



Cirencester College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

Published
February 2007

Provider reference
130686

Contents

Basic information about the college	3
Background of the organisation	4
Scope of the inspection	4
<hr/>	
Summary of grades awarded	5
<hr/>	
Overall judgement	6
Main findings	9

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Cirencester College
Type of college:	Tertiary
Principal:	Nigel Robbins OBE
Address of college:	Fosse Way Campus, Stroud Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 1XA
Telephone number:	01285 640994
Fax number:	01285 644171
Chair of governors:	David Brech
Unique reference number:	130686
Name of lead inspector:	Janet Mercer, HMI
Dates of inspection:	4-8 December 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Cirencester College is a tertiary college which serves 1,600 full-time students, from a wide range of local schools, and 5,000 part-time students. In September 2004, the college was awarded Beacon College Status and Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status in Financial Services in 2005. The college aims to “be recognised as excellent for enabling learners of any age to realise their full potential in achieving qualifications and skills, access to higher education and employment, career progression and personal growth”.
2. The college has grown steadily since it opened in 1991. While the sixth-form focus remains central to the college, there is a varied range of provision for adults. The college offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses to full- and part-time learners, including learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Three-quarters of learners (based on full-time equivalents) are aged 16-18, most of whom study on level 3 programmes. The college offers courses in 14 of the 15 sector subject areas defined by the Learning and Skills Council. The greatest numbers of enrolments are in health, public services and care; arts and media; social sciences and humanities; English and modern languages; and information and communication technology (ICT).
3. The population of Cirencester is around 20,000. The south-east Cotswolds area is a rural area with a low unemployment rate. It has a significant proportion of retired citizens. The main employment sectors are: retail and distribution, tourism, hospitality, finance, light manufacture, public administration, education and health care. The area has many small businesses, employing fewer than 50 people. There are four other further education colleges within a 15 to 20 mile radius and some local schools have sixth forms.

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college’s previous inspection report (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	Outstanding: grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Outstanding: grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
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

Outstanding: grade 1

5. Cirencester College is an outstanding college. Learners aged 16-18 achieve success rates well above the national average at all levels. Success rates for adults are good. Many learners make very good progress, develop high levels of skills and produce work of a high quality. The college has identified the need to increase the proportion of A*-C grades in GCSE English and mathematics and retention rates for adult learners on distance learning programmes as priorities for the coming year.
6. The overall quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good and are well supported by a rigorous and accurate lesson observation system and a well focused staff development programme. Assessment of learners' work is good and feedback helps them to improve their work. Attendance is good and closely monitored. The college has identified improving take-up and accreditation of key skills as a priority in 2006/07.
7. Social and educational inclusion is outstanding. The college offers an extensive range of provision to meet effectively the needs of young people, employers and the local community. The college has an excellent reputation in the local area. Partner schools, employers and local community representatives speak very highly of the college's approach to widening participation and its support for learners.
8. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Learners with additional support needs receive very good support early in their programme. They value the support they receive from teachers and tutors and receive good careers education and guidance. Parents of younger learners are kept well informed about their progress.
9. Leadership, management and governance are outstanding. At all levels, there is a very clear focus on, and commitment to, raising standards, and enabling learners to achieve their potential. College performance is closely monitored at all levels, and managers have accurately identified strengths and areas for further development. Staff make very good use of accurate management information to monitor performance and secure improvements. Resources are good and effectively utilised, though the college acknowledges that some accommodation requires improvement.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

10. The college demonstrates outstanding capacity to improve its provision further. Senior and curriculum managers and staff are very effective in raising and

maintaining success rates and the standard of provision at a high level. Governors' and managers' reviews of college performance are particularly thorough. Quality assurance arrangements are rigorous and very effective. Comprehensive staff development supports college priorities and helps raise standards through a clear focus on teaching and learning. Managers and staff use the accurate learner data very effectively to make provision better. Self-assessment is rigorous and very thorough. The self-assessment report is accurate and identifies very clearly strengths and areas for improvements.

