

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Chelmsford College

Date of visit: 29 January 2008

Context

Chelmsford College is a medium sized general further education college (GFE). The college comprises three sites with the main campus at Moulsham Street, an additional campus at Princes Road and leased town centre premises that house the e-learning and open-learning centre. The main site has ageing buildings and the college is currently involved in a feasibility study for a new build.

Chelmsford accounts for approximately 10% of the population of Essex. Overall deprivation levels are low but there are pockets of significant deprivation in a small number of wards. Unemployment is relatively low at 1.4%. Residents of Chelmsford have higher levels of qualifications than the rest of Essex and the proportion of young people achieving 5 passes at GCSE grades A*-C (including mathematics and English) is slightly higher than the Essex average. The college has sought to foster strong local and county wide collaborative links and currently chairs a consortium of schools and other providers.

The college offers a broadly based provision with substantive provision across 14 of the 15 sector subject areas. The areas of significant growth are in construction and health and social care. The number of learners studying courses in business and travel and tourism has declined over the past three years. In 2007, of the 3,442 enrolments, 1,745 were of adults and 1,697 were of learners aged 16-18. Most adults study part-time and the vast majority of learners aged 16-18 are on full time courses. The college's mission is to 'enable success for all learners through the provision of high quality, flexible teaching and learning opportunities across a broad range of vocational and academic disciplines'.

Achievement and standards

<p>What progress on achievement and standards do college data from 2008 demonstrate? In particular, have level 3 success and pass rates for learners aged 16-18 improved?</p>	<p>Reasonable Progress</p>
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Checks on data revealed discrepancies between success rates published in the 2004/05 College Performance Report (CPR) and the 2005/06 CPR. The major impact has been to depress adult success rates in 2004/05 and 2005/06, particularly at level 1 and a slight rise in the same success rates at level 2. Checks by the college, Ofsted and the Learning Skills Council (LSC) suggest that these have been caused by the redefinition of levels of study after the college has submitted its data. Checks into the causes of the discrepancies are on-going. The recalculated adult success rates at level 1 in 2005/06 at 77% remain significantly above the national average. For the purposes of the monitoring visit, data for 2004/05 and 2005/06 has been taken from the 2005/06 CPR. Data for 2006/07 is as supplied by the college.

College data show improved success rates at all levels for learners aged 16-18 in 2006/07. Level 1 success rates, having been slightly below average, have improved to well above average. Level 2 success rates have improved over the last three years by nine percentage points to broadly average. Level 3 success rates, an area identified as needing improvement, have risen to 71% with a particularly sharp improvement in achievement from 79% in 2005/06 to 87% in 2006/07.

Adult success rates at level 1 have declined slightly to 74%; however, this remains above the 2005/06 average. Success rates at level 2 remain at 77%. Again, these are well above the previous year's national average. At level 3, there has been a steady improvement over the last three years with the 2006/07 results 4 percentage points above the 2005/06 average.

The college has identified success rates on short courses as an area for improvement. The very small number of learners aged 16-18 achieved results well below the national average in 2006/07 having achieved 100% the previous year. The larger cohort of adult learners also achieved below average results in 2006/07 having previously been at the high national average.

College data for overall success rates show construction and engineering as significantly below average in 2006/07. The college is keenly aware of the need to improve these areas and has taken a number of actions including a revised curriculum offer. The high and improved current attendance and retention figures suggest that actions have secured improvements, but it is too early to judge their full effect. The college has reduced the proportion of courses below the revised and higher LSC minimum levels of performance from 10.6% in 2005/06 to 7.7%.

Quality of Provision

What progress has the college made in increasing the proportion of good or better teaching and learning across the curriculum and departments?	Reasonable Progress
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The college has maintained its strong focus on improving teaching and learning. Annual observations have been increased to two per year for all teaching staff and the college is currently on-track to complete this target successfully. Lesson observations are now well-aligned to appraisal with observations automatically triggering performance review. The documentation for observation is particularly well-organised and available on-line to managers. Very useful reports can be generated including particular strengths, areas for improvement and good practice. Managers can access quickly those teachers with significant strengths in an area they need to develop in their staff.

