

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Suffolk New College

Date of visit: 4 October 2007

### Context

Suffolk New College is a large general further education college which is located in the centre of Ipswich but serves a wide catchment area in southeast Suffolk. The majority of its provision is further education funded by the Learning and Skills Council. There are Foundation Degrees in the Built Environment funded through the Higher Education Funding Council. A programme of adult and community learning is provided on behalf of Suffolk County Council. The college offers programmes in all subject sector areas with the exception of agriculture, horticulture and animal care.

What progress has been made in improving success rates on GCE AS/A level courses?	Significant progress
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The college has taken a series of positive and effective actions to improve success rates. These have included providing better targeted guidance at entry, improvements to the quality of teaching and learning and more effective target setting and progress monitoring. The college's data for 2007 demonstrate clear improvement in success rates on both GCE AS and A level courses. For learners aged 16 to 18 the AS level pass rate improved by 6% to the national average at 65% with an improvement in the percentage of high grades of 5%. At A level the success rate improved by 9% to above the national average at 90% and with an improvement in high grades of 3%. Value-added information reveals that learners are achieving higher success rates than their prior attainment suggests and there is a strong and improving trend in the performance of learners in relation to their starting points. Learners aged 19 years and over recorded similar gains overall with a particularly impressive improvement at A level where the success rate increased by 21% to well above the national average at 98%.

What progress has been made in improving success rates for apprentices?	Reasonable progress
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The overall success rate has improved by 12% to 53%, still below the national average but improving at a faster rate than national figures. The timely success rate has improved slightly to 32%, below the national average and improving at a slower rate. These figures conceal significant differences in the performance of different subject sector areas. Hairdressing and accountancy accounted for half of the total learners who completed in 2007 and timely completions in these areas were very high. The college has yet to investigate why the areas where there are more learners are performing significantly better than the areas where learner numbers are low.

#### Quality of provision

What progress has been made with the implementation of the skills for life strategy?	Reasonable progress
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Since the last inspection the college has developed a skills for life strategy. The strategy was implemented in September 2006 but the new management team recognise that it already needs replacing to take account of the development of learners' functional skills and the staff training needs associated with developing this provision. The management team have identified and are addressing a number of issues which have impacted on the effectiveness of skills for life provision. These include providing earlier diagnostic testing, tracking progression more carefully and beginning to addressing the difference in success rates between key skills at level 1 (where they are better) and at level 2. As a result key skills success rates overall have continued to improve but in hairdressing the improvement has been significant and results are now good. The college is undertaking a review of its ESOL provision in the light of the exceptionally high demand for these courses this year.

What progress has the college made in monitoring the effectiveness of learning support?	Insufficient progress
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The college has experienced a significant contraction in its funding for the provision of learning support yet remains committed to providing the best service that it can for learners. The number of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities in the Centre for Independent Living and Learning has doubled this year.

Although the college has conducted some evaluation of learning support in terms of the attendance of learners who receive it, the evaluation of the quality of the service remains underdeveloped. The impact of learning support on success rates, the views of the learners who receive additional support and the impact of learning support assistants in the classroom have yet to be formally evaluated.

### Leadership and management

What improvements have been made to the overall quality of curriculum leadership and management?	Significant progress
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The college has taken effective measures to address the inconsistent quality of curriculum management identified at the previous inspection. Programme leader posts have recently been introduced to replace senior lecturer posts. The programme leaders have detailed job descriptions and clear lines of accountability which enable them to support both departmental heads and lecturers more effectively. The new postholders are clear about their new roles in relation to the operational management of the curriculum and welcome their new responsibilities. The changes have already resulted in improvements in the identification and sharing of good practice. For example, procedures for dealing with attendance and discipline are now applied consistently in all departments. The effectiveness of quality assurance and the use of data have both improved.

How successfully are targets being identified and used to improve learner performance?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made major changes to the use it makes of targets to improve performance, although many of the changes are recent and their full impact is yet to be seen. Managers now have good access to management information and as a result make better use of it in setting targets. Target setting at course level is now consistent across the college and progress towards achieving the targets is monitored carefully. Individual learners have clear and appropriate targets but a minority of learners are not sure what steps they need to take to achieve them.