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

11. The college has made outstanding progress in addressing areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Overall success, retention and pass rates are now high and for most learners are significantly above the national average. Self-assessment is particularly rigorous and evaluative and development plans have precise actions. Success, pass and retention rate data are accurate, reliable and trusted by staff. The take-up of learning support by learners is now very high and there are clear arrangements to monitor equality of opportunities.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- outstanding success rates for learners aged 16-18 , particularly at level 3
- very high pass rates on a significant majority of GCE A level and national diploma courses
- learners on most level 3 programmes make very good progress
- consistently good teaching and learning and rigorous assessment
- very good additional learning support which meets individual learning needs
- outstanding range of provision which meets the needs of learners, employers and the local community
- very productive partnerships with schools, employers and community groups
- highly effective strategies for employer engagement
- outstanding pastoral and academic support for students
- leaders, managers and governors are highly effective in raising standards
- effective use of accurate data in rigorous self-assessment and quality improvement processes
- well focussed staff development which contributes to improving teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement

The college should address

- the take-up and accreditation of key skills
- the proportion of A*-C grades in GCSE English and mathematics

- retention rates on distance learning courses for adult learners
- the quality of accommodation in some areas.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Outstanding: grade 1

12. Achievements and standards are outstanding, particularly for 16-18 year olds. Success rates for learners aged 16-18 have been consistently well above average for the last three years at all levels. Pass rates on GCE AS and A level courses are consistently very high. In 2005/06, one-third of AS and four-fifths of A level subjects had 100% pass rates. The proportion of students achieving A and B grades in AS and A level subjects is also higher than that seen nationally. Pass rates on BTEC first and national diplomas are well above average.
13. Learners on most level 3 programmes make very good progress. College data for the last three years indicate that learners on many A and AS courses achieve grades higher than those predicted based on their GCSE results. Progression rates to higher level courses, employment or training are good.
14. While many learners develop high levels of key skills; for example, in communication, the college acknowledges that too few learners gain formal accreditation for key skills. Attendance on discrete key skills programmes is significantly lower than the college average. However, success rates for those who do undertake key skills have improved significantly over the past three years and now stand at 80%.
15. While pass rates at A*-C in GCSE English and mathematics have been at the national average for the last few years, they declined in 2005/06 to just below average. The college has analysed the reasons for this and put appropriate improvement strategies in place.
16. Success rates for adult learners are good. On level 1 courses, they have risen consistently over several years and are now above average. They are in line with the average at level 2 and above at level 3. Pass rates at level 2 remain very high, but retention dropped sharply in 2005/06 due to poor completion rates for many distance learners. While pass rates declined on level 3 courses for adult learners in 2005/06, they remain above average. The college has identified the need to improve retention rates on distance learning courses as a priority for this academic year.
17. Many learners enjoy their work, develop high levels of skills and produce work of a high standard. For example, in art and design, learners' sketchbook work demonstrates good research and development of ideas combined with lively experimentation with a range of media and techniques. In politics and English lessons observed by inspectors, learners discussed complex ideas and concepts, making relevant connections across a wide range of ideas and topics. Learners on entry and foundation level courses were developing good personal and

communication skills through effective use of information and learning technology (ILT).

Quality of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

18. Teaching and learning are good. The college's self-assessment report accurately reflects the strengths and areas for development in teaching. The college has a comprehensive and effective lesson observation system. Graded observations for most teachers inform staff appraisal, staff development and departmental action plans. For 2006/07, the college has introduced a new system that places observation of teaching and learning at the centre of a broader evaluation of the quality of provision in departments. It also formalises peer observations, which staff find valuable in improving and extending their teaching practice.
19. Most lessons are good. Learners are attentive and contribute freely and confidently in class. They demonstrate high levels of understanding and develop good critical thinking. For example, in a history GCSE lesson, learners role-played a trial in the First World War, which showed a highly sophisticated understanding of the conditions and social values at that time. Teachers generally have clear and detailed plans, make good use of different approaches to engage learners and pace classes well. All teaching effectively develops learners' knowledge and skills to succeed in their chosen subject. Teachers make appropriate use of ILT within classes.
20. Assessment is well organised. Subject teachers assess learners' academic potential well and make good use of target minimum grades to set, and monitor, challenging yet realistic targets for learners. Teachers mark learners' work carefully and indicate how they can improve. The requirements of awarding bodies are well met. Learner attendance is closely monitored and parents are kept very well informed about learners' progress.
21. Provision for learners with additional learning needs is very good. Initial assessment identifies learners with additional learning needs early in the year. Take up of support is very good, with 89% of those identified with additional learning needs undertaking it. Learners receive prompt support tailored to their individual needs. Communication between additional support tutors and subject tutors is good. Teachers pay close attention to learners' requirements when planning their lessons. The college is in the early stages of measuring the impact of additional learning support on learners' performance.
22. The college's response to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. Partnerships are excellent, enabling the college to offer a range of provision that fully meets the needs of learners, employers, community organisations and those under represented in education. Those students with personal and additional learning needs receive exemplary support resulting in outstanding progress and achievement.

