

City College, Brighton and Hove

Re-inspection report

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Introduction

City College, Brighton and Hove was inspected in February 2007. Inspectors carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in the skills for life curriculum area which was found to be inadequate. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is inadequate.

The less than satisfactory skills for life area was re-inspected on 17 and 18 June 2008. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Skills for life	4	2

Context

The skills for life discrete provision consists of 40 courses in English as a second or other language (ESOL), 10 literacy and 10 numeracy courses, offered mostly on the main site, on a part-time basis. Of the 874 students studying since September 2007, 72% were ESOL learners and most were aged over 19. In addition, 442 students on vocational courses received literacy, language or numeracy support.

Strengths

- High retention rates on all programmes
- Good and much improved success rates in all ESOL, literacy level 1 and numeracy level 2 courses
- Good development of skills on ESOL programmes
- Good teaching and learning in ESOL
- Effective action to bring about improvement

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates on literacy level 2 and numeracy level 1
- Insufficient focus on the development of skills in progress reviews

Achievement and standards

Retention and attendance are good on most programmes. Success rates at all ESOL levels and on literacy level 1 and numeracy level 2 programmes are much improved and are good. ESOL students gain good language and study skills, becoming confident and accurate communicators, with well developed vocabulary and spelling skills. They demonstrate good understanding of language structures and apply formal and informal language well.

Literacy level 2 and numeracy level 1 programmes are followed by 14% of the students. Success rates on these programmes are still low, but are improving.

Key skills success rates have improved from 39% in 2006/07 and are now in line with national averages. The standard of students' work is good on most skills for life programmes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are good on all ESOL programmes. Learning is well planned and information and learning technology is used very effectively to enhance learning and for communications outside the classroom. Most students on skills for life programmes have access to a suitable range of resources and challenging activities. The range of provision is now satisfactory and sufficiently diverse to meet local needs. Students now receive timely learning support, take up is good and students receiving support have high retention rates. Staff are effective in sharing information about students' needs. Planning reflects the needs and vocational interests of students. There is insufficient focus on the development of skills and on setting clear targets for improvement during students' progress reviews.

Leadership and management

The college has taken very effective steps to improve the provision. Staff are now suitably qualified, clear about what is expected of them, and have good opportunities to share good practice. Data are now used effectively to monitor performance and attendance and ensure good retention.

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: City College, Brighton and Hove

Date of visit: 17-18 June 2008

Context

City College, Brighton and Hove is a large further education college located at three main centres within the city. It provides full and part-time courses from entry level to foundation degrees. Provision is offered in 13 of the 15 sector/subject areas. The college has a formal Accord with the two local sixth form colleges and holds a direct contract for adult and community learning and work-based learning. The college participates in six Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and is the lead for digital media and heritage engineering. In 2006/07, there were 1,495 students aged 16-19 and 3,789 adults on roll equating to 1,391 and 1,548 full-time equivalent students respectively.

The college was inspected in February 2007. Effectiveness of provision, capacity to improve, achievements and standards, quality of provision, and leadership and management were found to be satisfactory. Provision in arts, media and performing arts was found to be good. In engineering, construction, hairdressing and beauty therapy and travel and tourism provision was judged satisfactory. Provision in skills for life was found to be inadequate. A new principal took up post in August 2007.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving students' achievements?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates for young people following level 1 courses have continued to improve and were significantly above the 2005/06 national average for general further education colleges last year. Below average success rates for adults at level 1 showed a further slight decline in 2006/07. The retention rate has however improved significantly this year by 10 percentage points.

At level 2, success rates for young people continue to be above the 2005/06 national average and rates improved significantly for adults. The proportion of adult learners who complete their course has continued to improve this year and is well above the 2005/06 national rate for similar colleges.

College actions to improve achievements have been most successful at level 3. Success rates were well above the 2005/06 national average for both adults and young people in 2006/07 and retention rates have continued to improve for both age groups over the current academic year.

The college has started to address low success rates for short courses and has rationalised the provision. Preliminary data for 2007/08 indicate improvement for courses of 5-24 weeks duration with success rates in excess of 70%. The college recognises however that there is work to be done to achieve appropriate standards in this area. For work-based learning programmes both success rates and timely success rates have continued to improve and are good. The college has not enjoyed similar success with its E2E provision and has appointed a new manager to the area, as it views expanding the provision to be an important element of its strategy for engaging hard to reach and vulnerable young people.

Quality of provision

Have appropriate actions been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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Improving teaching and learning is a clearly stated priority for the college leadership team. The emphasis on staff development has continued with training provided in areas such as behaviour management and differentiation of teaching to meet the needs of individual students. There is increased attention to teaching and learning in self-assessment reports but these do not always provide sufficient evidence to support judgements. Support is provided for teachers to improve their performance by learning coaches and learning mentors and there is a more systematic approach to sharing of good practice through regular meetings of course teams. The information available to teachers about students' additional learning needs to help them plan their lessons has improved and is now timely.

