

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Weymouth College
Date of visit: 13 November 2007

Weymouth College is a medium-sized further education college serving the town of Weymouth, Portland, and South & West Dorset. The College is the main provider of post 14-16 vocational and post 16 academic education in the area. Weymouth College completed the final year of a four year 'Recovery Plan' at the end of July 2007, restoring financial stability now assessed as Category B.

The college provides a diverse range of education and training programmes in all of the 15 subject sector categories. The college offers a wide range of general certificate of education courses: Advanced-Level (GCE A-level) subjects, Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) courses, Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).

The recruitment of full-time 16-18 student numbers is strong. In 2005-06 there were 7189 learners on roll. There were 2200 FTE (ILR) students, with 59.36% of those on full time programmes. College enrolments broadly reflect the ethnic composition of the population of the local community.

The total number of work-based learners is 175 with over a third in engineering and manufacturing technologies. The college has a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for its provision in Stonemasonry, a joint collaboration with Bath and York Colleges.

Weymouth College offers a wide range of full and part time HE courses, mainly Foundation degrees, validated and franchised by partner Higher Education Institutions but delivered at the College. 14% of the students are from widening participation backgrounds, well above sector average for HE.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates on both long and short courses?	Reasonable progress
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At the full inspection in November 2006, interim college data was used. Retention rates had improved considerably and were above the national average for 16-19 year olds. Official figures for 2005-06 indicate this is maintained for 16-19 year olds and that rates are good for most short courses and above the national average for long courses.

For 2005-06, success rates on long courses for learners aged 16-19 had been maintained or improved at all levels. For over 19s, success rates remain below the national average at all levels. Success rates in key skills have risen steadily over a three year period. In work-based learning, the overall success rate for apprentices has improved significantly over three years and is just above the national average. The success rate for advanced apprentices has risen, though it remains below the national average. Timely success rates are significantly above the low national average.

Since the last inspection, reasonable progress has been made in implementing quality improvement actions. It is too early to see the full impact of these actions for all learners. However, 2006-07 complete college data for 16-18 year olds indicates significant improvement in success rates on long level one courses and short courses at all levels. Success rates for long courses for over 19 learners remain below the national average. However, significant improvement has been made in success rates on short courses for these learners. Success rates in some AS and A2 courses are low. Students with lower grades at entry make better progress than expected, with improved learner support arrangements. Students with higher levels of achievement on entry gain lower average point's scores than expected.

Progression rates on vocational courses, and for learners aged 14-16 to mainstream courses remain good.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the rigour of lesson observations to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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Since the last inspection the college has changed the procedures for observation of teaching and learning to include a more formal and consistent cross college approach that is audited annually. Additional training includes a whole college training day using an external consultant.

The college has successfully recruited and trained learning team leaders in each curriculum area who are responsible for carrying out graded peer observations. Useful weekly meetings take place to share good practice or receive training. A team of trained observers, including programme area managers, carry out annual observations which are linked to appraisal. Analysis of lessons observation grades in 2006/07 indicate there has been a reduction in the number of unsatisfactory grades and more grades awarded that are good or better. The college is aware these grades may be over generous.

Guidance provided for observers is extensive and focuses appropriately on the importance of checking students' understanding as a key performance indicator. However, data collected electronically doesn't focus enough on the impact of teaching on learning and how well teachers are checking that all students understand the key learning aims. Records of lesson observations contain useful feedback to teachers and include clear actions plans with specific targets for improvement. However, many are too descriptive and some comments are contradictory.

What progress has been made in improving tutorials for learners?	Significant progress
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Since the last inspection the college has amended the arrangements for tutorials. All full time students now have a personal tutor. Lead tutors in each school are responsible for developing generic schemes of work and learning materials for personal tutors to use in group tutorials. Generic schemes of work are clearly linked to every child matters themes and key questions from

the common inspection framework. Weekly meetings provide useful opportunities for students to receive effective individual support sessions. Topics covered by external speakers are effective in helping students to gain deeper understanding about particular issues such as personal health matters or drug and alcohol misuse.

Staff identify students at risk. With effective intervention from personal tutors and additional learning support staff, the outcomes of these students have improved. For example, significant numbers of students identified as at risk in engineering have now achieved their framework.

What progress has been made in improving target setting and individual learning plans for all learners?	Reasonable progress
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The college has introduced an electronic individual learning plan (eILP) which includes target setting and attendance monitoring. It is effective in helping tutors identify issues quickly. The college has adopted a traffic light highlighting system whereby progress against units or aspects of a course are captured in red yellow or green for each student. Teachers use the eILP to set targets and it is used effectively during tutorials with personal tutors. Part-time learners do not have eILPs, but electronic courses tracking documents provide teachers with useful information about the whole group as well as individual student's attendance and progress. Some students find short term target setting very useful. Others find generic target setting less helpful.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in embedding equality of opportunity more fully?	Reasonable progress
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Progress in actions to improve the monitoring of equality of opportunity, identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection is reasonable. The use of data to analyse the performance of different student groups is improved.

A pro-active and thoughtful approach has been taken to embedding equality and diversity across the curriculum and into key college processes and

procedures. Links with local agencies to share information, good practice and offer joint training events are effective. The promotion of equality and diversity in the classroom is a major component in the quality audit cycle with the equality and diversity manager observing teaching and learning sessions, checking schemes of work and supporting tutors in appropriate inclusion of equality and diversity in teaching materials.

What progress has been made in improving the involvement in decision-making by learners?	Insufficient progress
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Attendance by representatives at the student council remains poor and is recognized as an area for improvement by the provider. Actions taken have been ineffective, though more student representatives are attending in 2006-07. In some areas, for example, care studies and arts and media, effective forums enable learners to feedback and make suggestions about their particular course or school. Prompt action is taken where good ideas or problems are identified, but these actions are not shared with other areas. The use of suggestion boxes is welcomed by students.