

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: East Berkshire College

Date of visit: 6 February 2008

Context

East Berkshire College is a large general further education (FE) college situated in the towns of Slough (Langley) and Windsor. It has recently rebuilt its site in Windsor and closed its site in Maidenhead, with the majority of the provision transferring to other college sites or to other venues in and around Maidenhead. The college operates in a competitive educational environment, with two nearby FE colleges, a university offering FE courses and 12 local schools with sixth forms. Unemployment rates for Berkshire are the lowest in the south east, although there are significant areas of social deprivation in Slough. The majority of students are adults on part time programmes, with many of these courses being delivered in the community. A quarter of the full time students are also adults. Overall, the largest proportion of enrolments is for level 1 courses. The college has a small number of higher education (HE) students. About 30% of students are of minority ethnic origin.

Last inspection

East Berkshire College was last fully inspected in January 2005. At that inspection, leadership and management were judged to be good. Guidance and support, and the college's response to educational and social inclusion were also judged to be good. In curriculum areas, the college was awarded one outstanding, five good, seven satisfactory, and one unsatisfactory grades. Work-based learning (WBL) provision in construction and hairdressing was also judged to be unsatisfactory. The unsatisfactory areas were re-inspected in March 2007 when the curriculum area was judged to be good, and the two WBL areas were both judged as satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates at all levels?	Reasonable progress
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College data for 2006/07 show that the overall success rate for long courses rose since the last monitoring visit, and is around the national average. Success rates

for learners on long courses at levels 2 and 3 improved significantly for both age groups, particularly for 16-18 year-old learners at level 2 and adults at level 3. However, rates for learners on long level 1 courses, although improving, are still below average, particularly for adults. Success rates for short courses over 5 weeks long improved and are around the average.

Retention rates improved in 2006/07, particularly at levels 2 and 3. They are around national rates at levels 1 and 3, and above at level 2. Achievement rates on long courses improved in most cases, and are about average. Learners aged 16-18 have better than average pass rates on courses at levels 1 and 2, whereas adults achieve slightly better at level 3. The college is aware of what needs to be done to improve learners' performance, and has appropriate strategies in place. These have started to show an impact on retention and achievement in the current year.

What progress has been made in improving success rates for apprentices?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates for apprentices increased significantly from 46% in 2005/06, to 71% in 2006/07 in construction, and from 53% to 70% in engineering – well above national averages. Completion of frameworks for advanced apprentices also improved significantly in construction to 65%, although the increase in engineering was slower. However, success rates in hairdressing fell to below average, although the cohort size was small. The monitoring of apprentices' progress has improved, with effective use made of the work-based learning steering group. Managers make good use of data to track learners' progress and effectively identify those learners at risk of not achieving their targets. Links with employers have also improved.

Quality of provision

What progress is being made in improving the quality of teaching in those subjects performing less well?	Reasonable progress
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The college has increased its focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning across its provision. A robust lesson observation scheme results in effective action plans for individual staff. These are linked to appraisal, and are used well to provide individual support through mentoring and professional development. Managers use areas for improvement identified from observations to develop subject-specific and cross-college themes for wider training. The college has increased the number of teaching and support staff, and many areas have improved learning resources. Recently developed activities have led to improved use of initial diagnostic assessments to plan individualized learning, and the wider sharing of individual learning plans among staff, in a number of subject

areas. It is too early to evaluate the effect of these measures on learner achievement.

What progress has been made in providing enrichment activities at both cross-college, and curriculum levels, in response to the 'student voice'?	Significant progress
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The college has implemented a new enrichment programme in response to learners' requests. There is now an expectation on all subject areas to provide curriculum-related activities, such as trips, visits, and speakers, to enhance learning. There is also a greater variety of cross-college extra-curricular activities, such as sports and charity events, for which the college reports a considerable increase in participation since the last inspection. The college has well-developed plans to further extend opportunities with, for example, cross-college sports teams. It has also begun to analyse participation by learner background to ensure that all groups are catered for. Students speak positively about the opportunities that are now available to them, and how these have improved since the previous year.

Leadership and management

How is the college promoting social inclusion and meeting the diverse needs of its students?	Significant progress
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The college has maintained and built on many of its strengths in widening participation and raising awareness of equal opportunities. It has set high standards in the promotion of social inclusion, with more focused monitoring of its equality action plans. Procedures for monitoring equal opportunities for apprentices in the workplace have improved. The college has increased its focus on identifying and meeting the needs of individual learners, particularly learners with dyslexia. Personal tutors provide good individual support, both within and outside of tutorials, to meet learners' diverse needs. The college uses equality and diversity impact measures well to monitor and improve performance of minority groups. It has identified the need to improve its promotion to learners of the benefits of disclosing any learning disability.

What progress has the college made to improve the management of those subject areas that were not making appropriate improvements?	Reasonable progress
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The college has systematically analysed the performance of those subject areas not making sufficient improvements, and of the groups of students within these areas, and responded with appropriate strategies to suit each situation. At

curriculum level, teaching and learning are monitored well and appropriate actions for improvement have been taken. There is a robust cross-college system for tracking retention, and its effect on predicted success rates, for each course. Through appropriate and timely interventions, improvements in retention can be seen. Systematic monitoring of student assessment, and the setting of targets for students and courses, have been improved. However, these systems are not yet linked to provide senior managers with more accurate predictions of success.