

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Brooksby Melton College

Date of visit: 03/03/09

Context

Brooksby Melton College (BMC) is a small further education college, operating on three main sites; Brooksby campus, Melton campus and King Street in Melton. The Brooksby campus is an 880 acre estate and working farm with a range of commercial activities including banqueting and conferencing, fishing lake, equestrian centre and plant centre. On the Melton campus, commercial activity is within the leisure centre and theatre and has a strong community link.

The college has provision within 10 of the 15 sector subject areas. During 2007/08, there were 716 full-time learners aged 16-18 and 193 full-time adult learners. There were 157 part-time learners aged 16-18 and 1,020 adult learners. The highest proportions of learners are in Sector Subject Area (SSA) 3 - agriculture, horticulture, animal care and in SSA 14 - preparation for life and work. The college delivers a significant volume of work-based learning and has specialist provision in workforce training through Train to Gain.

Mission, Vision and Strategic Objectives

The college has had a difficult year with the sudden departure of its principal shortly after the beginning of the 2007/08 academic year. It was served with a financial notice to improve. An interim principal was appointed on a part-time basis and subsequently left shortly before the start of the 2008/09 academic year. The chair of governors also resigned at this time. A second interim principal was appointed on a full-time basis in August 2008. The college has now completed its restructure including that of the senior management team. It has submitted and had agreed its strategic improvement plan.

Achievement and standards

<p>What progress has been made to improve learners' success rates and their progress compared with their prior attainment between 2006/07 and 2007/08? How well do the latest success rates compare with the national averages?</p>	<p>No discernible progress</p>
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Between 2006/07 and 2007/08, long course success rates remained about the same, short course success rates declined, and overall success rates remained about the same. The success rates for learners aged 16-18 on level 1 courses stayed the same and are very low compared with the national average; at level 2 they increased significantly to above the average; and at level 3 they stayed constant and above

average. Success rates for adult learners declined significantly at level 1 and are low; at level 2 they improved well to just below average; and at level 3 they remained the same at just above average. Short course success rates declined significantly and are low for learners aged 16-18; for adults they remained constant but are also low. Success rates on very short courses declined to about the national averages. The main areas of concern are the very low success rates on level 1 courses (both ages) which comprise just over a quarter of the guided learning hours. These are mainly due to poor performance on Skills for Life and ESOL courses. Adult literacy and numeracy success rates for adult learners, and also as additionality for learners aged 16-18, are low. Managers are changing the management of this provision and have removed poorly performing courses. In 2007/08, learners aged 16-18 made very good progress on BTEC national award and national diploma programmes compared with their prior attainment, as did learners in 2006/07 on BTEC first diploma provision. Learners in 2006/07, however, made poor progress on national Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at levels 2 and 3 courses and on key skills. Senior and middle managers have improved their monitoring of learners' data.

How much progress has been made to raise the success rates of learners on Work-Based Learning, Train to Gain and key skills provision between 2006/07 and 2007/08? How well do the latest data compare with the national rates?	Reasonable progress
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Key skills success rates improved significantly in 2007/08, but they are still below the national average. They improved at both levels 1 and 2. Train to Gain success rates have improved since the previous monitoring visit and are satisfactory. The number of learners involved has increased markedly. Apprenticeship framework success rates have improved and are high. Since the monitoring visit in January 2008, the college has expanded the apprenticeship provision into new areas and the number of apprentices has increased by 30%. The college is likely to increase this by 20% this year.

Quality of provision

How well has the college progressed in determining its learners' views, acting on them and informing learners of the outcomes? How much have the positive outcomes of learners' questionnaires improved in the last year?	Reasonable progress
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In 2008/09, learners' responses to the annual questionnaire show a greater degree of satisfaction than in 2007/08. They are, nevertheless, below national averages and below the responses of 2004/05. Managers have improved their analysis of the survey's outcomes, including by different groups of learners, and have improved the resultant action plan. A comprehensive learners' forum is carried out with a proportion of learners from each course. Its key strengths and areas for improvement lead into an action plan. Governors receive the report on learners'

views and set more challenging actions to resolve the areas of concern. Managers do not make, however, a formal, systematic and consistent cross-college response to learners regarding the actions taken to address issues. In some curriculum areas, managers make very good use of learners' views and take action, but this good practice is not yet implemented in all areas. Learners' views feed into course teams and to course reviews and then to the self-assessment report. This link is stronger than it was. Each course has a learner representative and two learners are on the governing body. The governors aim to phase elections to ensure continuity of experienced learner/governors. The learners' involvement strategy and action plan are good. They focus on consultation, representation, personalisation, review and development.

<p>How effectively has the college improved its responsiveness to employers and other stakeholders, including schools? How well does the college determine employers' skills needs? How proactive and reactive is the college to meeting these needs? Do more young people aged 14-19 benefit more from the specialist provision at the college than at the previous inspection?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Since the previous monitoring visit, the college has increased its employer base considerably. It has appointed two new business advisers to engage with employers proactively. Employers' skills needs and skills gaps are identified through a training needs analysis and the college provides appropriate programmes from short, one day courses to bespoke programmes or longer NVQs or apprenticeships. The focus is on each employer's needs; where necessary the college will bring in third party providers for areas in which it lacks expertise. Staff work actively with schools to engage with young people aged 16-18. About 200 young people aged between 14 and 16 are now benefiting from college provision, a small increase on the previous year. The college provides increased flexibility programmes for a number of schools and has around 70 learners on these programmes. A young apprenticeship programme, largely centred on motor vehicle training, attracts a similar number. The college is the lead on three diplomas and has plans to become involved in two other diplomas. The college is working with a number of schools in the development of a sixth form centre in one part of Melton.

Leadership and management

<p>What progress has been made with the financial recovery strategy in the last year? Has the college yet moved to financial category B? Is the medium to long term financial viability assured? Was there a financial short fall in 2007/08? What is the expectation for 2008/09 and beyond?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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The principal leads well on the improvement in college finances. The clear strategic improvement plan provides a strong direction for financial recovery. The college's financial health category has already improved from last year. This will decline if the proposals for the new buildings are approved and construction starts, but should become category A in 2014. In 2007/08 the financial shortfall was mainly due to the under delivery of adult-funded provision. Managers expect the college to deliver to targets in 2008/09. The final accounts were signed off on time for the first time since merger. 'Other' provision was greatly reduced in the last year. Managers expect to achieve a balanced budget in 2008/09, except for some considerable one-off costs. Staff costs reduced last year by about 11%. Medium to long term viability is much more assured now than at this time last year. The management of finances has improved; new senior financial staff and new management accounts staff are in place. Financial control is more rigorous and budget holders are held more responsible.

<p>How well has the college developed its accommodation strategy in the last year? Are all areas accessible to people with restricted mobility? Has the overall accommodation utilisation improved?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Since the previous monitoring visit, the college has made considerable progress in developing its accommodation strategy. During this year, a new strategy has been written with changed priorities to meet the needs of learners and the local community. The college has submitted an application in principle for a significant building programme amounting to around 42 million pounds and including involvement in a new post-16 development in Melton. Although the college improved accessibility for people with restricted mobility two years ago, in parts of the college, particularly those with listed building status, accessibility is either very difficult or inconvenient. The utilisation of the college's accommodation has improved slightly.