

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Southampton City College

Date of visit: 11 June 2008

Context

Southampton City College is a medium sized general further education (GFE) college, largely based on one site close to the city centre, with a separate centre for its specialism in marine engineering. Educational achievement in Southampton for those at age 16 is significantly below England averages. Around a quarter of the adult population have no qualifications and there are low levels of literacy and numeracy. Just over 7% of the population are from minority ethnic groups, in addition to a large proportion of migrants from Eastern Europe.

The college offers a broad and primarily vocational curriculum, along with significant provision in basic skills. In 2007/08, around 7,950 students enrolled on courses. Of these students, 6,181 were adults, although most full-time students are aged 16 to 18. Most enrolments for both age groups are at level 1. Apprenticeship programmes, organised under the college's City Training arm, are available in several sector subject areas, with the largest number in construction. The college is also involved in a substantial programme of work for pupils aged 14 to 16 from local schools.

The college was inspected in October 2007. All key areas were judged to be satisfactory. One sector subject area was graded good and four satisfactory. Construction was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made since the previous inspection in improving success rates?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving the pockets of low success rates identified at the previous inspection. There has been a strong focus on ensuring that students are placed on the right course and given good support. Improved links with local schools have meant that the college now receives better information about prospective students in advance. Initial screening and advice and guidance have also been improved. The traffic light system that was in place at the previous inspection to track progress is more rigorously used and there is a more concerted approach by staff to monitor and enforce attendance and punctuality. College data indicate that in-year retention has improved overall for those aged 16-

18 and is currently 91% for those on level 1 courses, 89% for level 2, and 86% for level 3. The college has predicted that success rates overall for those aged 16-18 will improve in 2007/08 to 77% from the college figures for 2006/07 of 69%. In the same age group, college data shows that there has been a decline in the success rates on short courses from 80% in 2005/06 to 75% in 2006/07. For those aged 19 and over, the predicted success rates are either at, or marginally higher than, those achieved in 2005/06, which were 71% and 94% for long courses and short courses respectively. Apprenticeship framework completions are predicted to be 63% overall for 2007/08 although the college recognises that timely completions are likely to be low at 40%.

Quality of provision

What steps has the college taken to embed and further develop the arrangements to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. The college has reviewed and improved the forms used for lesson observations and additional staff have been trained as observers. Good use has been made of external consultants to conduct joint observations with college staff. The results of these joint observations have shown a good correlation with college grades. Following the previous inspection, staff development activities have been focused strongly on improvements to teaching and learning. A new teaching and learning policy is planned to be introduced next month which is specifically aimed at improving the quality of this aspect of provision. The college also has plans to focus this year's annual staff conference on improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. This event has been well planned.

What progress has been made since the previous inspection to improve the quality of provision in construction?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress since the previous inspection to improve the quality of provision in construction. Immediately following the inspection the college appointed an experienced manager from another curriculum area to act as head of school. A new curriculum team leader has also been appointed and other team leaders' roles have been suitably changed to enhance the management of the area. This management team are working well together with the curriculum team leaders providing good subject specialist expertise to support the new head. Staff are now set clear targets and there has been a marked improvement in awareness of the importance of ensuring student success.

Improvements have been made to better share good practice. The recent introduction of an informative internal staff newsletter, for example, helps to develop

staff understanding of the improvements they have made. There has been a stronger focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning as well as ensuring that students are put onto the right course and given good support. Good use has been made of external advisers and consultants to assist in the quality monitoring of the provision and to further enhance staff training. College data indicates good improvements to in-year retention, which is currently around 90% overall for all students on long courses. However, there is clear recognition that there are still retention issues to address on its entry level provision. The college predicts that it will have approximately 80% success rates for all students on construction craft courses for 2007/08.

Following the previous inspection, more effective use has been made of the college student adviser service. Student advisers are now based in each curriculum area and staff indicate that this has started to have a positive impact on student engagement. Good efforts have been made to improve the provision for apprentices, with better communications between curriculum staff and the colleges' training provider, Southampton City Training (City Training). There are now clearer admission processes and a stronger focus on the completion of key skills at the beginning of the course although it is too early to see the full impact of this. The college plans to cease plumbing apprenticeships from this September although City Training has plans to link-up with a neighbouring college to be able to continue offering apprenticeship programmes in this area.

Leadership and management

<p>Since the previous inspection what actions have been taken to improve the use of data and other management information to assess students' progress?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving the use of data and other management information to assess students' progress. College tutors and managers have a wider range of information made available to them to assist recruitment and ensure students are put onto the right course. Initial screening and testing are now being undertaken as part of the normal admissions process. College managers have recently starting using an upgraded management information system to improve the quality of data being used, although it is too early to see the full impact of this. Plans are in place to extend the access of the information available from this to all staff. The college has improved its 'traffic light' tracking system to ensure better information is used at tutorials, and to ensure students' attendance and punctuality are better monitored. Student support staff have improved access to student progress information and have been able to make more effective interventions to support students in need.

What improvements has the college made in the effectiveness of quality improvement and self-assessment since the previous inspection?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in quality improvement and self-assessment since the previous inspection. The self-assessment report (SAR) has been thoroughly revised to incorporate the strengths and areas for improvement highlighted in the previous inspection report. College managers have introduced a clear process of performance management that reviews each curriculum area every three months. Quality systems have been improved and particularly good use has been made of the support given from external advisers enlisted through the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA). Strong emphasis has been placed on the need for critical self evaluation. New arrangements are in place for mid-year and end of year reviews that encourage clear evaluation of progress as well as setting specific and measurable targets. Action planning has been improved within curriculum areas.

Post inspection development planning is effectively completed through the newly introduced sector review process. College managers are better prepared for completion of the annual SAR through the twice yearly sector review process. Staff are given clear responsibilities for student performance. The revised and updated SAR clearly reflects on improvements made.