

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: City College, Brighton and Hove

Date of visit: 4 October 2007

Context

City College, Brighton and Hove, is a large further education college at three main centres within the city. It provides full and part-time courses from entry level to foundation degrees. Provision is offered in 13 of the 15 sector subject areas. The number of GCE A-Level courses has been reduced significantly over the past four years and only four courses were offered in 2006-07. The college has a formal Accord with the two local sixth form colleges and holds a direct contract for adult and community learning and work-based learning. The college participates in six Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and is the lead for digital media and heritage engineering. The proportion of school leavers in Brighton and Hove who achieved five GCSEs at grade A*-C is below the national average. Employment in the area is mainly in professional and administrative occupations. The unemployment rate is twice the regional average. Approximately 5.7% of the population are from minority ethnic groups compared to a college population of 10%. In 2006/07, a total of 5,616 students attended the college. Of these, 279 were aged 14-16, 1,468 were aged 16-18 and 3,869 were adults. Over a 5 year period the college has managed a reduction of 39% in adult enrolments and an increase of 8.3% for student's aged 16-18. Most adults enrol on part-time courses and almost all 16-18 students are full-time.

The college was last inspected in February 2007. Effectiveness of provision, capacity to improve, achievements and standards, quality of provision, and leadership and management were found to be satisfactory. Provision in arts, media and performing arts was found to be good. In engineering, construction, hairdressing and beauty therapy and travel and tourism provision was judged satisfactory. Provision in skills for life was found to be inadequate. A new principal took up post in August 2007

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates for 16-18 year olds and adult learners following long courses?	Reasonable progress
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The college had not completed inputting all the achievement data for 2006/07 at the time of the visit. Retention data were however complete. Above average retention rates for 16-18 year olds following long level 2 courses have been maintained and rates for adults improved, and are above the national average for 2005/06. Retention rates for long level 3 courses have improved significantly and are at the 2005/06 national average for 16-18 year olds and well above for adults. At level 1 however, retention of 16-18 year olds declined to the 2005/06 national average and for adults declined from the national average to well below. Based on the available data, the college decision to discontinue poorly performing GCE A-level courses has had a significant positive impact on level 3 success rates for both 16-18 year olds and adults. Work based learning success rates have improved and the gap between full framework achievement and achievement of full framework or NVQ qualifications is continuing to close. Attendance has continued to improve from 79% in 2005/06 to 84% in 2006/07.

What progress has been made in improving success rates in key skills?	Reasonable progress
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Attendance, retention and success rates for key skills programmes have improved. Since summer 2007, key skills attendance at individual student levels has been closely monitored by programme area leaders. Success rates for key skills rose from 27% in 2005/06 to 35% in 2006/07. Rates at level 1 are rising slower than levels 2 and 3, and in the case of application of number, there has been a fall in success rates. The college identifies problems with appropriate registration of students for key or basic skills qualifications during 2006-07 as causing the drop in success rates. Curriculum areas are given good support to develop or refine integrated key skills delivery models. A comprehensive key skills handbook has been made available to staff. All full-time 16-18 courses should have fully integrated key skills delivery in 2007-08, but the college recognises that there is some unevenness in planning for integration amongst curriculum areas.

Quality of provision

What actions have been taken to improve student access to and take up of learning support?	Reasonable progress
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Effective curriculum mapping has been undertaken to identify areas where provision was insufficient to meet needs. As part of the clear skills for life recovery and post-inspection action plan, senior managers have allocated a larger budget to learning support. The college expects that around 80 more learners will be able to access support in the current year. A senior learning support assistant post has been created to improve co-ordination of learning support activity, and there has been a sizeable increase in sessional educational tutor hours. Initial assessment has improved and occurs earlier. Staff are better able to plan to meet the needs of groups and individuals. Following a two-day summer staff development conference, staff have a better understanding of initial assessment. The college has adopted an improved three-tier prioritisation scheme to target students with greatest need of support. Currently, around 80% of students identified in priority areas 1 and 2 are receiving support.

What progress has been made in implementing and monitoring the impact of the skills for life strategy across the college?	Significant progress
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Considerable staff development activity has been devoted to skills for life, including the training of over 20 staff towards specialist level 4 qualifications. Senior management and governor support for skills for life has been strengthened through representation on the skills for life steering group and curriculum implementation groups. Some staff do not properly understand the purpose or activities of these groups. Self-assessment and observation of teaching and learning processes now refer directly to skills for life targets. Effective reporting mechanisms now exist to monitor the cross-college implementation of the skills for life strategy, including bi-annual reports to the academic board and corporation. Promotional and publicity materials now include improved references to skills for life opportunities, priorities and expectations at the college.

Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to improve the rigour of the management of quality improvement and the impact of quality assurance procedures?	Reasonable progress
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Quality improvement is recognised by the senior management team to be key priority for the college. The deputy principal has responsibility for leading the quality improvement overall and improvements in teaching and learning. A director of quality improvement was appointed in April 2007. Management information is reliable and is now accessible to managers. Standard reports summarising key indicators of performance are prepared centrally to support a more consistent approach to course and programme area reviews. Internal conferences and dialogue are used well to clarify management responsibilities for quality improvement. Programme area managers are now clear about their responsibilities for raising standards. Course review procedures have been simplified with a clearer focus on teaching and learning, student support and success rates. Amended procedures for self-assessment have been introduced, involving closer and regular scrutiny of performance by senior managers. Provision in specific areas is now examined in detail through quality monitoring visits. Restructuring the time table has enabled teachers and course tutors to meet regularly to review progress and share good practice. This development has had significant impact on teachers' understanding of, and commitment to, quality improvement. The 2006/07 self assessment report was in a very early draft form at the time of the visit. Although the foundations for a more evaluative and self-critical approach to self-evaluation have been established and responsibilities for quality improvement clarified, the college's capacity to implement all the changes necessary to accelerate the rate of quality improvement is currently limited.

What progress has been made in implementing actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The last inspection reported that the progress to markedly improve the quality of teaching and learning was slow. Lesson observation procedures have been reviewed and there is a good level of discussion between teachers and managers on how best to bring about improvement. Joint lesson observations, involving a central team of observers and subject teachers, are being implemented. The approach is supported by teachers and is effective in identifying good practice and vocationally specific improvement needs.

External observers help moderate judgements. Teachers whose lessons are graded satisfactory are re-observed. Lesson planning, developing skills for life and clarity about learning outcomes are clear priorities for teachers. A newly established data base facilitates analysis of observation outcomes and the use of data to support course and programme area reviews and staff development. The data base is not yet used to target staff development to areas of specific needs. Six learning mentors are being appointed to support teachers and help prepare post observation action plans, but the time allocated is a modest resource.

Has progress been made in implementing measures introduced to improve the management of skills for life and the management of quality improvement in the skills for life area?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the management of the skills for life area. Managers of skills for life now report to senior staff through an improved and coherent management structure. Line management of key skills and skills for life staff now resides in relevant curriculum areas, affording closer curriculum engagement with skills for life and key skills. Effective adjustments have been made to staffing in ESOL, and the curriculum has been thoroughly reviewed to provide more coherent progression routes and better monitoring of students' progress. Staff teams in all skills for life areas now meet frequently to exchange information and to share good practice. Appraisal targets for curriculum area directors now include skills for life success and attendance targets.