

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Croydon College of Further and Higher Education
Date of visit: 24 April 2008

Context

Croydon College is a large further education college, with a significant higher education (HE) provision, in the London Borough of Croydon. Currently, while completing a major extension and renovation programme, the college is based on three sites. In 2005 only 55% of 16 year olds achieved five GCSE grades A*-C in Croydon with the rate falling as low as 27% in parts. The college is popular with students with over 40% of students travelling from outside the borough.

The college offers a broad and varied curriculum from entry to degree level. Some 43% of enrolments on further education courses are at level 1. The college provides work-based learning and a wide range of services to local businesses. It is designated as a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for hospitality and catering. In terms of further education in 2006/07, there were 2,929 students aged 16-19 and 6,705 adults on roll equating to 2,661 and 2,643 full-time equivalent students respectively. Some 24% of students aged 16-18 and 18% of adults are from areas of relatively high deprivation. The college is highly diverse; 69% of students are from black and minority ethnic groups and only 31% describe themselves as white British.

The college was inspected in May 2005. One curriculum area was judged good, nine satisfactory and one unsatisfactory. Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was re-inspected in June 2007 and found to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made since the last monitoring visit in improving success rates?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates for students following long courses have been improving steadily since the previous inspection at all levels. At level 1, rates improved further for both young people and adults in 2006/07 and are now good for adults but remain satisfactory for young people. Pass rates at this level improved for both age groups last year and are at the 2005/06 national average. Although the retention of adults at level 1 improved significantly in 2006/07 there was no further improvement on the good retention rate achieved in 2005/06 for 16-18 year olds. At level 2, success rates for young people and adults improved by 3% and 6% respectively last year due to improving

retention. Success rates at this level are in line with national averages for similar colleges. There was no improvement in pass rates for either age group and rates remain at the 2005/06 national average. Success rates at level 3 are satisfactory for both adults and young people. Rates improved by 4% both for young people and adults last year due to improvements in both retention and pass rates. Retention and pass rates were just above the 2005/06 national average rates for similar colleges. Data prepared by the college suggest improvements in retention of around 5% for full-time students for the current academic year. College data indicate no significant differences between the achievement of Black and minority ethnic students and those who describe themselves as White British in 2006/07. Success rates for Black and minority ethnic groups have improved steadily since the previous inspection with very significant improvements in performance of certain groups such as the African Caribbean group. Timely success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices improved further in 2006/07 and are well above national average rates.

Quality of provision

<p>What steps has the college taken since the last monitoring visit to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning across the college?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college continues to place a high priority on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The introduction of quality improvement reviews for sector subject areas has reinforced the college's commitment to improvement. Paired observations, the use of external consultants and the exchange of observers with other colleges to moderate observation judgements are contributing well to ensuring consistent and thorough judgements. The period of notice teachers receive prior to observation has been reduced to three weeks and teachers are no longer informed of the lesson which will be observed. Probationary teachers are now included in the observation scheme. These changes to observation procedures have resulted in a profile which reflects more accurately the experience of students. The level of unsatisfactory teaching has reduced since the previous inspection but the college still judged 5% of lessons unsatisfactory in 2006/07. A high turnover of 17% for full-time and 29% for part-time teachers emphasises the need for continuous support and training. Only 58% of part-time teachers and 93% of full-time teachers are qualified. A team of advanced practitioner teachers are well motivated and support the implementation of improvement strategies well. Sharing of good practice has improved and a process of peer observation has been introduced. Induction of new staff has been strengthened along with a mentoring scheme for unqualified teachers. Teachers judged unsatisfactory receive wide ranging support to improve their practice. Action planning to improve the practice of those judged satisfactory is at an early stage of development.

What progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of key skills, literacy, numeracy and language support?	Significant progress
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Procedures for identifying the support needs of individual students have improved significantly. When compared with the previous year, 20% more initial assessments were carried out in 2007/08. Support needs of individual students are now included in the initial class information provided for teachers. Take up of identified support has improved with 69% of full-time and 47% part-time students accepting support in 2007/08 compared with 41% and 14% respectively in 2006/07. Students are now re-assessed at the end of the academic year to ensure the support provided has been effective. At the time of the visit, retention rates for students receiving support were 5% higher than for those who were not. The college has developed a clear policy and structure for developing students' key and basic skills and staffing levels have been increased. The management of skills for life is more coherent. Internal verification of key skills is much improved and now works well to aid students in completing their portfolios. The college recognises that there is still work to be done in the key skills and basic skills provision to ensure effective management of all aspects of skills for life provision across the college.

Has the college succeeded in improving arrangements for monitoring students' progress and intervention when required?	Significant progress
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Tutorial arrangements for full-time students have been strengthened and individual support is available for those who attend college on a part-time basis. Clear guidelines have been developed to enable tutors to make effective use of different sources of information for monitoring and supporting students' progress. These include initial assessments of additional learning needs, students' preferences expressed during induction and qualification, and associated aims. A variety of individual learning plans are currently used to monitor students' progress and an electronic version has been piloted successfully with a sample of 800 students to rationalise procedures. Students' support and development needs are clearly identified and information is accessible to tutors, teachers and support staff via the college intranet. College managers are confident that the improvements to progress monitoring for this sample of students have substantially improved current and potential qualification success rates. Based on the success of the pilot, the college is planning to extend the use of electronic learning plans to all full-time students from September 2008.

What impact have the changes implemented since the last monitoring visit had on ESOL provision and outcomes?	Significant progress
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Since the previous monitoring visit, the college has terminated the ineffective franchise arrangements for providing English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, the majority of which were located outside the borough. ESOL enrolments have fallen dramatically. However, the numbers of students attending college part-time have remained constant and those attending full-time have increased. Good partnership working with local schools, social workers and the Connexions service has resulted in a substantial increase in the numbers of 16-18 following ESOL programmes. The curriculum offered is flexible, meets the needs of students and includes vocationally based ESOL courses. The college has also responded well to local needs in introducing an ESOL for work programme that concentrates on employability skills for those learners seeking employment. ESOL staff have worked well with different college departments to include ESOL, along with other aspects of skills for life, within new Train to Gain programmes. Appropriate action has been taken to ensure learners are enrolled on courses that are appropriate to their needs. Effective procedures have been introduced for monitoring students' attendance and progress and retention rates have improved substantially for both full- and part-time learners. Success rates for ESOL provision have improved significantly and are well above national rates.

Leadership and management

What steps have been taken since the last monitoring visit to improve the consistency and impact of course level self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous monitoring visit the college provides better access to information for course tutors responsible for monitoring and managing performance data. In parallel to this initiative, the college has usefully refined the process of course quality reviews and their subsequent amalgamation into faculty and college self-assessment reports. Curriculum managers fully support the system to assess course performance and areas of potential risk. They confidently use self-assessment and action-planning processes. Senior staff and external consultants now conduct quality improvement reviews of all curriculum areas over a two year cycle. Feedback from these reviews is used constructively to moderate self-assessment judgements. The new college management structure is enabling curriculum leaders and managers to take a more strategic view of their responsibilities. Curriculum leaders make regular use of feedback from learners and there are examples of improvements introduced following complaints.