23. The college offers an extensive range of subjects through GCSE, AS, and A level courses and the International Baccalaureate programme. The range of vocational courses is good and increasing. Many students benefit from the wide range of curriculum enrichment activities, including trips, visits, residentials and other off site learning activities. Learners speak very highly of the way in which these activities enhance their experience and enjoyment of college. The college is working to improve the co-ordination and promotion of extra-curricular provision to enable learners to participate more widely.
24. Collaboration and partnerships are particularly strong. The college has played an active part in the 14-19 partnership, developing a good range of vocational provision for 14-16 year old learners. This partnership has expanded through its bid to run specialist diplomas and curriculum links are strong. It works closely with a range of community partners collaborating well with the adult education service and voluntary groups. Many learners take up the opportunity to work on community based projects.
25. The college has an outstanding reputation with local employers, responding positively and quickly to their training needs. A large number of local employers are engaged with the college through the CoVE and the highly successful employer academies. Learners and employers both benefit from the employer 'internships'. These six week summer placements are planned well by the employers and provide effective personal and professional skills development to the learners.
26. Support and guidance are outstanding. Prospective learners receive extensive and impartial advice and guidance. The comprehensive admissions process helps them make appropriate career and learning choices. School pupils appreciate the advice they receive from college staff and student ambassadors from Year 9 onwards. Specialist advice for adults returning to education is also very good.
27. During their course, learners receive good careers advice and guidance. High achieving learners are supported effectively by the Aim Higher co-ordinator. The support needs of all full-time learners are identified early, often before they start college. Part-time adults are not systematically screened, but those who declare a need are assessed and supported.
28. Learners value the support they receive from teachers and tutors. Individual learning plans are used extensively and effectively to monitor learners' progress. The 'student comment' system is used effectively to share with appropriate staff, information about the performance of individual learners so that any concerns are addressed quickly. Parents of young learners appreciate being informed quickly about absenteeism and poor performance. While learners gain an awareness of healthy lifestyles through themed weeks, they acknowledge that they do not always choose healthy food options available in the refectory. They receive a very good range of counselling, information, and

welfare services, through college provision and external support agencies with which the college has excellent links.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

29. Leadership and management are outstanding, as identified in the college's self-assessment report. The principal and senior managers provide particularly clear and successful leadership to drive up standards for learners. They work with managers and staff very effectively to increase and maintain success rates at a very high level, and ensure outstanding quality of provision.
30. Thorough performance reviews involve all managers and staff in a comprehensive appraisal of the quality of provision and learners' performance. Reviews make excellent use of the accurate and wide range of relevant management information reports. Curriculum management is strong and has a very clear focus on securing high standards. Since the last inspection, progress in maintaining and improving strengths and resolving issues has been particularly effective. Communications are very good.
31. Governance is outstanding. Governors very effectively monitor the college's academic performance. Their understanding of this area is of a very high standard. Governors' strong range of skills supports the work of the college particularly well. They have a strong focus on the needs of the local community and employers.
32. Comprehensive quality assurance arrangements are based on a particularly thorough self-assessment system which effectively focuses on improving and maintaining standards of teaching and learning, learners' success rates and continuing improvement. Quality assurance arrangements make very good use of data, teaching and learning observations, learners' surveys and course reviews. The college has effective action plans to secure further improvements. Lesson observations carried out jointly with inspectors indicate close agreement on judgements and grades. The college regularly reviews its quality assurance and self-assessment arrangements to ensure effectiveness. Quality assurance is supported by a comprehensive staff development programme which links clearly to the college's key priorities and to improving provision.
33. Equality of opportunities is good. The college is a safe and secure environment for learners. The college complies with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Children Act 2004. Procedures for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults are robust. Staff have received training in equality and diversity and child protection.
34. Financial management is satisfactory. The college has clear arrangements to allocate finance to curriculum and cross college areas. Resources and the range of ILT available to learners and staff are of a high standard. Most accommodation is good, some outstanding but some is also poor. Given its

