills with hand and machine tools. Motor vehicle learners have developed good diagnostic skills and work competently on a range of vehicles. Learners pay careful attention to safe working in the workshops. Assessment is accurate, but some marked work lacks constructive feedback. Internal verification, a weakness at the original inspection, is robust. Classroom teaching is satisfactory, but too few lessons are good or better. Some lessons either fail to involve learners or challenge them sufficiently. Tutorials are supportive but most do not result in actions that provide timely targets to drive learners' progress. Resources for motor vehicle and motor sports engineering are good and workshops provide a realistic environment for skills development.

Leadership and management

Leadership of this curriculum area is strong. This, along with effective management, action planning and self-assessment, has contributed to significant improvements in success rates since the last inspection. Links with employers and schools, identified as strong in the last inspection, remain highly effective.

WBL area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Engineering work-based	4	3

Context

The college has nearly 200 students on work-based engineering programmes. Some 147 are advanced apprentices, with 113 and 34 following engineering

and motor vehicle respectively. There are 4 engineering apprentices and 46 motor vehicle apprentices. Motor vehicle students attend college one day a week for their technical certificate and key skills and are assessed in the work place for their NVQ. Engineering students attend the college full-time during their first year of training and then complete their studies in subsequent years on a day release basis.

Strengths

- High standard of practical skill acquisition
- Good resources to support learning
- Strong leadership

Areas for improvement

- Low achievement of apprenticeship frameworks
- Insufficient engagement of employers in planning and providing assessment opportunities
- Poor key skills performance on one campus

Achievement and standards

Students produce a high standard of practical work. Many work in prestigious engineering companies and produce work that meets the stringent requirements of their employers. Portfolios are well organised and presented and exceed awarding body requirements but most fail to convey the quality and competence of the students' work. The achievement of completed frameworks for apprentices continues to be low, whereas for advanced apprentices, it is satisfactory. Success rates overall are beginning to show improvement. Current in-year results indicate that many students are ahead of their planned completion dates and are likely to complete within their original target date.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Very good use is made of the high quality facilities in the workplace. However, employers are not involved enough in the integration and planning of assessment in the workplace to provide a coherent programme for the students. The identification of students' additional learning needs is satisfactory and subsequent support is highly valued by those who receive it. Framework achievement is adversely affected by poor key skills achievement particularly at one campus. Progress reviews and target setting are satisfactory but some targets are too general and do not provide sufficient challenge for the learners.

Leadership and management

Leadership of the provision has been strong since the last inspection, with a clear focus on learner achievement. Assessors, curriculum staff and apprentice co-ordinators work well together in teams to monitor performance. Appropriate staffing is now in place to support students.

Curriculum	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Business	4	3

Context

The college's Oxford and Banbury centres offer a wide range of management, administration, business, law and professional courses on a full-time and part-time basis, from level 2 to level 4 as well as higher education programmes. At the time of the re-inspection there were 139 full-time and 299 part-time learners. Some 28% of learners are aged 16 to 18.

Strengths

- High success rates on some courses

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates on some courses
- Poor attendance and punctuality by some 16-18 year old students

Achievement and standards

Overall, success rates have been improving. Success rates are high on the accounting programmes at NVQ levels 2 and 3 and the NVQ level 3 in management. However, they still too low on the A Level business and law courses, certificate for legal secretaries, the BTEC first diploma in business, professional diploma in law and level 4 professional courses in marketing and accounting. Retention is satisfactory, although poor attendance and punctuality on some full-time courses remain a concern.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers and learners make good use of information learning technology (ILT) including interactive whiteboards and the college's virtual learning environment (VLE). Increasingly, students are using the VLE to access course specific resources from home. They use case studies, newspapers and internet links effectively to enrich their learning and they draw on presentations from visiting speakers. In some lessons, teachers

fail to motivate students sufficiently to learn. Students benefit from good pastoral support from tutors, particularly those on full-time courses. Teachers' feedback on students' written work is thorough and helpful. Limited use is made of individual learning plans to set sufficiently challenging learning goals and to track progress.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the curriculum area have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. However, many of the actions taken have yet to have a full impact on success rates. Internal lesson observation reports review teacher performance thoroughly and the self-assessment process identifies appropriate areas for development.

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Oxford and Cherwell Valley College
Date of Visit: 31 October and 1 November 2006

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the issues identified in the pre-visit analysis and explored during the visit. It does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

Over recent years not all curriculum areas have seen a consistent pattern of improvement in success rates. To what extent have initiatives in the improvement plan had an impact on 2005/06 achievement and retention rates?

- As the college performance report (CPR) is considered unreliable, following the merger and creation of the new college, inspectors based their judgements on the data provided by the college at the time of the visit. This included forecast data for the period 2005/06. The national rates used for comparison are those for the period 2004/05.

  Overall, the headline success rate has improved by four percentage points between 2003/04 and 2005/06, to a forecast success rate of 73%. This trend in improvement is found in long courses at levels 2 and 3, on higher level long courses for 19+ students and on 5-24 week courses. The trend in improving success rates is not seen in all aspects of provision. Success rates on long courses at level 1 for 16-18 year old students have fallen to just above the national rate and are now 65% per cent. On courses lasting five weeks or less, success rates for students have declined to just below national rates.

