

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Kensington and Chelsea College

Date of visit: 11 June 2009

Context

Kensington and Chelsea College is a major provider of education and training in West London. The college has four centres within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, is a lead provider for Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) in five prisons and delivers training in business and community venues in central and West London. Some 45% of the college's income is generated by the OLASS contract.

Most learners are over 19 years of age although the college is significantly increasing the number of learners aged 16–18 through the offer of vocational programmes. In the current academic year there are some 600 younger learners. The college is also developing significant school link provision for learners aged 14-16 and is pivotal to the two Diplomas offered within the Royal Borough.

In addition to courses funded directly by the London Central Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the college also provides a wide range of non-vocational courses for adults on behalf of the Royal Borough. These are first steps courses, programmes that lead to progression to FE and courses for enrichment and personal development.

The college was last inspected in February 2007 when the overall effectiveness of provision was graded as good, as were the quality of provision, leadership and management and capacity to improve. Achievement and standards were satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in improving success rates and learners' outcomes?	Reasonable progress
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The overall college success rate for 2007/08 is 74%, which is at the national comparator for similar colleges. This represents a one percentage point improvement over the figure for 2006/07.

The improvement in overall adult course success rates, noted at the last inspection, has continued. The success rate, of 74% in 2007/08, places the college at the national average for similar colleges. For the relatively small number of learners aged 16-18, the success rate for 2007/08 was 65% which is well below the national comparator, and which has fallen since 2006/07. For these learners, lower pass rates and retention were equal contributors to the poorer success rates.

Over the last two years there has been considerable change in the makeup of the curriculum, particularly with regard to the development and expansion of provision for learners aged 16-18. The college recognises that its success in recruiting younger learners overstretched its capacity to ensure consistent levels of support to promote success.

Overall retention for 2008/09 is improved, and for the courses with the worst retention in 2007/08 it is much improved. The college has identified the reasons for the poorer performance of learners aged 16-18 and has addressed each of them during the current academic year. Actions are having a positive impact. College analysis of learners' performance in assessments, together with improved retention, point to significant improvement in success rates for learners aged 16-18 in the current year, especially in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and in childcare.

Learners' progress, relative to their prior attainment, is now good. The college continues to expand the range of opportunities for learners and continues to improve their progression. Internal progression is often good, especially at levels 2 and 3. Progression to higher education has improved consistently over the last three years.

Learners' overall attendance is improved since the last inspection and over the last few years, but at 76% in 2007/08 it is still low. The college is engaged in the implementation of a wide range of strategies to make further improvement. The integrated work of the two youth tutors, in helping to engage and retain learners, is proving to be very important in this respect.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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At the last inspection teaching was good but the observation scheme lacked rigour. The college has made significant progress in improving the amount of good or better teaching. The observation system has been strengthened. Observation training, using external consultants, has widened the trained pool of college observers and quality assured the process. There is more emphasis on capturing features of learning, attainment and equality and diversity through revised paperwork. The system appears robust and leads to a clear agreed action plan for teachers observed. The grade profile is currently running at 81% of grades 1 or 2 compared to 68% in 2007/08 and 65% in 2006/07.

A series of initiatives to improve teaching, such as a trial of peer observations to identify and spread good practice in care, have been effective. The college has introduced their own good practice database on their intranet. There is a strong focus on improving teaching in the OLASS provision with staff benefiting from surgeries and training on aspects such as lesson planning from an advanced practitioner. OLASS staff requested spot checks themselves to see if improvements were embedded.

The use of information learning technologies (ILT) is widespread and improving. Subject reviews have informed the training being offered and a new ongoing series of training events, alongside college conferences, is seen positively by teachers in helping them to improve their teaching strategies. New teachers have ready access to teacher training courses. The role of advanced practitioners and subject coaches is well-embedded and impacting positively on improving teaching.

How much progress has been made in further developing the college's work on employer engagement?	Reasonable progress
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The college has identified improving employer engagement as their third strategic objective. They have made reasonable progress with this. The college has established an employer solutions unit to manage the process. A central database of employer contacts has been developed and is used to promote training opportunities and to engage with employers. The Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in health and social care has been used to expand work with employers across a wide area and there is significant Train to Gain provision. Other areas, such as management training, have been offered to care employers. New delivery partnerships are being established for culture and heritage apprenticeships with a prestigious nearby museum; a new area of work for the college. Further links with hospitals and sports employers benefit learners, with apprenticeship and employment activities.

Successful events, such as business club breakfast meetings with well-known guest speakers on relevant topics, have been run for employers, leading to new work and contacts for the college. The most recent event topically covered sales and marketing during recession. Jobs fairs are held, where potential new staff meet employers.

The college makes good use of additional funding to engage with the community. For example, there was a recent intermediate labour market project for people with disabilities. Links with housing trusts are giving construction learners employment opportunities. Training has begun for people who might become redundant. There are several examples of the college being responsive to opportunities, such as training support workers in schools in twilight and Saturday classes. The employer engagement strategy and income targets are regularly reviewed.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in further developing college strategies to secure quality improvements, including self assessment?	Reasonable progress
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Quality assurance procedures were well established at the last inspection, but some aspects lacked rigour. Reasonable progress has been made in further developing college approaches to quality improvement. All key aspects of quality improvement are now executed with rigour. The quality improvement drive (QUID), led by the

principal, now provides a key focus to further improve quality. Its integrated plans embrace all key elements for quality improvement and it successfully engages staff in its work.

The work of the team of advanced practitioners, within the quality team, is indicative of the progress which the college is making. The college attaches status to their role and they work closely with teachers to help them improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers respect them for their expertise.

The work of the advanced practitioners is also a key element of the college's wider and successful strategy to engage staff within the secure estate. Teachers in secure establishments are now very fully integrated into the work of the college and benefit from the community of improvement which the wider college offers.

Staff development planning is improved. Staff development is now further and better informed by the outcomes from the process of staff appraisal and those from the observation of teaching and learning.

Management reports and data are now closely matched to the needs of staff and managers. Teachers' understanding of data, and how it can help to monitor learners' performance, is further developed.

The self assessment process continues to improve as the range and reliability of evidence, and the capacity of staff to usefully analyse it, also improves. The college has introduced the concept of 'critical friends' to test out the quality of self assessment report judgements. The benefits of rigorous self assessment are now more fully understood by the college's partners in the secure estate.