success rates, quality of teaching and learning, responsiveness to learners and employers and support for learners, the college provides outstanding value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, 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	03/04	671	83.6	60.3	23.3	1,185	52.8	59.1	-6.3
	04/05	791	70.9	64.2	6.7	1,176	50.4	61.6	-11.2
	05/06	834	74			1,185	69		
* GNVQs and precursors	03/04								
	04/05								
	05/06								
NVQs	03/04	2	0.0	61.0	-61.0	67	31.3	62.3	-31.0
	04/05	4	25.0	67.2	-42.2	80	40.0	66.9	-26.9
	05/06	12	92			32	38		
Other	03/04	669	83.9	60.0	23.9	1,118	54.1	59.0	-4.9
	04/05	787	71.2	63.6	7.6	1,096	51.2	61.4	-10.2
	05/06	822	74			1,009	70		

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, 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	03/04	552	62.1	56.3	5.8	2,126	29.3	53.6	-24.3
	04/05	503	72.2	60.9	11.3	2,427	67.4	59.5	7.9
	05/06	576	71			1,701	61		
GCSEs	03/04	339	69.3	61.3	8.0	22	59.1	58.8	0.3
	04/05	305	72.1	64.1	8.0	41	56.1	62.3	-6.2
	05/06	301	76			25	56		
*GNVQs and precursors	03/04								
	04/05								
	05/06								
NVQs	03/04	19	73.7	51.9	21.8	55	56.4	53.5	2.9
	04/05	53	79.2	57.0	22.2	231	64.9	59.6	5.3
	05/06	37	59			361	35		
Other	03/04	173	43.9	54.1	-10.2	2,049	28.3	52.7	-24.4
	04/05	145	69.7	60.1	9.6	2,155	67.9	58.8	9.1
	05/06	238	66			1,315	68		

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, 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	03/04	3,927	78.2	64.1	14.1	505	52.9	53.5	-0.6
	04/05	3,823	78.0	67.5	10.5	681	51.4	57.3	-5.9
	05/06	4,024	81			452	60		
A/A2 Levels	03/04	1,449	84.0	83.8	0.2	44	72.7	65.5	7.2
	04/05	1,359	81.2	85.6	-4.4	34	64.7	69.1	-4.4
	05/06	1,408	85			37	76		
AS Levels	03/04	1,977	75.5	62.9	12.6	40	62.5	49.6	12.9
	04/05	1,963	76.6	65.5	11.1	48	60.4	52.2	8.2
	05/06	1,998	82			42	74		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	261	78.5	52.4	26.1	3	0.0	43.5	-43.5
	04/05	192	82.3	60.2	22.1	2	50.0	52.9	-2.9
	05/06	94	79			2	0		
NVQs	03/04	7	57.1	53.7	3.4	55	43.6	47.0	-3.4
	04/05	15	73.3	62.4	10.9	177	50.3	53.9	-3.6
	05/06	31	94			110	38		
Other	03/04	233	66.1	56.3	9.8	363	51.2	55.7	-4.5
	04/05	294	70.4	60.0	10.4	420	49.8	58.3	-8.5
	05/06	493	70			261	64		

NB Data for 2005/06 is the college's data, not yet validated at the time of inspection.

* no enrolments for GNVQ or precursors in L1 or 2