

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: University College Birmingham (formerly known as Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies)

Date of visit: 21 May 2008

### Context

This feedback contains brief findings from the monitoring visit. It focuses on the issues explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the institution's performance.

### Achievement and standards

To what extent has the university college maintained its high success rates on most courses and has it made improvements to retention on the small number of courses identified during inspection as below national averages?

The high retention and pass rates identified at the previous inspection have been maintained. Retention issues on courses highlighted as areas for improvement during the last inspection have been addressed. Inspectors noted improvements in the National Certificate in Health Studies and the National Diploma in Sport; although on the National Diploma in Hospitality Supervision it is too early to see the full impact of the actions taken. Contributory factors to improvements include better initial advice and guidance, improved information at interview and revisions to induction. Tutorial arrangements have been further developed with improved tracking and monitoring of student progress.

Overall attendance has improved and, at around 87% in 2006/07, was slightly better than attendance at the previous inspection. In the same year, at almost 90%, attendance in Early Years care and education was significantly better.

Changes have been made to the range of programmes offered to better reflect the interests and needs of students and employers. There is very good and improving progression from further to higher education courses at the university, supported by a newly appointed progression manager post. Almost 50% of the current Early Years' care and education level 3 students are on target to progress to internal HE courses in the coming year.

To what extent have improvements been made to the low apprenticeship achievements and low key skills pass rates?

The university college made a strategic decision to stop offering apprenticeships from September this year. The numbers currently on apprenticeship programmes are low, with five students undertaking apprenticeships in hospitality and catering. Following inspection, overall framework completions improved significantly. Some 75% of those who started their catering apprenticeship during the last year have achieved the full framework.

Key skills pass rates overall have improved since the previous inspection, although pass rates on level 2 application of number courses remain low. External tests have been identified as an area of concern. The university college has taken steps to ensure students receive better support to complete the tests but it is too early to judge the impact of these. Key skills pass rates at levels 1 and 2 in Health and Social Care are good.

## Quality of education and training

To what extent has the university college maintained or improved its very good standards of teaching and learning and is there better sharing of good practice between teaching teams?

Rigorous internal audit processes now involve an element of subject-specialist feedback in the internal observations of teaching and learning. Internal lesson observation grades awarded indicate that the high proportion of good or better lessons, identified at the previous inspection, have been maintained. This is supported by the continuing high levels of success on many courses and the very positive response about the quality of teaching and learning on student evaluations. Staff development is given appropriate high priority. However, it is not always clear from the feedback on internal observations of teaching and learning what it is about the lesson that differentiates the grades given. Most significantly, observation records do not always identify

the intended learning outcomes, or evaluate the impact of teaching on student progress.

Sharing of good practice in teaching and learning within schools is now well-embedded. Cross-curricular team meetings further support this. For example, the good practice developed in the Young Hairdressers' Academy informed the successful implementation of the Young Chefs' Academy. There is a good focus on teaching and learning at the university's annual staff conference to encourage the sharing of best practice across the provision.

To what extent has the university college maintained or improved its strong and highly productive industry links?

The very good working relationships with employers continue to be developed. For example, strong partnerships have been established with a large national supermarket chain and an international chocolate company and bakery to work on staff training and product development. Good and productive links have been forged with the local authority, for example, to support the development of their workforce in Early Years and the training of teaching assistants. Furthermore, the university college is working with the local authority to model the 14-19 curriculum in the area, and aims to offer 'master classes' in local schools to enhance the vocational element of the new diplomas. Work placements are a key feature of many programmes and the already strong links with these employers have been strengthened. Students on Early Years' courses for example spend as much as half of their time in multiple placements and gain very good experience in workplace settings. The university college was a founder member of the Hospitality and Catering National Skills Academy.

## Leadership and management

To what extent has the university college maintained its outstanding leadership and management and very good governance?

Since the last inspection the institution has been successful in the bid to gain university college status. The very good focus on further education has been maintained and the very clear links with higher education provision continue to be strengthened. Quality assurance systems are robust and lead to improvements. Self-assessment and action planning are thorough. Good use is made of students' and employers' views to inform the actions taken. Good

progress has been made on the development points identified at the previous inspection.

The university college has a clear commitment to ensuring students have equity of experience across all aspects of the provision. Links with local community groups are excellent. Community provision in Early Years has been expanded and includes off-site delivery at 11 venues. Good efforts are made to attract minority groups. A recent community course, for women from an Asian background who traditionally may not access further education, was very successful and a number of these students are likely to progress to higher education. Further education students are also attracted from overseas.

Since the inspection, the university college has gained Beacon status and now takes the lead in the local lifelong learning partnership. Further improvements have been made to the already outstanding accommodation and resources. The library has been refurbished and a new learning resource centre created; new beauty salons have been added; a new development kitchen has been equipped to a very high standard with external sponsorship; the main training restaurant and kitchens have been refurbished and are impressive. Clear plans are in place to support impending changes to the senior management structure. Governance remains strong with very good industry representation.