

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Greenwich Community College

Date of visit: 4 December 2008

Context

Greenwich Community College is a large general college of further education. It has ten sites and a number of community venues located across the borough of Greenwich. The college is in an area with high levels of social deprivation and unemployment, with a high proportion of low income families, many of whom are single parents.

The college offers a wide range of courses from entry level to level 4. The five largest curriculum areas are: preparation for life and work; leisure, travel and tourism; science and mathematics; health, public services and care; and languages, literature and culture. The college has two Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in heritage and tourism, and health and social care in partnership with Tower Hamlets College.

In 2007/08, the college recruited 10,141 learners. The average age of learners is 32 years. All ethnic groups were represented within the learner population, with 50% of learners from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities compared with the local representation of 30%. The gender ratio is 67% female to 33% male.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has the college made to improve learners' outcomes generally?	Reasonable progress
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The college was graded satisfactory for achievements and standards at the previous inspection in April 2006. The college has made reasonable progress to improve learners' outcomes.

A major concern is the discrepancy between the students' achievement data reported by the college and that recorded on the College Performance Report (CPR). Comparing data for 2005/06 and 2006/07, there is agreement regarding the number of learners recorded, but substantial differences in the overall success rates and national averages. College data report higher success rates and lower national averages than the CPR. For example, the success rates at level 2 for adults in 2006/07 are recorded as 10% higher in college data (70%) compared with the CPR (60.2%), with a national average of 66% reported by the college, compared with

69.9% in the CPR. Senior college managers have been working with colleagues from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for some time to resolve this issue.

The following analysis is made using the current college data. Headline success rates between 2005/06 and 2006/07 improved at a faster rate than nationally, but remained below the national average for similar colleges. Students' achievement data for 2007/08 is still being collated, but senior managers report that the headline success rate will continue to improve, although it is unlikely to reach the national average.

In 2006/07, the success rate for learners aged 16 to 18 on long courses was significantly below the national average at level 1. Level 2 success rates were at national average and above at level 3. Provisional data for 2007/08 indicates that success rates have improved, with a similar trend to previous years. The low success rate for adult learners at level 2 was an area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Provisional data for 2007/08 gives a 66% success rate which is just below the national average.

Success rates for short courses in 2006/07 were comparable to the national average and just below for very short courses. Provisional data for 2007/08 indicates an improvement for very short courses that will bring performance to around the national average. Too many results are still to be collated to be clear about the position for short courses, but low success rates are found in a number of curriculum areas, particularly for programmes at levels 1 and 2.

The college successfully recruited 768 Train to Gain learners during 2006/07 with a high achievement rate of 91%. The success rates of school pupils aged 14 to 16 attending the college increased in 2007/08 to 88% at level 1 and 92% at level 2, although the number of pupils involved dropped. In 2007/08, the proportion of learners obtaining grade A* - C at GCSE was lower than for similar colleges. GCE AS success rates were well above the national averages for similar colleges and they were comparable for GCE A2 courses, with good performance for high grade passes. The overall student attendance rate for 2007/08 was 80%, which was the same as for 2006/07.

Quality of provision

Has the college made sufficient progress in developing a rigorous lesson observation scheme that can lead to greater variety in teaching to meet the needs of all learners?	Significant progress
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The college has continued to improve the quality of its teaching and learning since the last monitoring visit. At the same time it has further improved the rigour of its scheme of lesson observations. As part of these arrangements, the college has made significant progress in developing teaching to meet the needs of all learners.

Lesson observations focus more on the capacity of teachers to meet the particular learning needs of learners. Observers are required to consider the extent to which class profiles are used by teachers to influence their teaching. Improvements in learners' target setting and progress review are providing a more secure platform for matching teaching to need. The good progress made with the development and use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) is a significant contributor to help address learners' varying needs and preferences. Some areas of learning, such as business, and health and care, provide a significant amount of material on the VLE for their learners.

Interactive whiteboards are now available in all teaching areas. Learners clearly prefer lessons that effectively use teaching and learning technologies. Most teachers have been trained in the use of the digital technology. The college is working to use the expertise of more accomplished teachers to help develop the expertise of their colleagues.

To improve the relevance of courses for their learners, more areas of learning are engaging with employers and the business world. There are also positive local partnerships with other colleges and with schools, where teachers share their ideas for improving teaching.

Are individual learner targets being set and monitored that challenge and promote improvement?	Significant progress
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The previous inspection reported the use of individual learning plans (ILPs) was underdeveloped and target-setting was weak. The college has made significant progress to address these issues. In 2006/07, a large scale project was undertaken, involving over 1,000 learners, who completed their ILPs on-line. This was successful and the scheme is now being extended to all full time and many part time learners.

The on-line system used for ILPs is part of the college's VLE and so forms an integrated package of learning resources for learners. Specific targets are agreed by subject teachers and learners, and then overall learning targets are discussed at individual meetings between the learner and personal tutor. Learners also make a written contribution to this review of their progress. These targets are available to view for all staff involved in teaching or supporting the learner, thus ensuring that communication about the progress of learners is swift. Learners and staff are also able to gain access to the system from locations outside college. The college is considering whether this information should be made available to parents and carers of learners under 18 years old. Comments on learners' progress form the basis of reports that are sent to the homes of learners and the employers of sponsored learners. The system is popular with learners and many staff appreciate its benefits, in terms of improved communication and the reduction of paper use.

Currently, the system does not hold information about the attendance and punctuality of learners, although comments on these are made by teachers and tutors. Further refinements are planned, to incorporate the results of diagnostic tests and information on learners' progress towards key skills qualifications.

Leadership and management

Has the college established greater consistency in quality monitoring procedures at course level?	Significant progress
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Course Quality Records (CQRs) continue to be at the centre of the college's arrangements to monitor the quality of courses and to improve quality overall. Much of the college's work on quality improvement over the last year has focused on achieving further consistency of quality monitoring at course level. Significant progress has been made.

The CQR system now covers all provision; including work based learning and is being extended to short course fee-paying provision. It is proactively managed and developed by the team of curriculum leaders, led by the director of quality and standards. In the current academic year, streamlined and simpler documentation for the CQR has been introduced. More rigorous and manageable standardisation of CQRs is now in place. Curriculum leaders meet every five or six weeks with the director of quality to achieve this and to share practice.

The work with the CQR has also extended to the remodelling of the format for departmental self-assessment reports. The consistency and rigour of the CQR and of the self-assessment process has been helped by the central provision of key data sets for courses, avoiding the need to generate local data. A quality and standards area on the college's intranet provides good support for practitioners. The consistency in quality monitoring has also been improved by the increased reliability of lesson observations and more use is being made of the learner voice to influence judgements. As before, there is appropriate training to support staff in the introduction of the further changes.