

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Chichester College

Date of visit: 4 February 2009

### Context

Chichester College is a large general further education college (GFE), located in the south-west of West Sussex. In 2002, the college merged with Brinsbury College, a former specialist land-based college. The college offers courses in all 15 sector subject areas. In 2006/07, there were approximately 3,600 full-time students aged 16 to 18, and 4,673 adult learners. The college holds large contracts for work-based learning apprenticeships and Train to Gain. Over 1,000 students aged 14 to 16 who are at school attend vocational courses at the college's two campuses. The college has been accredited recently with the New Standard for employer responsiveness.

The college was last inspected in February 2008. At that inspection, the college's overall effectiveness was judged to be good, as was its leadership and management, the quality of provision, and its capacity to improve. Achievement and standards were judged to be satisfactory.

### Achievement and standards

How much progress has the college made in improving students' success rates, including in work-based learning?	Reasonable progress
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At the 2008 inspection, achievement and standards were judged to be satisfactory, and a contributory grade of inadequate was given to work-based learning. In the short time since that inspection, reasonable progress has been made in improving students' outcomes.

Overall success rates rose between 2006/07 and 2007/08. For students aged 16 to 18, success rates rose significantly on long courses at Level 1 from 69% to 80%, well above the 2006/07 national average. At Levels 2 and 3, success rates rose slightly, and are broadly in line with national averages. Progress for adult learners on long courses has been slow. At Level 1, success rates have declined over the last three years from being well above to slightly below the national average. At Level 2, success rates have been static for the last three years and are slightly below the national average. Success rates improved at Level 3 to be broadly in line with the national average.

Good progress has been made in improving success rates in work-based learning. Overall success rates had risen to 72% at the time of the visit, with timely success rates at 58%. Both these figures are above the latest national averages.

Improvements have been made to assessment practices, to the monitoring of apprentices' progress, and to the delivery of key skills. The college recognises that further improvements need to be made to apprentices' outcomes in carpentry and electrical installation.

Value-added data and distance travelled data from the learner achievement tracker show that students make satisfactory progress overall. For most qualification types, the progress students make is slightly below average, although not significantly so. Data from the advanced level information system show that A-level students' progress is below what might be expected based on their prior attainment, although again not significantly so. The college pays insufficient attention to the progress made by students in its self-assessment report.

How much progress has been made in improving success rates in construction, engineering and information and communication technology (ICT)?	Reasonable progress
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Construction, engineering and ICT were highlighted as areas with low success rates at the 2008 inspection. Overall, reasonable progress has been made in improving provision in these areas. Between 2006/07 and 2007/08, long course success rates rose significantly in engineering to be in line with the national average. In ICT, success rates also rose significantly, but remain well below national average. There was no improvement in construction, where success rates remain low.

Since the last inspection, the college has put in place a number of initiatives in both construction and ICT in an effort to improve achievement and standards, and the quality of provision in these areas. It has reviewed and amended the management structure of both areas, in an attempt to improve communications, to empower managers and increase accountability. The curriculum has been reviewed to provide the opportunity to study at different levels and improve progression routes. New data management systems have been introduced in support of the procedures for setting and monitoring targets. The college is working to embed a system in which a number of staff act as dedicated student tutors who aim to support learners and improve the tracking and monitoring of their progress. In construction, the focus on delivery of basic and key skills has been improved. Initial indications on data provided by the college for short courses that started since September 2008 indicate significantly improved success rates on both the foundation programme in construction and on the web design course in ICT. It is too early to assess the impact of these changes on long course success rates.

## Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in improving the monitoring of students' progress in order to raise standards?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving arrangements for monitoring students' progress. A new, dedicated role of student tutor has been introduced for a number of staff, and is being extended across the college. In their job description the primary function of these tutors is defined as *to focus on and take the leading role in the achievement of high individual student attendance and success rates, meeting or surpassing the relevant targets for each*. Each tutor works with students from one or two subject areas. They are a core part of each subject team, and regularly attend meetings to monitor and review student performance, share good practice, and assure close communication with the teaching staff. Tutors have access to accurate and timely data on attendance. They use a recently-introduced online student progress tracking system to record and monitor progress. Tutors set targets in consultation with the lecturers and the students. These are recorded and reviewed regularly in group tutorials and individual reviews. There is a detailed student tutor handbook which clearly identifies the role and functions of tutors. Tutors are involved at all stages of the learners' journey, including pre-entry information and advice evenings, taster days, interviews and induction. Early indications are that the monitoring of students' progress is becoming more rigorous. The college recognises that further work needs to be done to make full use of data on students' prior attainment to set targets for them.

## Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in improving the quality assurance of the lesson observation process?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving the quality assurance of the lesson observation process. Around 500 lessons are observed by a large team of internal observers each year. Observers are well trained and well supported. In 2007/08, 83% of the lessons observed were judged to be good or better, with 24% outstanding. College leaders recognise that it is difficult to reconcile such a high standard of teaching and learning with student outcomes that are judged to be satisfactory. They recognise the possibility of over-grading, and attribute this partly to the fact that teachers have advanced notice of the specific lesson that is to be observed. Efforts are being made to improve the quality assurance of each individual observation, through greater scrutiny of feedback reports, and standardisation meetings between observers. Observers have been encouraged to put more emphasis on what students learn, rather than on the performance of the teacher, in their judgements and grades. Scrutiny of a sample of observation reports during the monitoring visit by inspectors revealed the possibility of some over-grading. It was

not clear from the written feedback on several of the lessons judged to be outstanding exactly what features of students' learning supported this judgement. Similarly, in some of the lessons judged to be good, it was difficult to discern from the written commentary why the lesson was good rather than satisfactory. These comments do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the grade awarded was inaccurate; merely that the evidence presented does not provide a compelling case for the grade. The very detailed paperwork that is used to supply feedback on lessons may have the effect of steering observers to focus too much on the processes of teaching rather than on the outcomes for students.

The formal lesson observation scheme is supplemented by the growing use of peer observations, and regular staff development sessions to share good practice that has been observed during observations.

How much progress has been made in improving aspects of quality improvement?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving aspects of quality improvement. College leaders and managers recognise that for the college to achieve its aim of being outstanding, greater consistency in students' outcomes, and in the quality of teaching and learning, needs to be achieved.

The college makes good use of external advice and guidance, and recognises the importance of developing a culture of greater accountability at all levels of the organisation. A set of core values has been agreed across the college as part of a programme of cultural change. Appropriate management development has taken place. The reliability, accessibility and use of management information has improved considerably, and middle managers and teachers are making more use of data on students' attendance and progress to intervene more swiftly when problems arise. Regular meetings to review attendance, retention rates and achievement in each curriculum area are sharpening accountability. Sensible management restructuring has shortened the reporting lines between middle managers responsible for curriculum delivery and senior managers. The relatively new role of Heads of Study, with responsibilities for key aspects of college work that cut across curriculum areas, has significant potential for bringing about greater consistency. The self-assessment report is largely accurate and realistic. Curriculum area self-assessment reports are also evaluative, although they would benefit from a clearer overview of students' outcomes. Inspection evidence suggested that a minority of course reviews may be over-estimating the quality of provision. A new sub-committee of the corporation has been established to focus on the quality of provision and the curriculum.