

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Brooklands College
Date of visit: 25 June 2009

Context

Brooklands College is a large general further education college, with its main campus situated close to the town of Weybridge in Surrey. It merged with Spelthorne College in August 2007 and now has another campus based in Ashford in the Borough of Spelthorne. As well as work at the main sites, the college offers part-time courses, primarily in basic skills and supported learning at 18 other venues, including Community Centres and on employers' premises in the Elmbridge, Runnymede, Surrey Heath and Spelthorne areas.

Brooklands College received a monitoring visit in January 2008. The curriculum area of skills for life was reinspected. At reinspection, inspectors judged the area to be satisfactory. The monitoring visit reported: significant progress in improving key skills provision; significant progress in the use of lesson observations; significant progress in addressing poor accommodation at Spelthorne; significant progress in improving the speed of quality improvement and ensuring consistency following the merger; reasonable progress in improving success rates at level 3; reasonable progress in developing self-assessment; reasonable progress in ensuring compliance with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act across both college sites; insufficient progress in improving the quality of work-based learning.

Achievement and standards

What further success has the college achieved in the improvement of success rates on long courses for 16 - 18 learners?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving success rates for 16-18 year olds. The previous monitoring visit reported that pre-merger success rates had improved for both colleges. In 2007/08, overall success rates for 16 – 18 learners were above the national average at 81%. At level 1, success rates in 2007/08 were just below national averages at 74%. For level 2 learners, success rates were three percentage points above the national average for 2007/08. Success rates are broadly in line with national averages for level 3 programmes.

In 2007/08, 1423 learners started on level 3 programmes and success rates for A level, AS and A2 qualifications were broadly satisfactory at 75% for 16-18 learners.

Success rates for mathematics and chemistry at GCE A2 level were particularly high at 100% and 92% respectively. Conversely, science and mathematics at GCE AS level were weaker with success rates below 70%. Issues resulting from the merger of the two colleges have been identified, for example duplication of courses, and appropriate action is in place to resolve these issues.

What further success has the college achieved in the improvement of success rates on long courses for adult learners?	Reasonable Progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving success rates for adults. Success rates in 2007/08 for these students were broadly in line with national averages and have shown small improvements each year for the last 2 years. Success rates on level 2 courses are better than at levels 1 and 3, where overall the rates remain slightly below national averages. The changes in skills for life provision as a response to the changes in learners' needs have resulted in improved retention and increased confidence that success rates will continue to improve. While the 2007/08 student achievement data for level 1 and 2 is now more reliable, the data for level 3 remains unreliable as a result of inherited merged data for 2 – year programmes not yet being fully reconciled. The college is using data more effectively to determine areas of weakness and adapting its provision well to meet individual needs.

What success has the college achieved in the improvement of success rates for short courses?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving success rates for short courses. Generally success rates were satisfactory for short courses. In 2007/08 success rates were 69% for 16-18 learners and 73% for adults. Learners aged 16-18 on very short courses of less than five weeks achieved well, with high success rates of 97%. Adult learners' success rates for very short courses were low at 61% for 2007/08. Learner numbers were around 60 for this provision. Low achievement was mainly due to an intake of 48 learners with the armed services who were studying skills for life courses. Their study was cut short when many of them were posted abroad to combat zones before they had completed their courses.

Quality of provision

What further success has the college achieved in the improvement of skills for life provision?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made by the college in making further improvements to the skills for life provision. Success rates in 2007/08 were satisfactory. Current retention on skills for life courses for 2008/09 are high in most areas (over 90% in many cases) and there is strong evidence that achievements will see significant improvement in 2008/09.

Since the merger the college has successfully invested additional time and resources into developing this area and significant change has taken place. New members of

staff appointed include a Head of School reporting to the Head of Faculty for Foundation Studies and some key cross college staff, for example in key skills. Staff are working very effectively and efficiently to identify and share good practice. The Faculty for Foundation Studies consists of three schools to support skills for life: supported learning; progression studies; adult skills for life. There are clear indications that the college wide support structure for key skills and employment/work skills was being established in all areas. Teachers on vocational courses have responded well to these changes and appreciate this new support.

Staff roles and responsibilities are clear and well defined. Communications have significantly improved and are now very effective. Managers and teaching staff communicate well, particularly between the main sites and the community outreach centres. Skills for life provision is mainly accessed by adults and the college has flexible attendance patterns and a new range of programmes, for example, job seeking and redundancy support, to meet the needs of those in the community.

Key skills development has been clearly identified as a priority and learners are progressing and achieving well. Mentors have been identified and are working well with staff to develop materials and resources. Teaching and learning has improved and the lesson observation process is working effectively with all staff to support improvements in teaching and learning. Initial assessment has been strengthened. Monitoring and monitoring of learners' progress is thorough and more consistent across the college sites.

The range of provision has improved and includes pre entry to level 2 in literacy, numeracy and ESOL. The ESOL provision has improved with a more thorough initial assessment and diagnostic process. Learners benefit from short units of reading and writing, and speaking and listening that are linked to appropriate qualifications.

What success has the college achieved in the improvement of work-based learning programmes?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made good improvements to the provision for work-based learning following the previous monitoring visit, where insufficient progress was reported. Work-based learning represents a small proportion of the college's work with 78 learners currently on programmes. Since the last visit the college has ceased to offer apprenticeships in health and social care, which was performing poorly. However, this has been replaced with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) funded through Train to Gain, where work-based learner numbers in care have increased, and success rates this year are high at 95%.

The college has continued to improve its information advice and guidance for work-based learners along with better engagement with employers. There were good initiatives to promote apprenticeship programmes through the 'National Apprenticeship Week'. Stronger links have been established with other local colleges to ensure learners are placed on the most appropriate apprenticeship programmes. Key skills are now completed early in the programme across all areas which has helped to improved success rates.

The college continues to offer apprenticeships primarily in engineering with very small numbers of learners in business administration. Motor vehicle apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship achievements have improved considerably and were 79% and 91% respectively in 2007/08 which was significantly above national averages. Several apprentices are due to complete shortly.

The management structure of work-based learning has improved with the introduction of an NVQ and apprenticeship administrator in each sector skills area and a revised role for the newly appointed work-based learning apprenticeship co-ordinator. It is too early to judge the full impact of this appointment. Curriculum managers have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities with work-based learning and are more accountable. More thorough monitoring of work-based learners' progress is carried out to identify learners at risk.

Leadership and management

What further success has the college had in improving the self-assessment process?	Reasonable progress
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Following the merger of the two colleges and management re-structuring, the college has made sure that all key staff new to post are well trained in the self-assessment procedures. More emphasis is given to the use of data as well as other evidence to support judgements. Curriculum managers receive regular monthly data updates to inform their provision and there are plans to improve this process further. Staff training workshops have been established to share best practices and there are good opportunities to allow staff to contribute to the self-assessment process. Changes have been made to the self- assessment process to ensure a thorough and more consistent approach is taken when completing reports at curriculum level. Subject specific mentors and observers have been introduced to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to give more rigour to judgements for self-assessment. The college has adequate arrangements in place to gather the views of students and employers through a range of processes such as focus groups and surveys.

Since the previous inspection the validation processes for self-assessment have been improved and the college plans to introduce individualised training for curriculum heads to further improve the quality of self-assessment report writing. Course reviews have been improved and are now more consistent. Action planning is thorough and the quality improvement plan is regularly monitored and updated.