

# City College Plymouth

## Focused monitoring visit report

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Unique reference number: 130649

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Last day of inspection: 4 November 2009

Type of provider: General Further Education College

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

City College Plymouth (formerly Plymouth College of Further Education) is a large GFE college which operates from two main sites. The college runs courses in almost all the subject areas and offers qualifications from pre-entry to degree level. The college has a large apprenticeship contract, mainly in engineering and construction trades. They also have a Train to Gain contract for around 2900 adults. The college is Plymouth's largest GCE A level provider.

Census data show the city's minority ethnic population to be lower than in the south-west region as a whole. Plymouth ranks in the top 25% of local authorities with the greatest levels of economic deprivation. Unemployment rates are above the regional and national average.

At the inspection in November 2008, the college was found to be satisfactory overall, with achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management all satisfactory. Capacity to improve was judged to be good. Six subject areas were inspected and graded. Five areas were graded satisfactory or good but science and mathematics were judged to be inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit, which include the two mandatory themes of outcomes for learners and self-assessment and improvement planning.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made in improving the effectiveness and impact of quality improvement at curriculum level and in meeting the milestones on the post inspection improvement plan? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, quality improvement arrangements were clear and comprehensive but were not fully effective across the range of the college's work. The college has made reasonable progress in introducing a quality improvement cycle that puts the learner journey at the heart of all the processes. There is now a strong focus on reviewing courses, programme areas and learner progress. The review process has enabled all staff to take responsibility for quality improvement. Learners' progress is formally monitored in whole-college Student Tracking, Evaluation and Planning for Success weeks (STEPS). STEPS weeks take place three times a year and in these weeks, all learners have their progress reviewed and recorded. Those who are behind target are given additional support and those who are doing well are provided with enrichment activities. At the time of the monitoring visit, the first STEPS week had taken place and the college was in the process of analysing the data, therefore it was too early to judge the impact of this initiative.

Considerable progress has been made in meeting the milestones on the post-inspection improvement plan. The majority of actions identified have been completed and any outstanding actions have been carried over to the quality improvement plan for 2009/10.

The draft self-assessment statements presented for the monitoring visit are a realistic analysis of the current position. The key actions are clearly and accurately identified and followed through. Managers have a good appreciation of how well they are doing with regard to making improvements. Quality assurance, performance management and their links to improvements are much stronger.

### Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made in improving: success rates at level 3 for learners aged 16-18 success rates for core key skills retention rates for all learners?	Reasonable progress
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Achievement and standards were satisfactory overall at the last inspection. For learners aged 16 to 18, success rates were broadly average for those studying at foundation and intermediate levels but were low for learners at advanced level. Success rates were low on most science and mathematics courses. Key skills success rates were improving but remained low, and retention rates were still below average for learners aged 16 to 18 at advanced level.

The college has made reasonable progress in improving outcomes for learners. Success rates at advanced level for learners aged 16 to 18 have improved and are now just below the latest published national average.

Success rates for the core key skills have improved to around the average for the sector. Key skills success rates in communications at Level 3 and application of number at Level 2 remain poor.

Retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on long courses have improved to 1% above the national average. The retention rate for learners aged 16 to 18 studying at Level 3 has improved by 8 percentage points but is still just below the national average. Retention rates for adult learners have improved and are now above the national average.

### Observation of Teaching and Learning

What progress has been made by the college in taking actions to help reduce the significant proportion of satisfactory lessons and improve the standards of teaching and learning in key skills?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in reducing the significant proportion of satisfactory lessons and improving the teaching and learning across the college. Key actions taken include the retraining of all observers and a revision of the lesson observation procedure. The college has also put in place much staff training and development. The college's first teaching and learning conference took place last December. Eighty-five per cent of those teachers who attended the teaching and learning conference and had previously been graded satisfactory have since been graded good or better. There is very good support for teachers graded inadequate and this year the college plans to offer the same level of support for those graded satisfactory. However, it was too early at the time of the monitoring visit to see the impact of this new initiative. Overall, the college reduced its satisfactory teaching by 2% last year and improved the good or better teaching by the same amount. The grade profile from college lesson observations has improved, although the lesson observation notes show that there is still too much focus by observers and teachers on the teaching and insufficient focus on the learning. Evidence from lessons observed by inspectors during the monitoring visit supports the view that teaching and learning have improved.

There is still too much teaching in key skills that is satisfactory. There has been increased support for key skills across college and many staff have had training and development. However, the college acknowledges that it needs to do more across the college on improving key skills.

### Teaching and learning

What progress has been made by the college in taking actions to help improve lesson planning so that learners' individual needs are more fully met in lessons? Significant progress

The college has made significant progress in helping teachers plan to meet the individual needs of learners in lessons. In March this year, there was a whole-college training programme which focused on meeting the individual needs of learners. Lesson planning has improved and the majority of plans now identify the individual needs of learners and how those needs will be met in lessons. In most lessons observed by inspectors during the monitoring visit, the individual needs of learners were met well.

### Guidance and support

What progress has the college made in improving target-setting in individual learning plans for all learners, but particularly those in science and mathematics? Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving target setting for learners. All personal tutors have had training to help them set realistic and measurable targets for their learners. The college has also introduced Course Improvement Boards (CIBs). The CIBs involve course teams meeting six times a year to formally

review performance of learners and ensure that the targets set for learners are realistic and measurable. Inspectors reviewed a selection of individual learning plans (ILPs) for learners from a wide range of courses across the college and found a mixture of good, well-focused targets set for learners but also found too many targets still insufficiently sharp to help learners progress.

### Quality improvement

What progress has the college made in improving the sharing of existing good practice across the college?

Reasonable progress

The sharing of good practice across the college was underdeveloped at the last inspection. The college has made reasonable progress in developing the arrangements for sharing good practice. The role of the Advanced Teaching Practitioner (ATP) has been further developed to enable them to disseminate good practice. The ATPs are being used this year to share and spread good practice in tutorials and teaching and learning. Where subject areas are identified as having particular aspects of good practice, they are paired with an area needing to improve. This year, health and social care have been paired with hair and beauty to share good practice in target setting and tutorials. In science and mathematics, there is now a senior tutor whose role includes the development of tutors and tutoring to better support learners: learning from the best practice of some tutors and spreading this to others is an important element of this work.

What progress has the college made in improving provision in science and mathematics?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, achievement and standards for science and mathematics were inadequate. Success rates were low on most science and mathematics courses. There is now evidence of some good improvements in success rates, but these are not consistent across all the provision. For 16 to 18 year olds, the provision at advanced level has improved but learners still perform well below national averages. Access courses in science have significantly improved and their outcomes are now good.

Curriculum management has improved and there is a more systematic and thorough approach to monitoring of the quality of the provision. A strong focus is now placed on the quality of teaching and learning and on improved target-setting in individual learning plans for all learners. The ILPs inspected in science and mathematics included objective analysis of learners' progress and encouraging feedback to the learners.

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