

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Hackney Community College

Date of visit: 25 June 2009

### Context

Hackney Community College is a large general further education college (FE) in the London Borough of Hackney. It is the only general FE college in the borough. Apart from its main site in Shoreditch there is a small site in the centre of Hackney, primarily for commercial activity. The college works in over 40 community venues in the borough. The college offers a wide range of programmes from entry to postgraduate level, with provision in all 15 sector subject areas. The college has two Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), in business, and construction. A high number of learners take programmes in preparation for life and work, constituting over 40% of all adult full-time equivalent (FTE) learners. Outside of this area of learning, the most significant number of learners are in health and social care.

In 2007/08, there were 5,970 learners, of whom 76% were adults and 60% were female. Around 75% of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Learners are predominantly drawn from Hackney and its immediate neighbours. The borough has many of the most economically and socially deprived wards in the country and nearly 95% of learners reside in disadvantaged areas. The borough has the third highest rate of worklessness in the UK. Over a fifth of Hackney residents of working age have no qualifications.

### Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in improving success rates of students?	Reasonable progress
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College data for 2007/08 show that overall success rates have continued to improve since the last monitoring visit. Compared with the significant improvement in success rates in 2006/07, the increase in 2007/08 was just above the rise in the national rate. Consequently, the overall success rate is now at the national average for similar colleges. Success rates on long courses improved for adults at all levels, and for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 1 and 2, but they remained static at around the national average at level 3. However, success rates for adults on long level 1 courses remain low. Overall success rates for short courses increased slightly in 2007/08, but remain lower than the national rate. Key skills success rates continue to rise, increasing by another nine percentage points in 2007/08. They are now broadly average.

For all lengths and levels of course, overall retention rates have improved since the previous inspection, although they dropped in 2007/08 for adults on long courses and for younger students on short courses. They are still around national averages for both age groups. Overall achievement rates for students of both age groups on long and short courses have improved, except for those of students aged 16 to 18 on long level 3 courses. Students on vocational courses at level 3 make significantly better progress than expected compared with their starting points. However, those on A and AS-level programmes do not achieve grades as high as would be expected of them.

College data show that the overall framework success rates for apprentices have improved to above national averages and timely success rates have improved to around the national average. Overall success rates for learners on the Train to Gain programme fell from 77% in 2006/07 to 59% in 2007/08. However, there is considerable variation in performance across subject areas. Learners in education and training, around 40% of the intake, achieve success rates higher than the national average. In other areas, such as health and social care, and administration, success rates are significantly lower than average. The college is aware of where the areas for improvement lie and are taking appropriate action. College data for the current year show an improvement in success rates.

How much progress has been made in improving the attendance and punctuality of learners?	Insufficient progress
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Since the previous inspection the college has concentrated on developing strategies to improve students' attendance and punctuality. These include staff training, raising the profile of punctuality and attendance in students' induction and through the RESPECT campaign. Initiatives have been implemented such as electronic registers, contacting of absent students by administrators, and a student lounge to encourage students to stay on site during their breaks from lessons. The new registration system now enables a more accurate reporting of attendance. College data suggest that attendance rates have improved since the last monitoring visit, although they are not yet good enough.

The college does not have a consistent policy on the punctuality of students in lessons. Curriculum teams are allowed to define their own expectations for determining students' lateness. Consequently, although electronic registration allows much improved recording and monitoring of punctuality, teachers are not clear how they should define students' lateness, and registers are not completed consistently. The college's data on students' punctuality in previous years is based on unreliable monitoring, with the result that college managers do not have an accurate view of the levels of poor punctuality to lessons, or the effect it may be having on learning.

## Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in the steps taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous monitoring visit, results of the college observation scheme indicate that there has been a continued improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. College data for the current year, with 80% of staff having been observed, show that the proportion of good and better teaching and learning has risen to 72%. The college appreciates that the present system of giving teachers five days notice of which lesson will be observed may lead to an inflated profile of the quality of lessons, and has adjusted the results appropriately. In 2009/10, the college is planning to continue with a similar notification period for lesson observations, but without informing teachers which lesson will be observed. Observation forms record appropriately the impact of the teaching on students' learning. The college moderates all lesson observations to ensure consistency of practice. Teachers whose lessons are graded less than good are given a good support to help them improve. The college has appropriate procedures to deal with staff whose performance is judged less than satisfactory, and show no sign of improvement.

An electronic system to record key aspects of all teaching and learning observations has been recently introduced. Reports from this database are beginning to inform the college of areas of best practice and areas for improvement. These are used to develop a more focused programme of staff development to promote improvement. The outcomes from lesson observations are monitored closely against course success rates and there is evidence that improvements in teaching and learning are directly related to improved retention and the improvements in success rates that the college is predicting in the current year.

How much progress has been made in improving employer engagement and provision for apprentices?	Significant progress
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In 2007 the college set up a new employer-focused Business Development Unit (BDU) to respond to the growing number of work-based learning programmes. As a result of this, and work across a range of curriculum departments, the college has developed new and effective links with many key employers, both locally and regionally, such as the Metropolitan Police, Virgin Active and London Employer Accord. These have resulted in almost a doubling in the number of employers with which the college works with and a rapid growth in learners on the Train to Gain programme from 40 in 2006/07 to 740 in 2008/09. Links have also been widened in priority areas, such as construction, health and care, and Skills for Life. In preparation for the Olympic Games in 2012, the college has expanded its work-based learning in hospitality and catering, with significant investment in resources to support this key area that is under-represented in the locality.

The HATCH project, comprising 11 public sector employers and two training providers in the borough, is leading to significant opportunities to expand work-based learning. Employers now have more involvement in the development of

bespoke courses and modules in, for example, business administration and IT programmes.

## Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in developing quality improvement procedures and curriculum area self-assessment reports?	Reasonable progress
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The college has continued to improve its quality improvement procedures since the last monitoring visit. A key aspect of the improvements has been the accessibility and accuracy of data to inform course tutors and managers of students' performance and progress. Managers are able to access accurate information at student, course and department levels to quickly identify emerging trends and any areas of under-performance. They are able to monitor course performance more effectively, and have a greater ability to deal with developing problems and consider actions in a more timely manner. Course and subject quality improvement plans are monitored regularly and reviewed at key stages throughout the year. Timely intervention measures are applied, and these are already showing a positive impact on improving retention rates for under-performing courses.

Quality assurance arrangements in off-site work-based learning are not yet sufficiently developed. Some key aspects of the student experience, for example the quality of training or progress reviews, are not currently monitored for their impact on the students' experience. The college self-assessment report is broadly accurate and contains a good critique of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. Self-assessment reports in curriculum areas are based on the key questions in the common inspection framework. Although improvement in the quality of those reports can be seen, with good examples of evaluative self-assessment, they vary across subjects. For example, in one report, the overall grading for the course did not equate to the judgements proposed for the key questions. In another, success rates were quoted as a strength, but also as an area for improvement, with no detail of the relevant courses, or the levels of improvement required.