

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Milton Keynes College

Date of visit: 16 June 2009

### Context

Milton Keynes College was last inspected in November 2007. Overall effectiveness, achievement and standards and the quality of provision were judged to be satisfactory, and leadership and management and capacity to improve were judged to be good. Six curriculum areas were inspected, five of which were judged to be satisfactory and one good. Inspectors carried out an annual monitoring visit in June 2008. The college was judged to have made reasonable progress in all the areas investigated in achievement and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management.

The college has experienced a period of considerable growth since the previous inspection, particularly in the number of full-time students aged 16 to 18, which has risen by 36% to 2,553 full-time equivalent students in 2007/08. The college continues to develop and expand its provision to meet the growth in population in Milton Keynes and the increasingly diverse needs of local people and employers. Changed economic circumstances have had a particular impact on Milton Keynes, which now has the highest unemployment rate in the south east.

### Achievement and standards

How well has the college sustained improvements in overall success rates since the previous inspection?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, the overall success rate for the college was 70% and below the national average for that year. In the two years prior to the inspection, its overall success rates were significantly below national rates. The college has made significant progress in sustaining improvements in its overall success rates. During a period of significant growth in the number of full-time students aged 16 to 18 at the college, it has improved its overall success rates at a faster rate than improvements in the national rate. The 2008 monitoring visit noted marked improvements in success rates over the previous three year period. In 2007/08 they rose again to 81%, just above the national average. College data for 2008/09 indicate that the overall success rate will improve again this year, to 83% or more.

In order to sustain this improving trend, the college has improved its systems for monitoring the progress and performance of students and made better use of the data provided by these systems. It carries out frequent and regular reviews of progress at individual, course and departmental level and has improved attention to, and accountability for, success rates at all staffing levels in the college. It has made

marked improvements in success rates for adult learners on level 1 courses, which rose by 13 percentage points between 2006/07 and 2007/08, while success rates at level 2 rose by 6 percentage points. At level 3, the college has made reasonable progress to improve success rates. Vocational course success rates have improved slowly, in line with national rates. GCE A-level provision is a comparatively small part of the provision offered by the college. GCE A2 achievement rates have continued to improve but AS success rates fell in 2007/08 to below national averages. The college has identified the curriculum areas contributing to this decline and is acting to improve this provision.

In 2007/08 the college failed to meet its retention rate target of 90%, with a 2007/08 retention rate of 84%. However, retention rates have improved in 2008/09, with an in-year retention rate for students aged 16 to 18 of 88% and for adult students of 91%.

How well has the college sustained and built on the improved overall and timely success rates in work-based learning noted at the last monitoring visit?	Reasonable progress
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The previous monitoring visit noted significant improvements in overall and timely success rates for advanced apprenticeships, to 77% and 63% respectively, well above national rates. Overall and timely success rates for apprentices also improved and were in line with national averages, at 65% and 46% respectively.

The college has made reasonable progress to sustain these improvements. Although qualification success rate data for the current period suggest that these overall and timely success rates will not be maintained, these data do not yet include the outcomes for a significant number of learners who have completed their frameworks and whose portfolios are awaiting moderation. College data indicate that to date in 2008/09, overall success rates are 66% for apprenticeships and 74% for advanced apprenticeships, and the college expects these to rise as more learners complete their awards. College data also indicate that timely success rates for advanced apprenticeships have risen slightly, to 65%. Although the timely success rate for apprenticeships is currently only 40%, the college expects that on moderation of completed portfolios this will rise and reach 56% by the end of 2008/09.

Processes for managing work-based learning and its delivery are well established and effective. The college has improved its collection and use of data, and improved the monitoring of learners' progress. The progress of learners in some sector skills areas, such as administration and motor vehicle studies, has been affected by the economic downturn and loss of work. The college has improved its assessment planning to make better use of opportunities for learners' assessment at work, and to help learners at risk of redundancy to make faster progress. It takes appropriate action to support those learners who lose their jobs to find alternative employment.

## Quality of provision

How much progress has the college made in improving key skills provision?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous monitoring visit, the college was judged to have made reasonable progress in improving key skills provision and raising key skills success rates. However, the planned improvements to key skills did not have sufficient impact on success rates in 2007/08. The college has taken further action to improve success rates and has made reasonable progress. It has improved the management of key skills delivery across the college, with better monitoring of their delivery and assessment. The resources available for assessment and internal verification of key skills have improved, and these improvements have been recognised by the awarding body. Managers have helped teaching staff to share good practice and improved their collection and use of data on key skills achievement. In-year data suggest that success rates are improving. For comparable periods in 2007/08 and 2008/09, success rates were 10% and 20% respectively. A further 31% of students have completed their key skills tests and portfolios and these are awaiting moderation. The college expects that 63% of learners will successfully complete their key skills qualifications in 2008/09.

## Leadership and management

How much progress has the college made in addressing variations in performance between different curriculum areas?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous monitoring visit, the college was deemed to have made reasonable progress in implementing its strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning. This progress has been maintained, and it has made reasonable progress in improving the performance of curriculum areas giving cause for concern. The college has well established processes for monitoring and improving teaching and learning and for sustaining the improving trend. To meet the needs of its growing student population it recruited 124 new teaching staff in 2008. Newly recruited teachers are monitored and supported carefully during their probationary period of employment. Managers take effective action to improve the performance of all teachers whose lesson observation is judged to be inadequate or satisfactory.

On initial observation, 66% of lessons were graded good or better in 2008/09; following support and re-observation of teachers whose lessons were graded satisfactory or inadequate, this has risen to 73% to date. The proportion of good or better teaching and learning on re-observation, in 2007/08, was 71%.

To improve the performance of curriculum areas the college now gathers and provides better access to data on students' performance, and managers have improved their use of these data to monitor progress. In care and childcare, they have improved team working and accountability within the department. Their actions have been successful in improving retention rates on the national diploma. Although

this will not have an impact on success rates in 2008/09, the college is confident that these improved retention rates will result in improved success rates in 2009/10. In hospitality and catering, the quality of teaching and learning has improved, good practice has been more widely shared, and the curriculum has been developed. The college's data indicate that these actions will be successful in improving the department's 2008/09 success rate to 90%.