

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Northbrook College

Date of visit: 5 December 2007

Context

Northbrook College is a large further education college located at three main sites in Worthing and one at Shoreham Airport. The college is predominantly vocational providing full and part time courses from entry level to foundation degrees. It works closely with a sixth form college serving the same area. Provision is offered in 13 of the 15 sector subject areas including provision for 330 young people aged 14-16. Adult and community learning is provided through 39 community venues as well as at the main campuses. In 2006-07, 1,697 full time and 4,506 part time students attended the college. At 6.8%, the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is higher than the local population average of 2.4% in Worthing.

The proportion of young people leaving school in Worthing with 5 or more GCSEs grade A*-C is below the national average. Retail, public sector, finance and business services and health services are the main employment sectors. The college is the lead in the centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) in business, management and finance in partnership with City College Brighton and Hove; lead in the aero and aviation CoVE and a partner in CoVEs for hospitality and engineering.

The college was inspected in October 2004. Of the 11 graded areas inspected four were graded good, four satisfactory one unsatisfactory and one very poor. Support and guidance for students were good and leadership and management satisfactory. A new principal was appointed in October 2005. Unsatisfactory aspects of provision were re-inspected in October 2006 and judged satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

<p>What progress has been made in improving success rates, for 16-18 year olds and adult learners following long courses at levels 1, 2 and 3, since the last monitoring visit?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Adults comprise the majority of students attending the college. Provisional data for 2006/07 indicate that success rates for adults following long courses have continued to improve and are above the national averages for 2005/06 at all levels, and very significantly so at levels 1 and 3. This constitutes significant progress for the majority of the college's students. Overall success rates for adults in information and communication technology, which were well below the national average in 2005/06, have improved. Poorly performing distance learning courses have been discontinued and aspects of provision which did not meet the needs of adults re-structured. Reasons for below average success rates for adults following long courses in arts, media and publishing during 2005/06 have been identified. Some aspects of provision have been discontinued, alternatives offered and the dates by which students need to complete their programmes made more explicit. There is still work to be done to ensure all weaknesses in this sector subject area have been identified and addressed.

For 16-18 year olds, progress has been insufficient although there has been some improvement for long courses at levels 1 and 3. Success rates at level 1 are at the 2005/06 national average but, despite improvement, continue to be below at level 3. At level 2, success rates in 2006/07 declined from above to below the 2005/06 national average. These low success rates are the result of poor retention. In 2006/07 retention of 16-18 year olds on level 2 long courses declined significantly and, although improvements were achieved at level 3, rates at both levels are well below the 2005/06 national average.

In order to improve retention the college is implementing a range of appropriate measures. Attendance monitoring and procedures for following up of absences using an electronic registration system are now more rigorous. New, well thought out, procedures were put in place at the start of this academic year for monitoring students' progress and for identifying causes for concern early through a re-structured tutorial system. Eighteen

programme area managers have been replaced by seven heads of department to provide a more consistent approach and a clearer focus on raising standards. It is too early to judge the impact of these changes but senior managers and heads of department clearly identify improving retention and success rates as priorities.

The last monitoring visit judged managers to be making better use of data to improve work based learning. Has sufficient progress been made in improving work based learning programmes?	Significant progress
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Work based learning outcomes continue to improve. Recruitment and selection procedures are well structured and enrolments this academic year have increased by 62%. Work based learning staff are enthusiastic and confident about what they can achieve. Communication within the work based learning team and with different curriculum areas is now good with regular meetings to review progress. Data are used well to monitor the performance of work based learning programmes and there are clear systems in place for tracking the progress of individual learners. Those at risk of failing to complete successfully are identified early. Work based learning staff are well supported, guidance documentation is clear and the observation of work based assessment is helping disseminate good practice.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in implementing actions to raise the standards of teaching and learning?	Insufficient progress
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Although the college has taken decisive action to improve the consistency and rigour of lesson observations during the past few months, the overall progress made since the last inspection in 2004 is insufficient. Since the last inspection, the college has implemented an annual programme of lesson observations. Unsatisfactory teaching has been addressed and action plans and targeted support are provided to help all teachers to improve. During 2006/07, the college concluded that its procedures for observing and grading lessons were not being implemented consistently across all programme areas. Currently therefore, the college can not be secure in its judgement about the overall quality of teaching and learning or the rate of improvement. Consequently, as part of the major re-structuring of the management of the

college, a teaching and learning development manager has been appointed to each of the seven newly established departments with a clear responsibility for conducting lesson observations and improving the quality of teaching and learning. A comprehensive training programme is being implemented, supported by external consultants, to ensure the new team of observers work to the same standards. Teaching and learning development managers are clear and enthusiastic about the task they have to achieve. External consultants provide support and help ensure that a high proportion of teaching staff are observed quickly.

Has sufficient action been taken to improve the quality of teaching accommodation, particularly in the priority areas identified in the last inspection report?	Reasonable progress
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Since the appointment of the new principal in 2005 much work has been done to establish a comprehensive accommodation strategy and to prepare plans for re-locating the college to new, purpose built accommodation on the existing Broadwater site. Most of the site is not currently fit for purpose. A planning application has been submitted to the local authority and an application for financial support from the Learning and Skills Council will be formally submitted in January. The Union Place Site will be vacated before the end of December 2007. In making interim improvements to facilities the college has been mindful of the need to balance students' needs with prudent expenditure on facilities which will be vacated or demolished. Library and flexible learning resources have been improved as have some of the facilities for the performing arts, construction, engineering and hair and beauty therapy. Electronic white boards have been installed in many classrooms and audio visual equipment upgraded. Particular attention has been paid to security and safety. A new facility has been developed in partnership with schools to provide opportunities for 14-16 year olds to develop skills in hair dressing, beauty therapy and construction.

Leadership and management

The last annual monitoring visit found the self assessment report to be significantly better than that prepared the previous year, but programme area reviews were variable in quality. Has the college taken sufficient and appropriate action to improve the quality of programme area reviews and the consistency of their impact?	Reasonable progress
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The draft self assessment report for 2006/07 provides a succinct overview of the college's main strengths and weaknesses. Programme area reviews underpinning the report are now prepared to a common format focusing appropriately on achievements and standards and quality of provision. Use of data to identify areas for improvement and inform judgements has improved. There are still examples of sector norms being identified as strengths, some unnecessary descriptive text and analyses of teaching and learning paying insufficient attention to the impact of teaching on learning. There is still work to be done to strengthen the moderation of reviews to ensure judgements are clear, consistent and well supported by evidence and to ensure the new heads of department adopt best practice.

<p>The last annual monitoring visit found the promotion of equality and diversity still to be an area for improvement. How much progress has been made in promoting equality and diversity and in monitoring impact?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college has completed a comprehensive review of its response to promoting equality and diversity and the extent to which it discharges legislative requirements. Opportunities for students to explore equality and diversity are provided through the group tutorials. Many good examples of equality and diversity promotion have been identified across curriculum areas. Materials used during the induction of new students are being reviewed. However, despite staff at all levels being committed to equality and diversity, the college has concluded that its approach to promotion is not sufficiently systematic. Policies relating to race, disability, gender, harassment and bullying have been reviewed and re-drafted and an overarching equality and diversity policy established. A more coherent approach to promoting equality and diversity and monitoring impact is being established. Awareness raising sessions have been held for staff and a comprehensive staff development programme is being developed.