

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Oxford and Cherwell Valley College
Date of visit: 13 December 2007

Context

Oxford and Cherwell Valley College is a large further education college operating from four sites and in community venues and workplaces across Oxfordshire. The college was formed from the merger of three colleges in 2003 and now has two main campuses in Oxford and Banbury. Construction and motor vehicle, some ESOL and also the Autistic Unit are located in a third campus in Blackbird Leys, Oxford. The Performance Engineering Centre, which specialises in motor sport, is located in Bicester. There were 11,008 FTE students in 2005/06. These include 2,880 full time 16-18 students and 8,128 FTE 19+ students.

The college was last inspected in November 2004. 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. During re-inspection in November 2006, provision in engineering was found to be good. Work-based engineering and business provision were satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Have student outcomes improved as a result of management actions?	Reasonable progress
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Staff and managers at all sites have good access to reliable data on students' attendance, retention and success rates. Staff use data routinely to assess performance of students, courses, cross-college and curriculum areas. In most areas, success rates have risen steadily over the past three years. Success rates on long courses show strong progress at level 2. For 19+ students, the three year trend shows a 15% improvement and rates are now well above national average.

Engineering level 3 long courses for 16-18 year olds are performing very well, at 34% above national average. 19+ provision at level 2 and level 3 in engineering were 15% and 24% above national average in 2006/07. Provision in leisure travel and tourism for 16-18 year olds and adults is performing well above national average. However, in science and mathematics, 16-18 long course overall success rates are 5% below national rates, and on 16-18 long level 2 courses, success rates are around 10% below national rates. 19+ level 1 long courses leading to a national vocational qualification in cleaning are 23% below national rates, but in the rest of SSA 7, success rates are above national rates, and significantly above on 16-18 level 3 long courses. Managers have identified the reasons for the low success rates in science and mathematics and cleaning, and have put measures in place to deal with poor performance.

Have measures to improve retention and attendance been successful?	Significant progress
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A clear and well-understood cross-college strategy is in place to raise retention and attendance, with some useful variations to suit curriculum needs. Attendance rates have risen from 80% in 2004/05, to 84% in 2006/07, and 88% currently. Retention rates on long courses have risen overall from 77% in 2004/05, to 79% in 2005/06 and are currently at 82%. Measures to deal with student lateness and absence are good, and there have been some notable improvements in attendance, particularly in business, hair and beauty, and preparation for life and work programmes. In these and other areas there is very close monitoring of absences and positive recognition and celebration of good attendance.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in improving key skills provision?	Reasonable progress
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Key skills success rates improved considerably in 2006/07, to 61%. The college has focussed strongly on improving this area of its work. Following the merger in 2003, a new key skills policy was implemented to provide a consistent approach across all of the college's campuses. Considerable investment has been made in staff development to ensure that curriculum teachers have the skills necessary to teach key skills. As part of this process key skills specialists teach alongside vocational teachers to offer support and

to help to build vocational teachers' confidence. Curriculum self-assessment reports include a thorough review of key skills success rates and this data contributes to the overall judgement on the quality of the area. However, as yet students only work towards one key skill, usually in communication at level 2. Although the use of number is embedded within curriculum teaching the college is not able to clearly judge its success in developing students' number skills. Few students work towards key skills at level 3.

Leadership and management

Are college teaching and learning observation arrangements contributing to improvements in teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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The college observation arrangements are wide ranging and provide managers with good information to assess and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Observations are well planned to target areas for improvement, identified through analysis of self-assessment and performance data. Grades for observations of lessons have risen steadily, and during 2006/07, 65% were graded good or better, with 97% of staff observed. Teachers have a positive attitude to the observation scheme, and are supported by helpful handbooks, CDs and online information. A useful range of staff development activities supports teaching and learning quality initiatives. Good use is made of outstanding teachers to support and mentor colleagues. Early implementation of both un-graded and graded observations provides good support for new teachers.

What progress has the college made in improving the management of work-based learning?	Significant progress
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The college views work-based learning as a significant and important part of its curriculum offer. It has continued to build on the improvements recognised by inspectors at the annual assessment visit in 2006. The systems for monitoring students' progress are robust and effective. Success rates are now satisfactory having continued to rise since 2005/06. In 2006/07, so far, success rates for advanced apprentices are 62%. For apprentices, success rates have risen significantly from 33% in 2005/06 to 54%, so far, in 2006/07. Timely success rates have also improved significantly and are now satisfactory. A thorough review of the quality of work-based learning contributes to curriculum self-assessment and grading.

The college has ceased to contract with sub-contractors who have consistently failed to deliver high quality training. Links with employers are particularly strong and productive.

What progress has the college made in the implementation of its accommodation strategy?	Reasonable progress
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The college has invested considerable time and energy in drawing up its application to the LSC for the funding of a major rebuild of three of its campuses. All three sites have now been granted appropriate planning permission. The application is now ready for submission and the college hopes to start the building project in the summer of 2009. Until then it continues to manage well the priorities of improving current accommodation against its long term building plans. The redevelopment of the campuses is an integral part of its strategic business plan. The projected savings resulting from the better space utilisation of the new build are expected to contribute significantly to the college's financial recovery.