

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: City of Bath College  
Date of visit: 18 and 19 May 2009

### Context

City of Bath College is a medium-sized general further education (GFE) college located in the city centre, serving Bath and the surrounding rural area of Bath and North East Somerset (BANES), a unitary authority. The college offers courses in all 15 sector areas, although student numbers in some areas are small. Arts, media and publishing is the largest sector area and accounts for approximately 20% of all enrolments. In 2007/8, the college recruited 1791 students aged 16 to 18 and 3940 adult students. Some 149 school students aged 14 to 16 attend courses in the college.

The college went into financial recovery in 2006. An interim management team restructured the college and implemented a financial recovery plan. A permanent senior management team was formed with the appointment of a new Principal in August 2007 with other members of the senior team joining the college between September 2007 and February 2008. Seven of the eight members of the senior leadership group have joined the college since August 2007. In January 2008, the college revised its mission which is now captured in the phrase "Raising your skills, improving life chances".

At the previous monitoring visit in April 2008, the college was judged to have made significant progress in one aspect of the work inspected, reasonable progress in four aspects, insufficient progress in one aspect and no discernible progress in one aspect, the raising of success rates. This inspection visit judges that the college has made reasonable progress in six of the aspects inspected and significant improvement in two aspects, including the effectiveness of the governing body.

### Achievement and standards

How much progress has the college made in raising success rates in 2007/08?	Reasonable progress
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The college is improving its success rates faster than the national picture. Overall, success rates have risen by 6% over the last year and now stand at 76%. This is still slightly below the national average for GFE colleges but exceeded the college's own target for improvement for 2007/08. The college has set itself a target to achieve an 80% success rate overall at the end of 2008/09. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) issued the college with a notice to improve its success rates in several areas in May 2008. The college has responded effectively to the requirements of this notice

and it was removed in March 2009. In some areas, such as provision for adults at level 1, progress was significant and rates rose by 16%. For 16--18 year olds at level 3, performance has improved by nine percentage points over the last year, but this remains some way below the national average. Students aged 14–16 make good progress. In other areas, such as level 2 provision, there has been less improvement. There has been less success in improving success rates for key skills qualifications, and these rates remain low. However, evidence exists to support the college's view that students are making better progress in their key skills studies this year and that success rates in this area will be substantially improved. The self-assessment report accurately reflects this overall picture.

How much progress has been made in improving the rate of progress for learners on work-based learning programmes?	Reasonable progress
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Framework completion rates for apprentices increased significantly from 24% in 2006/07 to 67% in 2007/08, three percentage points above the national average. Timely completion rates for apprentices in 2007/08 were well above the national rate and 10 percentage points above the college's timely rate for 2006/07. However, timely and overall framework completion rates for the small number of advanced apprenticeships declined in 2007/08. Most of these advanced apprenticeships were in electrical engineering. The college no longer offers this programme.

During 2008/09 more thorough and systematic approaches to the tracking of progress and monitoring of key skills have been introduced. Better links have developed between work-based learning assessors and the additional learning support team. Take up of additional learning support by work-based learners has increased. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of some of these developments.

The overall success rate for Train to Gain provision was 66% in 2007/08, with success rates of 65% and 78% respectively for levels 2 and 3. In construction and hospitality success rates were 82% and 88% respectively. The self-assessment report recognises that learners' progress has been slow in some programme areas for Train to Gain.

#### Quality of provision

How much progress has the college made in raising the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve. The college has established a culture of openness in terms of the observation and analysis of teaching and learning. A strong focus exists on raising the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that learning sessions are observed regularly and that teachers receive detailed and helpful feedback to help them improve their practice. Staff are complimentary about these approaches which have helped to share best practice across the college. They have confidence in the system and see the judgements made about their work as generally accurate and fair. They find the action plans that

result from lesson observation helpful in enabling them to see how to improve their teaching and greatly value the support they receive from the team of learning coaches across the college.

Procedures to address underperformance are clear and lead to improvement. This enables satisfactory teaching to improve and ensures that good or outstanding teaching is also on a rising trend. Current lesson observation data for this year shows that there has been a 10% rise in the number of learning sessions judged as outstanding and that more of the teaching and learning is good than in previous years. Senior managers identify that observations still need to place a greater emphasis upon learning and that more consistent best practice across the college is necessary to improve success rates in every department.

Students comment that while they are generally well taught, some of their teaching is less effective and some is adversely affected by poor accommodation. In a few cases, students have had many different teachers hence their teaching programme has lacked continuity.

