

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Dudley College

Date of visit: 9 June 2009

Context

Dudley College is a large general further education college. It has four main campuses in Dudley. Just under half of the college-based learners are from Dudley, around a quarter from Sandwell and most of the remaining are from other neighbouring local authorities in the West Midlands. In 2008/09, the college had just over 17,000 learners. Of these, around three quarters were adults, just over half were male and about a fifth were from minority ethnic groups. The number of learners aged 14 to 16 years was 434. Some 347 learners were on work-based learning programmes. The college has 4,927 Train to Gain learners. Courses are available in all sector subject areas with the exception of agriculture, horticulture and animal care.

Ofsted last inspected Dudley College in May 2008. At that inspection, overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, quality of provision, leadership and management were good and achievement and standards were satisfactory. Inspectors judged as good the progress since the previous inspection, equality of opportunity, responsiveness to the needs and interests of learners and guidance and support. Provision was good in health, public services and care; construction, planning and the built environment; leisure, travel and tourism; arts, media and publishing; preparation for life and work and business, administration and law and satisfactory for information and communication technology (ICT).

Achievement and standards

How much progress has Dudley College made in increasing success rates overall?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

Long course success rates for both for learners aged 16 to 18 years and adults have increased very substantially between 2005/06 and 2007/08 by at least three times the national increase to a rate similar to comparable colleges. All long course success rates for the 14 sector subject areas Dudley college offers increased between 2005/06 and 2007/08. The increase was very substantial in seven and marked in three. In 2005/06, only one sector subject area long course success rate was above that for comparable colleges and eleven were below. In 2007/08, eight sector subject area long course success rates were above that for comparable colleges, four were similar and just two were below.

The overall key skills success rate between 2005/06 and 2007/08 increased at over twice the rate nationally to a high level. The success rate for all short courses for students aged 16 to 18 years increased between 2005/06 and 2007/08 at a pace quicker than that nationally to around the rate for comparable colleges. The success rate for all short courses for adults stayed at the same rate between 2005/06 and 2007/08. In 2007/08, the rate was similar to that for comparable colleges. Learners while at college make satisfactory to good progress compared with their prior levels of achievement. The success rates for different minority ethnic groups overall in 2007/08 were similar although the small number of adult Black Caribbean learners did less well. Female learners have slightly better success rates than those for males.

The overall and timely success rates for all work-based learning courses increased between 2005/06 and 2007/08 to above the national average, particularly for timely success rates. Train to Gain success rates between 2006/07 and the first nine months of 2008/09 stayed at a high level.

How much progress has the Dudley College made in increasing long course success rates for information and communication technology (ICT) courses	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Progress in resolving the low long course success rates in ICT is reasonable. At level 3, for learners aged 16 to 18 years and adults at level 1 the increase between 2005/06 and 2007/08 in long course success rates were substantial and to a high rate. At level 3 for adults, the increase in the long course rate was marked between 2005/06 and 2007/08 and was to just above that for comparable colleges. For learners aged 16 to 18 years at level 2, long course success rates between 2005/06 and 2007/08 increased at a rate similar to the national increase to a satisfactory level. At level 1, for learners aged 16 to 18 years, although the increase in the long course success rate was marked between 2005/06 and 2007/08 it was to below that for comparable colleges. At level 2, the long course success rate for adults declined slightly between 2005/06 and 2007/08 and in 2007/08, was at an unsatisfactory level.

The self-assessment report clearly recognises the issue with the adult long course success rate at level 2, in particular the retention rates for community based ICT provision. Managers have taken substantial actions to resolve this problem. These include improving pre-enrolment advice and guidance to ensure learners are on the appropriate course and increasing the focus on the individual needs of learners through more staffing, the strengthening of initial assessment and providing learning materials and teaching which focus on the specific requirements of learners. In addition, the college no longer works with partners that have low success rates.

Quality of provision

Is the use of data to assess learners' progress and to monitor progression and learners' destinations improving?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Thorough arrangements are now in place to collect data on learners' progression between the different levels and their destinations after studying at the college. Managers have started to analyse this information including comparing outcomes with similar local colleges. The use of systematic arrangements to collect data to measure the progress learners make compared with their prior levels of attainment has broadened to cover all level 3 provision. Managers analyse the outcomes from this information thoroughly to assess the progress of learners. Data indicate that learners with lower levels of prior attainment make better progress than those with higher levels of attainment, whose progress is satisfactory. To resolve this issue the college has put in place provision which now develops the ability of the more able learners to achieve higher grades.

What progress is being made to remedy ineffective target-setting to meet the needs of individual learners in lessons?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

In most lessons, the use of targets to meet the needs of individual learners is now effective. Targets are generally specific and measurable. However, in a small minority of lessons, the use of targets is variable in effectiveness including a few which are unrealistic. The good information on learners contained in group profiles and individual learning plans, including outcomes from initial assessment and learners' key areas for development and personal development goals, is used successfully by most teachers to set targets. Managers regularly check the effective use of learning targets. They recognise this is an area for further development and, in particular, to raise levels of achievement by providing targets that are more challenging and extend the ability of learners.

Have problems with underdeveloped provision of work opportunities and enrichment activities for full-time learners aged 16 to 18 years been resolved?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

The increase in work opportunities for full-time learners aged 16 to 18 years is substantial. These now include regular visits to employers' premises and work experience for most full-time learners aged 16 to 18 years, particularly for those in vocational sector subject areas. For example, on courses for creative and performance industries learners work with the BBC and Channel 4 on programme making and take part in creative workshops. In engineering and manufacturing, work opportunities are limited due to the current economic situation.

Non-curriculum enrichment activities have increased markedly, supported well by the student union. Full-time learners aged 16 to 18 years now take part in a wide range of events to broaden their learning, personal and social skills including visits, voluntary and charity work and internal events. Learners regularly take part in campaigns to improve society, welfare and fitness including those for mental and sexual health. They are involved in activities to support holocaust memorial day, international women's day, international day for disabled people and black history month.

Leadership and management

Is self-assessment accurate, rigorous and effective?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

Self-assessment is a particularly rigorous and accurate process. It makes very strong use of the improving and robust observations of teaching and learning, which now includes observations of visiting part-time teachers. Analysis of teaching and learning from each sector subject area is comprehensive and provides clear and relevant recommendations. The college's standards and performance directorate is very effective in ensuring the outcomes of the observations of teaching and learning link well with staff development, appraisal and the self-assessment process. The governing body's standards and diversity committee provides high levels of challenge to managers on the outcomes of teaching and learning observations and self-assessment. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and very thorough. It makes very good use of evidence and data and is particularly effectively at evaluating equality and diversity and the *Every Child Matters* outcomes. In a minority of instances, statements in the self-assessment reports are too descriptive.