

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Yeovil College
Date of visit: December 10 2007

Context

Yeovil College is a tertiary college serving a population of up to 200,000 people in south Somerset and north and west Dorset. The region is characterised by high employment but a low average income, a higher than average proportion of elderly residents, very low numbers of residents from a minority ethnic heritage and an above average population of people in the lower socio-economic categories.

The college was last inspected in November 2004. One curriculum area was judged to be outstanding, four were good and five were satisfactory. The unsatisfactory work-based learning provision in health and care was re-inspected in October 2006 and judged to be good. The college is a centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) in advanced engineering and, in partnership with two other colleges, in hospitality and tourism.

In 2005/06 there were 8,350 students on roll, amounting to over 20,000 enrolments and equating to 2,593 full-time equivalent enrolments. Of these, some 58% were aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in improving achievement and standards?	Reasonable
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Success rates for all students on long courses rose in 2006/07 by a further percentage point to 73%, seven points above the national average for 2005/06. This further sustains a consistent pattern of improvement made over the last four years, although the pace of improvement has slowed. For students aged 16 to 18, success rates are high: they have risen a further four percentage points to 76%, eight points above the previous year's national average. At level 1, they have risen five percentage points to the previous year's national average; at level 2, they have risen ten points to be well above the previous year's national average; at level 3, they have risen one point to be well above the previous year's national average. For adult students, success rates fell by four percentage points in 2006/07 to 68%, just above the national average for 2005/06 and reversing a strong pattern of improvement that

had been obtained over the previous two years. At level 1, success rates for these students rose four percentage points to be well above the previous year's national average; at level 2, they fell two points but remain just above the previous year's national average; at level 3, they fell one point and are now four points below the previous year's national average.

The progress made by students on AS and A level courses improved in 2006/07: for those on AS courses, their progress was better than that predicted by their previous levels of attainment; for those on A level courses, their progress improved to a level equivalent to prediction. Progression to higher education and employment is good.

Success rates are low for work-based learning apprentices, both within the timescale for which their training is funded and overall. However, for a significant minority of work-based students, the college has responded well to employers' needs for increasingly complex technical certificates. This has had a detrimental impact on apprentices' success rates. The overall success rate for advanced apprentices is high at 67% in 2006/07; their success rate within the funded timescale is low but improving.

Success rates in key skills are very low at all three levels. Although they show a marginal improvement on rates for 2005/06, the college has largely failed in its ambitions to improve the key skills achievements of most students.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in improving group tutorials for students aged 16 to 18?	Reasonable
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The college has a history of inconsistent and ineffective group tutorials, with a lack of compliance by many tutors with corporate systems and requirements. It has taken firm, clear and well considered action to improve this aspect of its provision. A tutorial handbook sets out unequivocal expectations and helpful guidance on how to carry out the tutorial role. There is a well designed corporate programme for group tutorials, including visiting speakers and practitioners, setting out students' universal entitlement. The timetable allows for tutorial groups to come together to attend specific combined events, such as a presentation on safe driving practice and sessions on sexual health and personal financial management. A course on 'best practice in tutoring' has been run twice, with more planned, and so far a majority of tutors have attended. The least effective or more reluctant tutors have been removed from the role. The college has assigned one of its advanced practitioners to support some tutors in exploring ways of making their tutorials more dynamic and attractive. Formal links have been established with Mid Kent College to share ideas and practices. The Students' Union has joined discussions about the development of the tutorial programme. Attendance is closely monitored and absences followed up. In 2007/08 tutorials are to be embraced within the formal teaching observation

programme. The college acknowledges that the provision of individual tutorials for part-time students remains too uneven in content, frequency and value.

What progress has the college made in enabling students to contribute to the overall community of their college?	Reasonable
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The college rightly judges that it is good at enabling students to contribute in positive ways to their own community. Students, through tutorial representatives who report to the Students' Union, enjoy a strong voice and influence in many aspects of the operational management of the college. A member of the college support team acts as a liaison officer to advise the Union in its business. The Unions' executive committee are committed and highly effective. Examples of recent interventions that have been carried out on their behalf are the designation of the entire campus as a non-smoking site, the installation of cash machines, the design of identity lanyards, and the restructuring of the timetable to allow for a common lunch break. Members of the executive committee are periodically invited to attend senior management team meetings, and some college governors occasionally attend Students' Union meetings. Students have established their own environmental and sustainability lobby group and are promoting these issues strongly within the college. The Students' Union plays a leading role in coordinating student activity in other colleges in Somerset.

The Students' Union is developing further its links with Somerset youth services, and now seeks to extend the role that students of the college may play in the wider local community of south Somerset and beyond. The college acknowledges that this is an area to develop further. The role of students as ambassadors for their college in the local and wider community lacks formal recognition and analysis.

What progress has the college made in the development of the work-based curriculum?	Reasonable
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Accommodation for work-based learning has improved, particularly in engineering and construction. A new training co-ordinator is in post and the tracking system introduced has improved the monitoring of students' progress. Key skills are well integrated in most courses. The college is developing its relations with employers through union learning representatives within companies. In partnership with two other colleges, the college has exceeded its targets for participation in the Train to Gain programme, and it has successfully engaged more local employers with a comprehensive package of business solutions. It has increased its entry to employment provision to respond better to the needs of students at level 1, and it has expanded its increasingly successful young apprenticeship scheme and its programme for students aged 14 to 16.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in improving the accuracy, completeness and use of management information?	Reasonable
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The college has not historically had full confidence in the accuracy and comprehensiveness of its data. It has consequently lacked the capacity to analyse these data or use them for effective performance management. The 'need to improve the rigour and timeliness of data for performance monitoring' is an acknowledged area for improvement in the 2006/07 self assessment report. In 2007/08 the appointment of new programme area coordinators (PACs) within departments is the primary mechanism whereby this deficiency is being remedied. Half of these new staff have so far been trained in how to gain access to, understand, analyse and use data to set and review performance at course and curriculum levels. They report that the local data available to them through central college management information systems are now both accurate and timely.

At pan-college level, a senior performance review group meets weekly to review and analyse data and take prompt action. The college has engaged a consultant to review the accuracy, completeness and timeliness of data. Currently the college's use of data to inform planning lacks sophistication and foresight. For example, it has yet to undertake any analysis of the impact of learning support services on the retention and achievement of students in receipt of support; nor has it carried out any comparative analysis of patterns of attendance, retention and transfers in departments. The college produces no analysis itself of what progress is made by students from their prior levels of attainment on entry to their course.

What progress has the college made in the use of staff performance management?	Reasonable
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The 2006/07 self assessment report states acknowledges that there are 'variable practices at department level in target setting and the monitoring of progress'. The performance management of staff has been hitherto hindered by the unreliability of data, but this situation is rapidly improving. The senior management team was largely restructured following the full inspection in 2004. All managers now have well focused and clear targets, including for course success rates and for the quality of lessons, arising from the college's quality improvement and development plan. These are thoroughly and regularly reviewed. An ambitious training and support programme, 'managers as leaders', is currently being run for all managers to equip them to assume more active leadership and to improve their operational competence as managers of people. The programme addresses a set of management standards that the college has already published.

The recording and active use of performance management processes are rigorous and set high expectations for managers. A notable feature is the emphasis put upon fully orbital evaluation and feedback on the role and effectiveness of all managers, from the points of view of all staff with whom they come into contact.