  Initiatives to improve success rates have had some impact. In many curriculum areas, success rates have risen steadily over the past three years. Success rates for those curriculum areas judged to be unsatisfactory at the last inspection have improved and, in engineering, these improvements have been significant. However, it remains the case that there is no consistent pattern of improvement across all curriculum areas.

Curriculum improvement plans focus on retention and achievement. These plans identify the need to continue to improve teaching and learning, as well as the monitoring of attendance and students' progress, delivery of key skills and employer engagement.

To what extent have the initiatives to improve retention been successful?

- Initiatives to improve retention have had some effect. In 2005/06 the overall retention rate was 85%, slightly higher than the previous year. This reflects a mixed picture across the college.

  At interview and induction stages, an appropriate range of activities is helping students to make better informed choices about their study. Staff are monitoring progress more effectively and taking action to improve attendance and punctuality. Students are aware of the college's focus on attendance and punctuality, although not all take it seriously. Students are confident that the college will intervene to support them if they find it difficult to remain on programme for any reason.

Quality of provision

What does the lesson observation system reveal about the quality of teaching and learning in 2005/06? What are the priorities for staff development for 2006/07 and why?

- The college judged 61% of teaching in 2005/06 to be good or better and 4% unsatisfactory. Although the proportion of good or better is lower than in 2004/05, staff suggest that this reflects a more realistic approach to grading and a rigorous moderation process. The college's analysis of the quality of teaching and learning reflects that, with a few exceptions, there is a broad correlation between good and better teaching and improving students' success rates in the different curriculum areas. The analysis reveals the highest proportion of good or better teaching and learning is for level 3 provision. Classroom management has been identified as an area for development for a significant proportion of teachers teaching younger learners, particularly those aged 14-16. Priorities for 2006/07 include the

introduction of joint lesson observations, a greater focus on peer observation and the harmonisation of lesson and tutorial observation processes.

Priorities for staff development are based on a wide range of sources of information, including the outcome of lesson observations. For 2006/07, there is an increasing focus on bespoke training for curriculum teams and/or individuals, further development of information learning technology (ILT) and a greater use of college staff to lead and facilitate sessions, rather than external trainers.

What impact has the emphasis, in 2005/06, on the use of information and learning technologies had on the quality of teaching and learning? Are staff now making effective use of interactive whiteboards and are students using 'moodle', the college's VLE?

- The effective use of ILT remains a focus of staff development. Staff talk highly of the training and support they have had, and continue to have, in relation to ILT and, in particular, the use of 'moodle', the college's virtual learning environment (VLE). Since the last AAV, schemes of work and course handbooks have been put on to the VLE along with an induction task for students. Many curriculum areas have sites with subject specific resources and, in many cases, these include interactive resources, such as quizzes and tests. Teacher trainers are using the VLE enthusiastically with a view to modelling good practice for their trainees, who in turn are using the VLE with their own students. An increasing number of teachers are using interactive whiteboards effectively. While some of the students interviewed by inspectors were not familiar with the VLE, others confirmed that they found it helpful to access resources on-line. The newly revised lesson observation form encourages observers to note good practice in relation to the use of ILT and this is shared with colleagues. Future plans for ILT developments include the increased use of the VLE for individual learning plans, tracking students' achievement, discussion forums and assignment submission.

The increasing use of VLE for schemes of work and resources is enabling managers and teachers to gain greater consistency across sites and share

good practice. This year, managers are also creating, storing and viewing course reviews on-line.

Leadership and management

How successful has the college been in increasing student numbers and reviewing its portfolio of courses to remain financially viable? How have the Oxford and Banbury centres been developed to ensure that they continue to attract students?

- A recovery plan, approved by the corporation in July 2006, projects a reducing deficit moving to a surplus by 2009/10. The poor financial situation was fuelled, in part, by reductions in Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding for part-time 19+ provision. Overall student numbers have increased this year. The college is continuing to expand its non-LSC funded provision, such as full-cost courses, higher education and European social fund projects, and has secured a large 'Train to Gain' project. Some full-cost provision for adults has not been as successful as the college had hoped, for example, in languages and IT. Managers have reviewed provision, informed by detailed 'portfolio reports' for each curriculum area. Courses that are not viable and/or are not of a high enough quality are no longer offered.

  Future curriculum planning is dependent, to a large degree, on refurbished accommodation. The college has submitted an application to the LSC for a £118 million project to redevelop three campuses.

How has the restructuring and shift of responsibilities for WBL to curriculum areas contributed to raising the standard of WBL across the college?

- The college has over 500 work-based learners. It has devolved responsibility for work-based learning to curriculum areas, with co-ordination of provision as a whole carried out by a team of staff with cross college roles and curriculum representation. The team monitors performance, promotes provision and shares good practice. The college has successfully recruited assessors to each curriculum area, to carry out on- and off-the-job assessment and reviews. Managers in each curriculum area are responsible for monitoring individual learners'

progress and co-ordinating the different strands of each apprenticeship.

Overall and timely success rates in work-based learning have improved, particularly for advanced apprentices. However, success rates remain low, and for apprentices, they are poor. In 2005/06, overall success rates for advanced apprentices were 50%, and timely success rates were 45%. For apprentices, these rates were 27% and 22% respectively. Although the college's advanced apprenticeship success rates exceed national rates, these national rates are low.

The college has placed more emphasis on the early achievement of key skills and provided development and support to enable these to be contextualised and delivered within curriculum areas. It has been successful in closing some of the gap between full framework and NVQ-only achievement.