

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Swindon College

Date of visit: 22 October 2008

### Context

Swindon College is a large college of further education located in Wiltshire. Over 75% of the college's learners, aged 16-18, come from within the borough. The attainment at GCSE of school leavers aged 16 in Swindon is low. Provision has moved away from A-levels and focuses on vocational education and training, taking into account local skills needs.

Final data for 2006/07 showed that the college enrolled just under 3,500 full-time equivalent learners (FTEs). Of these half were aged 16-18 and almost 60% of these learners studied at levels 1 or 2. The proportion of learners from a black and minority ethnic background was higher than that of the local population as a whole, at around 8%.

At the time of the previous inspection in 2007, the college was judged to be inadequate in overall effectiveness, achievement and standards and equality of opportunity. Quality of provision, leadership and management, and capacity to improve were satisfactory. Three of the six curriculum areas inspected were found to be inadequate with the remaining areas satisfactory.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates for learners on long courses and in apprenticeship programmes?	Insufficient progress
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For all learners on long courses the progress the college has made in improving success rates has been mixed and is insufficient overall. In 2007/08, for learners aged 16-18 success rates rose significantly at levels 1 and 3 to the point where they were broadly average, in relation to an estimated national average for that year. However, at level 2 the improvement was very small and success rates for these learners remained very low, some 14 percentage points below the estimated national average. For adults, success rates at levels 2 and 3 improved so that these were above an estimated national average for 2007/08. However, at level 1, success rates fell by eight percentage points and were low.

The college has made significant progress in improving success rates in work-based learning. Interim qualification success rate data indicates an improvement in overall framework success rates for both apprentices and advanced apprentices. This improvement was more pronounced for apprentices. For timely success rates the improvement was strong for both. Success rates for advanced apprentices were broadly average and above average for apprentices in both the timely and overall measures.

### Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in improving key skills provision?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving key skills provision. Success rates in key skills of application of number, communications and information technology at levels 1 and 2 rose significantly in 2007/08; these were above the national average for the previous year by at least five and up to 20 percentage points. However, not all curriculum areas in 2007/08 have achieved success rates at all levels at the college target of 55%. Art, design and publishing, and human services, sciences and humanities departments are the most significant under-performing areas with poor success rates on some key skills.

Senior managers have determined in the recovery plan to offer only one key skill per full-time course and allow course tutors to determine which one is the most appropriate for their students. Initial diagnosis and screening are being used to better ensure students are doing the most appropriate key skill at the correct level.

Course tutors monitor attendance at key skills lessons through the electronic individual learning plan (EILP) process, to identify where this may vary from students' attendance on their main course. Intervention by the newly-appointed manager is proving to be effective. Students' attendance has been good and the quality of their work is improving. The college offers a general vocational studies course with 160 students who have been assessed as needing all three key skills, and a more targeted approach to improve these skills, before they embark on more vocationally-specific courses. The college also offers, and has recruited well to, three new 14-19 Diplomas where functional skills, rather than key skills, are part of the programmes.

What progress has been made in improving the rigour of target-setting in individual learning plans?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving the rigour of target-setting in individual learning plans. Motivational target-setting is more established in work-based learning than in the rest of the college's work and has contributed to the improvement in both overall and timely success rates seen in 2007/08. Learner

achievement tracker (LAT) data for 2006/07 shows the effectiveness of a pilot process for setting and monitoring target grades in business and tourism. Learners made better progress in these areas compared with those studying equivalent qualifications in the other curriculum areas. This pilot has since been spread to equivalent qualifications in the other curriculum areas.

EILPs are at an early stage of development. This is a well conceived development, but it is too early to measure its impact on learners' achievements.

### Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in reducing the significant proportion of lessons that remained only satisfactory?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in this area. At the previous inspection inspectors judged that the lesson observation process was reliable, and strategies to improve teaching and learning were well devised, although there remained a significant proportion of lessons that were no better than satisfactory. The college has focused on reducing this proportion by increasing the rigour of lesson observation still further, and in ensuring that action planning and staff development leading on from the observation meet individual teachers' needs more fully. The monitoring of initiatives to improve teaching and learning has been strengthened. The college is able to demonstrate the impact of these developments in improved lesson observation grades. However, as the college has not yet completed a full round of observations, it is not yet able to show how much the proportion of satisfactory lessons has been reduced.

What progress has been made in developing the effectiveness of quality improvement, including the use of management information, at curriculum level?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in developing the effectiveness of quality improvement at curriculum level. A new quality improvement manual provides a clear and detailed set of procedures that rightly focus on the impact on students. It outlines well how course review and self-assessment contribute to quality assurance. Staff have begun to use the procedures for the review of courses and the compilation of the curriculum level self-assessment reports.

Managers have introduced the role of course tutors who have overall responsibility for the organisation, review and monitoring of their course. The quality improvement processes place stronger emphasis on course reviews, with clear oversight and scrutiny by senior managers at regular intervals. Course tutors have welcomed the ownership this has brought to the management of their areas.

Communications have been strengthened. Senior managers have clarified roles, established clear terms of reference and cycles for team meetings through the publication of a college calendar. This outlines all key meetings, the protocols for each type of meeting, who attends and how these contribute to the overall organisational management and development of the curriculum.

Staff have received training on how to use the college management information system and in particular how to produce and evaluate data on success, retention and pass rates. Course tutors use this data well and monitor individual students' progress carefully using information from EILPs. Course tutors from curriculum areas that were inadequate at the previous inspection understand how to use the data and are well aware of the areas they need to improve.

What progress has been made in the sharing of good practice across the college?	Reasonable progress
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The post-inspection position statement indicates that actions outlined to address this key area for improvement are focused on improving strategies for teaching and learning. The college has made reasonable progress in developing strategies to share good practice, particularly in teaching and learning.

Much work has been done to establish ways in which good practice may be shared more effectively. However, as with many new initiatives, it is too early to see what impact this is having, for example, on improving the proportion of lessons with outstanding teaching and learning.

Key initiatives have included the organisation of a learning fair, changing the role of the advanced practitioners, who are now able to coach and develop teachers separately from carrying out graded observations, and the setting up of themed groups to raise standards in key priority areas.

At the learning fair all curriculum areas displayed their most effective teaching and learning ideas in a large public area in the college. This highly successful event enabled all teams and teachers to gain practical ideas and suggestions to improve their own teaching.

Senior managers have instigated the formation of themed groups of enthusiastic volunteers whose purpose is to discuss issues, share good practice and raise standards. The themed groups are for teaching and learning, information and learning technologies (ILT), learner involvement, and employer engagement. A technology room has been set up for teachers to practice ILT strategies and receive support from experienced technologists.

What progress has been made in the promotion of equality and diversity?	Reasonable progress
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The college recognises that the promotion of equality and diversity is a work in progress. As a result of the findings of the previous inspection, the college has taken a 'back to basics' approach that has included foundation training for all staff. The impact assessment of college policies is both well organised and effective. A new equality policy and a single equality scheme is in place. However, more work is needed on the development of outcomes in the single equality scheme to ensure that progress towards all of these may be measured. The analysis of data is at an early stage of development. Lesson observation captures the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons, but training for teachers on how to build this into teaching and learning, though planned for later this academic year, has not yet taken place.