

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: City College, Brighton and Hove  
Date of visit: 19 May 2009

### Context

City College is a large general further education college located in three main centres in Brighton and Hove. The college provides full and part time courses from entry level to undergraduate level. Provision is offered in 13 of the 15 sector subject areas. City College has a formal accord with two local sixth form colleges and has direct contract for adult and community learning and work-based learning. The college also works with a range of community organisations and employers including Brighton Institute of Modern Music and Brighton and Hove Albion football club.

The college has more than 5000 learners, of which 1480 are aged 16 to 18. Around 700 of the adult learners are full time and the remaining 3100 are part time. Nearly two thirds of the learners take programmes at or below NVQ level 2. In addition, a further 1000 learners are on skills for life programmes. Around 500 14 to 16 year old pupils in local schools take part time vocational studies at the college.

The proportion of school leavers in Brighton achieving 5 A\* to C grades at GCSE is below the national average. In 2007/08 around a third of the learners were resident in disadvantaged areas. Just over 11% of the learners come from minority ethnic backgrounds and a further 14% are non-British Europeans. These proportions are higher than those in the city itself. The college mission is to 'work with partners to maximise local and wider community engagement in educational achievement and the development of skills for today's and tomorrow's workforce'.

### Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in improving learners' achievements?	Reasonable progress
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Overall success rates have improved over three years and in 2007/08 were broadly at national averages. Success rates for level 1 students aged 16 to 18 declined in 2007/08 to below the national average and at levels 2 and 3 they improved to around the national average. Success rates for adult learners improved at level 1 in 2007/08 and were well above the national average. They remained static for level 2 and were broadly average, at level 3 there has been a three year improvement in success rates for adults and in 2007/08 they were above the national average.

Success rates vary within sector subject areas and there was some poor performance in 2007/08. Success rates collated by ethnicity reveal a mixed picture of some lower rates by African, mixed African/white, white Irish and Bangladeshi learners. In

addition, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make slightly less progress than others. Work-based learning success rates have improved and are now around 60%. Train to Gain success rates have also improved and in 2008/09 are over 90%. Key skills success rates have improved over three years to around 54%. Success rates for short courses of between five and 24 weeks duration declined in 2007/08 and were below the national average.

Retention improved on long courses in 2007/08 and was broadly at national averages. However, good progress has been made in improving retention in 2008/09 and the current in-year rate is above 90%. Pass rates on adult courses improved by 6% to 88% in 2007/08 and at levels 2 and 3 for students aged 16 to 18 achievements also improved. However, some courses in science and mathematics, agriculture, engineering, construction and ICT had low pass rates.

Has the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning continued to improve?	Significant progress
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There is a strong emphasis on improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning across the college. The recently strengthened observation scheme places much greater emphasis on learning and students' progress. The number of observations carried out has increased significantly this year and as a result managers now have a clearer and more realistic picture of the overall quality of teaching and learning, together with areas of good and outstanding practice and areas of concern. The lesson observation scheme also successfully builds on staff expertise in teacher education and training.

Observation records are thorough and comprehensive and a useful summary is produced from each observation. Each member of staff has an agreed action plan for improvement following observation. On a few occasions, however, the plans contain too many actions to be addressed reasonably. Areas for improvement are drawn together from the observations and contribute to the staff development plan. The college recognizes that further work on the formal sharing of good practice is needed.

How much progress has been made in embedding e-learning into teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The college has invested time and money in improving the virtual learning environment (VLE) and in embedding e-learning into teaching. At a recent college training day priority was given to developing Moodle in curriculum teams. An e-learning co-ordinator has been appointed and some champions have come forward. Clear, but not over-ambitious, targets have been set to develop electronic materials. Over 100 course teams have posted basic materials on the VLE and a further 10 have produced more sophisticated materials. In addition smart board training has been successfully completed, and the purchase and installation of projectors and electronic whiteboards is progressing.

## Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in developing employer responsive provision?	Significant progress
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A clear and highly responsive strategy for employer engagement now exists. While the strategy, team and policies are relatively new a very good start has been made in this area. This work has high status within the college, policies are well thought through and appropriate, and are having a significant impact. The college now plays an important role in partnership working with other agencies such as the local authority and Jobcentre plus in identifying and providing for employment needs of the area. The number of apprentices and Train to Gain learners recruited this year has increased very significantly and outcomes to date are good. The range of curriculum opportunities for these trainees has also increased. Employer boards and breakfast club meetings are also enabling the college to deliver and monitor the effectiveness of its employer engagement strategy.

How has additional learning support been further developed?	Reasonable progress
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The take up of additional learning support has increased this year. A three tier system of support is now offered consisting of individual support, in-class support from learning support assistants, and "tutor-established help". Initial assessment and screening are well established and now include an assessment of free writing. Teachers receive details of students' assessment results and many use these effectively in planning lessons. Early indications are that additional support is effective in improving retention of those students who take it up. The college recognizes that more work is needed in this area to quantify the impact of additional learning support on students' achievements.

There are 81 students receiving intensive and/or specialist support for specific learning difficulties. The vast majority of these are on "mainstream" vocational programmes, hence making an important contribution to the inclusive principles of the college.

## Leadership and management

What developments have taken place in quality assurance?	Significant progress
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A clear focus exists on the seven core values to which the college aspires. Staff morale is good, and improving quality is central to the work of all college teams. The new management structure focuses appropriately on teaching and learning and improving consistency in sector subject areas. Teams have been well supported through the new processes of quality assurance and self-assessment. The new management structure places much more emphasis on issues, such as attendance, for which formal policies and procedures have been developed. A formal schedule is now in place of timetabled meetings where tracking and monitoring are discussed

and appropriate actions agreed. Team meetings have standing agenda items such as attendance, retention, students' progress and teaching and learning. These issues are clearly at the top of the agenda for action.

Quality assurance has been thoroughly reviewed and course review and evaluation completely overhauled. Curriculum leaders and managers speak with confidence about their involvement with self-assessment. Teams are taking much more responsibility for quantitative targets and the review of the targets is thoroughly understood. Self-assessment procedures are well planned and team leaders are well supported in the process. Access to data has improved and managers are confident in its use. Regular data reports are produced and are well used to help managers to identify areas for concern.

New appointments have also helped as newly formed teams are enthusiastic about improving outcomes for learners. Some teams have made very good progress in engaging learners and significantly improving retention which is having an energizing effect on other curriculum areas.

What is the current financial situation of the college and what is the status of any accommodation plans?	Reasonable progress
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Ambitious accommodation plans have been put on hold following LSC changes to funding for capital projects. The college has spent over £4 million on fees towards the development of the capital build but hopes to get this money back. There will be a budget deficit of around £1 million this year but senior managers are confident that the college will be out of deficit in the next three years.

The college has recently invested around £300,000 in developing City College East in an area of Brighton with high levels of social deprivation. In addition, £250,000 has been spent on Train to Gain staffing to enable the college to make an impact on the local employment market. There has also been investment in e-learning and ILT, however the physical accommodation of the college, while satisfactory overall, remains in need of development.