The college judges 65% of lessons to be good or better, which represents a small improvement on the previous year. This modest improvement is partly a consequence of more realistic assessment of previously over-graded lessons. A range of materials are provided to help teachers improve but managers recognises that the college's teaching and learning guidance handbook focuses primarily on teaching and pays insufficient attention to learning. The college was reviewing its guidance materials in this area at the time of the visit. Information held on the college lesson observation data base is accessible and is used to support improvement, but is not always sufficiently detailed to support the grade allocated to individual observations.

What action has been taken to improve the monitoring of students' progress and the tutorial system?	Significant progress
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Managers and staff at all levels are clear about the importance of monitoring all aspects of students' performance. Staff expect high rates of attendance and this is communicated clearly to students.

Tutors have a clear understanding of their role and they benefit from regular training and updating. They are effective at sharing the good practice that is now in evidence. Students value the informal and formal support they receive from their tutors.

Changes to the tutorial system have been effective. Full-time students attend a weekly group tutorial which follows an agreed series of topics based loosely around the *Every Child Matters* outcomes. Tutors have been successful in adapting good quality tutorial materials in order to make them relevant to different aspects of the curriculum.

Students value greatly the formal individual progress reviews where their targets are reviewed and new ones set. Students are generally aware of what they need to do to improve and most find the improvement targets helpful in their learning. There is however some inconsistency in the way targets are worded. Whilst some are very specific and easily measurable, others are too vague and of little value. There is also some variation in tutorial support offered to part-time students. Documentation to support the tutorial system is clear and effective and student progress files serve as useful records of progress made throughout the year.

Leadership and management

What action has been taken to improve the consistency and impact of management across the college?	Significant progress
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The college has completed a comprehensive review of its strategic aims and management arrangements. A new mission statement has been developed which relates the purpose of the college to local needs well. Following extensive dialogue and consultation, the management of the college has been restructured with 54 management posts reduced to 33 at the beginning of June 2008. The re-structuring was managed well and staff across the college have high expectations of the new senior leadership team.

The approach adopted to improvement by the new principal is coherent and tasks have been prioritised well. The college now has a much stronger focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and driving up success rates. The new management structure ensures all managers are accountable for aspects of the curriculum and there is a much stronger emphasis on accountability at all levels. Senior managers now place much higher emphasis on skills for life which accords with the needs of many of the college's students and the college's commitment to inclusion. Partnership arrangements are being used well to achieve the college's mission.

How successful has the college been in improving quality assurance since the last inspection?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made appropriate changes to its quality assurance arrangements since the last inspection. Clear procedures have been established which are understood well by staff. Self-assessment is now based on four reviews per annum with managers co-ordinating responses to various questions based on the common inspection framework. Staff involvement in self-assessment has improved, especially

at course team level. Some course level self-assessment reports focus appropriately on key aspects such as retention rates, achievement and teaching and learning and analyse strengths and weaknesses rigorously. Other course team reports are insufficiently evaluative and fail to use data adequately to support judgements.

The monitoring of students' attendance has improved significantly. All absences are followed up quickly and the particularly effective procedures now in place are applied consistently by curriculum areas. Attendance is improving and was 87% for full-time students aged 16-18 in 2006/07.

Senior managers have adopted an appropriately self-critical approach to the development of quality assurance. As a result they know their college well and are aware of the areas that require management time and attention. Whilst the new self-assessment process has yet to complete a full cycle there is evidence, for example, in improved retention and attendance, that the emerging quality assurance procedures are becoming more effective.

Has the college taken appropriate action to improve social inclusion and the procedures for monitoring the performance of various groups?	Significant progress
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The proportion of students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds attending the college is significantly higher than that of the city's population. The college now monitors enrolment, retention and pass rates well, by gender, ethnicity and disability. This analysis shows that no particular group performs significantly better or worse than the college norm with the exception of young women aged 16-19. who perform better than males on full-time courses.

The college has increased its level 1 provision significantly with courses now being available in all curriculum areas. Recruitment to this provision is very good and enrolments on level 1 courses now account for approximately one third of all enrolments. These courses also provide excellent progression routes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The college has invested heavily in equality and diversity training since the last inspection with over 200 staff taking part in a wide range of events. New staff are not confirmed in their posts until they have completed this training. Working with the Students' Union, the college has held a number of successful events such as an international day and a rock concert to celebrate equality and diversity. The disabled learners' forum is well attended and a detailed action plan has been drawn up as a result of their work.

The provision for 14 -16 year olds enables over 300 young people to gain skills and knowledge in a wide range of vocational areas. Many of these students progress to full-time courses and are able to settle to their studies quickly as a result of the time spent at the college whilst in Years 10 and 11. This provision enjoys high status in the college and success rates are high.

The college works very successfully with a range of partners in the areas of, for example, homelessness and substance misuse, focusing mainly on improving levels of literacy and numeracy. The college is true to its mission to work with disaffected and hard-to-reach groups.