How much progress has the college made in developing the curriculum, especially at levels 1 and 2?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to make reasonable progress in broadening its curriculum offer, especially at levels 1 and 2. It has substantially increased its Train to Gain provision across a reasonable range of curriculum areas. The Pathways to Employment programme has recruited a second cohort this year. There are now 11 stand alone level 1 courses, mainly BTEC Introductory Diplomas, across a good range of curriculum areas. There have been improvements to the Skills for Life, literacy and numeracy provision, the provision for Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) and in the GCE A level areas in response to the notice to improve. The college has formed a new relationship with two partner schools in the city, operating as the Bath Educational Trust, which will involve GCE A level students attending either schools or the college for specific subject teaching. The college is well established as part of the 14–19 Partnership locally and will be introducing the new Diplomas as they come on stream. The college still sees a need locally to further extend the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

How much progress has been made in improving access to Information Learning Technology (ILT) and using it effectively to support learning?	Reasonable progress
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Following the wide improvements made to ILT equipment in 2007/08, the college continues to invest in ILT and e-learning. Reasonable progress has been made to improve access to ILT. Three distributed learning centres were successfully completed for the start of the 2008/09 academic year. The strategy to decentralise access to ILT has been effectively implemented within most curriculum areas, however this not yet been sufficiently developed for construction. All teaching rooms are equipped with a data projector and screen, with about 30 interactive whiteboards

throughout the college. Access to ILT is further enhanced through the use of laptop trolleys that can be set up to equip classrooms with laptops on a temporary basis.

Reasonable progress is also being made in the use of ILT to support learning. Teaching staff receive good support to help them to use ILT effectively in their learning sessions. Each of the curriculum areas has a designated link within the ILT/e-learning team that enables close links for support and development. Good use has been made of the staff ILT skills audit to plan and support relevant staff development. Learning coaches provide some individual and small group development of skills and confidence in using ILT effectively to support learning. Although progress has been made, as recognised through the observation scheme, the effective use of ILT in learning sessions is variable in its development throughout the college. Effective use of the college's virtual learning environment varies throughout the college and it is not used sufficiently in work-based learning.

How much progress has the college made in improving the consistency of tutorial arrangements and target-setting to monitor progress?	Reasonable progress
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A new college-wide process, 'Tutoring for Success' for the tutoring and monitoring of student progress was introduced at the start of 2008/09. This has provided a more structured, frequent and regular approach to target-setting and progress monitoring. The process has a high profile within the college and the development included consultation with the governing body. Staff development to support the effective implementation of the process has been provided. The number of lead tutors has been increased from three to 10. The recording of progress reviews is closely monitored and sampled by members of the senior management team. Parents and carers receive more frequent information on their children's progress at regular intervals. The new tutorial process has enabled the college to monitor progress more closely and where appropriate take prompt action to support students' potential to achieve. The process has also been adapted effectively to meet the needs of GCE A level students and learners on work-based programmes. As identified by the college, arrangements for group tutorials are not yet sufficiently developed. Consultation with staff and learners is being undertaken to develop planning and development for improving group tutorials.

How much progress has the college made in developing its work with employers?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in developing its work with employers. An employer advisory panel has been established and a joint venture has been established with three other colleges to provide training to help employers to respond to the current economic downturn. Links with several national employers are developing further. Good progress has been made in expanding provision for Train to Gain, which includes the use of subcontractors. In 2007/08 there were 100 learners on work-based Train to Gain programmes, up from 22 in 2006/07. This has now increased rapidly to 700 in 2008/09. There is strong focus on collaborative and effective working with employers. Communications are good. College work-based

learning staff are meeting more frequently with employers. The revised process for progress reviews at 10-weekly intervals has been introduced effectively and the arrangements are monitored systematically. Employers find the college's guidance and support for their learners very helpful and have a high regard for the college and its staff.

## Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in improving governance?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in improving the governance of the college since it was judged ineffective in the 2007 inspection report. The LSC reviewed financial management and governance at the college in August 2008 and judged that there had been good progress made to improve these aspects of the college's work. Governors are well informed and are now clearly deciding, alongside senior managers, on the strategic direction of the college. They are fully supportive of the college's focus on partnership working in the local area. They have a good committee structure that helps them to monitor effectively the college's performance in key areas such as financial and academic performance. New members have brought a wider range of skills to the board. Governors are now accessing a good range of training to help them in their work. They have regular briefings at each of their meetings on important topics such as child protection.