Early indications are that the proportion of good or better teaching has increased to above the college target. Although variations remain in the quality of teaching across departments, early evidence suggests that this is becoming less pronounced. Professional support for teachers who receive a satisfactory grade is timely and there is evidence that it has had an impact on improving performance. Of the teachers observed thus far, over a third have improved their grade.

Written records are professionally presented. Whilst some demonstrate a good focus on standards, learning and progress, there are still too many that concentrate on teacher activity without fully defining the impact on learners. There are also examples of commonly occurring factors being presented as significant strengths. Areas for improvement are not always clearly

signposting appropriate development and training. The moderation process for lesson observations is timely and rigorous.

<p>What progress has the college made to planned developments and improvements in employer engagement including those through Central Essex Training and the sales and marketing executive?</p>	<p>Reasonable Progress</p>
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The college has made reasonable progress in developing employer engagement. This was identified as a weakness in the college's most recent self-assessment report. Central Essex Training has been established recently to manage all non-LSC funded work. This includes bespoke training for employers on a commercial basis. Successful links have been made with the British Forces in Germany to provide early years qualifications delivered by distance learning for the forces' childcare staff. The army has also awarded the college bursaries for young people aged 16 considering a vocational career in the army.

A range of partnership events aimed at local businesses and major employers are being held to inform them of commercial and government funded training opportunities for their staff. Useful publicity materials have been produced to advertise the colleges vocational and skills for life courses. The college has developed good partnerships with other providers and, as part of the Harlow consortium, offers a Train to Gain level 2 programme for 15 adults. Another partnership initiative, Training for your Future at level 1, currently has 49 young learners on programme. Strong links have been established with the local Chamber of Commerce and joint initiatives developed to extend the commercial arm of the college. A sales and marketing manager and newly appointed employer engagement manager have been further developing partnerships with employers; however, the college has yet to establish an employer engagement strategy to help steer its work in this area.

<p>Has additional learning support continued to support the achievement and standards of learners effectively? Have there been further developments to support vulnerable learners?</p>	<p>Significant Progress</p>
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The college has made significant progress in the provision of additional learning support to raise the achievement and standards of its most vulnerable learners. The number of learning support assistants (LSAs) has

been increased in the last year to meet the rise in learners with Asperger syndrome, autistic spectrum disorders and those with physical disabilities. The successful senior LSA position piloted in the construction skills sector area has been disseminated into all curriculum areas. This role coordinates effectively the activities of LSAs and is available to cover for absences, complete observations of the LSA role within the classroom, mentor, support and train the LSAs as appropriate. The success rates for learners receiving additional learning support continue to be above the college average and have risen further in 2006/07.

The college has continued to build on its learning support services which are now well embedded into the college's mainstream provision. The additional learning support department works closely and very effectively with the whole college. Teachers receive useful information about their learners via the student profile, which is an easily accessible electronic document. This helps teachers to plan their teaching and learning and any additional support to meet the individual needs of their learners. Discrete courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are successful in helping learners to gain independent living skills and develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Skills for life courses are offered as discrete and embedded provision within the college's main sites and at a town centre venue. Overall success rates are high; however there is some variability between courses.

Leadership and management

What progress are senior and middle managers making in securing improvements and moving departments from satisfactory to good?	Reasonable Progress
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The college continues to grade its overall effectiveness and the majority of its departments as satisfactory. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and built from course reviews upwards. There is good sharing and development of evaluative skills between heads of department when grading and moderating SARs. Managers have confidence in the detailed data available to them at departmental, course and student level. They also demonstrate confidence in staff and senior management in securing improvements and feel the freedom to be self critical and realistic in grading their areas. All managers interviewed presented evidence of improvements in the current year including teaching and learning grades, attendance and retention data and details of curriculum changes designed to meet learners'

needs more fully. However, it is too early to judge the full impact of these changes.

Purposeful actions have been taken to improve the pastoral and learning support for students aged 16-18 bringing them under the remit of the 6th Form Centre. Current retention data suggest improvements have been secured. The Performance Review Boards meet regularly and focus well on areas for improvement. The small sample of records examined has clear actions and outcomes delineated; again, it is too early to judge their impact fully.