

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Weymouth College

Date of visit: 19 November 2008

Context

Weymouth College is a medium-sized further education college serving the town of Weymouth, Portland, and South and West Dorset. The college is the main provider of post 14-16 vocational and post-16 academic education in the area, and provides a diverse range of education and training programmes in all of the 15 subject sector categories.

The college offers a wide choice of general certificate of education courses which includes A-level subjects, Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) courses, Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). In addition, the college has an expanding provision of work-based learning for apprentices in several sector subject areas.

The recruitment of students aged 16 to 18 is strong. In 2006/07, there were 7,643 enrolments, equating to around 1,600 full-time equivalent students. The total number of work-based learners is 211, with approximately a third in electro-technical services.

The college was inspected in November 2006. All key areas were judged to be satisfactory. One sector subject area, construction, was graded good, and four satisfactory. The college received a monitoring visit in November 2007.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made since the previous inspection to improve those areas identified as below minimum levels of performance?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress to improve those areas identified as below minimum levels of performance (MLP) by the Learning and Skills Council. The management of A-level provision has been completely reformed and curriculum changes have taken place since the previous inspection. College data for 2007/08 indicates that this has started to have a positive impact on success rates in those areas identified as below MLP. However, the college still has work to do to improve A-level provision in business administration, science and mathematics and information and communication technology. The college acknowledges in its draft

self-assessment report for 2007/08 that although progress has been made, some areas now out of MLP remain with low success rates and need further improvement.

The college data for 2007/08 indicates improvements to most long courses. However, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 on level 1 and 2 long courses have declined and are currently 82% and 81% respectively. Success rates, although improving, have not kept pace with rising national averages. Notable success rates that have improved to significantly above the rising national average are those at level one for students aged 19 and over. Work-based learning framework achievements overall have significantly improved during the past two years. The latest college data for 2007/08 indicates achievements are now 78% for apprentices and 82% for advanced apprentices, although achievements in construction are low at 50%. Timely success rates have also improved and are currently 68% overall.

What progress has been made to key skills in the areas identified as in need of improvement?	Reasonable progress
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Following the previous inspection, the college has changed the approach to key skills delivery. Sector subject areas now have full responsibility for key skills, and vocational staff have been identified in each area to lead on this. Staff in these areas have been appropriately trained and are given additional support from a central team of qualified key skills staff.

The identification of key skills needs at initial assessment has improved and there is now more thorough tracking and monitoring of key skills achievements by all staff. Students have a clearer understanding of the importance of key skills and how they apply to their individual areas of learning. Following the previous inspection, a stronger emphasis is now placed at induction on achieving key skills. College data for 2007/08 indicates improvements in key skills success rates for those aged 16 to 18 from 37% to 56%, and for those aged 19 and over from 23% to 47%. The college recognises that these success rates are not satisfactory and that it needs to continue to focus on improving success rates further.

Quality of provision

What improvements have been made to the quality of teaching and learning following the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, the college is striving to make clear and accurate judgements of teaching and learning. In 2007/08, 64% of lessons observed were judged good or better, which was slightly higher than the previous year, although the proportion of outstanding teaching had declined from 25% in 2006/07 to 16% in 2007/08. The college has recently introduced unannounced observations of teaching and learning across several curriculum areas. Of the 43 unannounced observations

that have been carried out, the proportion of good or better lessons in these areas was significantly lower than the overall cross-college figure. The college recognises this disparity and has subsequently further reviewed its processes for carrying out observations of teaching and learning. External consultants have undertaken observations during the last year, which has validated the accuracy of the judgements of internal observers.

Programme area managers and learning team leaders have increased the number of peer observations they carry out since the previous inspection and this has improved the effective sharing of good practice. There is better identification of staff development needs and a newly appointed manager with responsibility for teacher training works closely with these observers. Work is still in progress to ensure comments on internal observations accurately identify strengths and areas for improvements. The college has recently appointed a new quality director.

What progress has been made since the previous inspection to improve target setting and the use of individual learning plans, particularly to identify and improve assessment, support and skills for life?	Reasonable progress
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Arrangements for assessing students' literacy, numeracy and additional learning needs have been strengthened since the previous inspection. Learning support staff now have direct responsibility for managing the initial assessment process and give effective support to students identified with additional support needs. A higher proportion of students have taken up additional support since the previous inspection. Success rates have improved for those receiving support, although at 68%, remain no better than satisfactory.

Initial advice and guidance has been improved to ensure students are placed on the right course and level. Students who change courses are given careful guidance interviews. The use of the electronic individual learning plan (eILP) has been further improved and staff can quickly identify issues and improve support where needed, although some curriculum areas use this better than others.

Leadership and management

What steps have been taken following the previous inspection and monitoring visit, to improve the involvement in decision-making by students?	Reasonable progress
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Improvements have been made to learner involvement following the previous inspection and monitoring visit. Students are now involved in interviews for key post holder positions in the college and they are actively involved in college-wide decisions through the student council. Newly developed learning forums have been introduced where students can become more involved in strategic decision-making

and quality improvement, although these have yet to have an impact on provision and not all students were aware of their existence. Although there are currently no student governors, the college is actively seeking student involvement. One student governor has recently been identified and training is planned.

A range of activities has recently been developed by students to encourage others to participate. This includes a well attended debating society and comedy club. The college's learner involvement strategy is currently being redrafted with the help of external consultants, to identify additional areas where the college can further strengthen participation.

What progress has been made to improve employer engagement?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress to actively engage with employers through a wide range of activities. The college have an improved presence at local shows and events, and are fully involved in initiatives for the forthcoming Olympic Games where sailing events are to be held locally. Several project funded by the European Social Fund have a clear focus on employer involvement, and the college has recently undertaken a telemarketing exercise to encourage more local employer support. This successfully targeted the many small and medium size enterprises in the area that have been difficult to engage.

What actions have been taken to improve the monitoring and impact of equality of opportunities?	Reasonable progress
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Following the previous inspection, the college has continued to collect a range of data relating to equality and diversity which is now thoroughly analysed. This includes monitoring of student successes by gender, ethnicity and disabilities. Equality and diversity data has started to be well used to inform decisions and recent initiatives to recruit women into engineering and science have been successful. The college equality and diversity adviser receives regular monitoring information and data to inform planning. There is a particularly good response from the college when issues are identified, and there is a high level of respect between staff and students.