

# Swindon College

## Partial reinspection report

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## Introduction

Swindon College is a medium-sized general further education college offering courses from pre-entry to postgraduate level. The college has approximately 6,000 learners in further education and around 500 learners on higher education courses. The attainment of Swindon's school leavers is below the national average. The college provides vocational education and training to meet local community needs and support progression to further and higher education and employment.

Ofsted conducted a monitoring visit to the college in December 2009, when inspectors judged that, of the seven themes in scope, significant progress was being made in three and reasonable progress in the remaining four. These were linked to the areas for improvement from the college's full reinspection in March 2009. At that inspection, overall effectiveness, achievement and standards, quality of provision, leadership and management and capacity to improve were all judged satisfactory. Of the six subject areas inspected, one was judged good, four satisfactory and one, information and communication technology, inadequate. This inspection comprises both the reinspection of the inadequate area and a monitoring visit.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area/type of provision	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Information and communication technology (learner responsive)	4	3

## Context

Currently 105 students aged 16 to 18 are studying on full-time vocational programmes at foundation to advanced level, and 14 adults are studying on a part-time information technology (IT) course for students for whom English is an additional language. The full-time courses include BTEC first and national IT practitioner diplomas and an introductory IT at work diploma.

## Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. In recent years, success rates have fluctuated, but in 2008/09 were just above the national average for students aged 16 to 18. Retention rates have improved, and college data show that the in-year retention rate for current students is very high for the national diploma at 98%. Attendance is high on all courses.
- The standard of students' work is satisfactory. Students work well independently and contribute effectively in small groups. Students have developed good web development skills. However, students' recall of previous learning is often weak and in a significant number of instances their knowledge is less secure than should be expected at this stage in their studies.

- Teaching and learning are good and have improved since the last inspection. The well-planned lessons often feature a variety of engaging activities within which students were involved actively and are developing relevant technical skills.
- However, students commented that lessons did not always engage or involve them sufficiently. In these lessons, teachers often talked for too long and relied too heavily on presenting information slides.
- The college virtual learning environment is used appropriately to support learning and contains a good variety of resources including reference materials, quizzes and links to additional material.
- Assessment is good. Teachers use a variety of techniques well to check students' understanding, including mini-whiteboards, electronic quizzes and directed questioning. Marked work provides timely and useful feedback that indicates how students can improve their work.
- Satisfactory partnerships within the community have provided a variety of guest speakers and these have contributed towards students' understanding of developments in technology. Visits have been organised to enhance work-related learning, and assignments have realistic vocational settings. However, there is no work experience for students, although many have part-time jobs.
- Students are supported appropriately and their progress is monitored carefully. Electronic individual learning plans are updated regularly with challenging targets, and progress diaries are used effectively in some lessons.
- Leadership and management are good and have improved the quality of the provision since the last inspection. The phased approach to quality improvement has recently focused successfully on encouraging staff to take individual responsibility for their courses, assisted by the re-introduction of the course tutor role.
- Managers have rightly placed considerable emphasis on improving teaching and learning with the effective use of learning coaches. However, arrangements to share good practice are not yet fully developed.

#### What does Swindon College need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen arrangements to share the good practice across the subject area.
- Ensure that students' learning is consolidated and developed further beyond the immediate demands of completing coursework in a timely manner.
- Introduce work experience to enable students to develop further their work-related skills and to experience a commercial environment

## Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

### Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has the college made in improving the consistency and impact of quality assurance procedures and self-assessment? Significant progress

The college's self-assessment is evaluative and realistic in its assessment of the provision. The action plan arising from self-assessment is closely managed. Managers have allocated appropriate risk and priority to actions that are both specific and measurable. The college has made good progress against almost all of these actions that were put in place to rectify all the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The reinspection judgement for the information technology subject area provides compelling evidence of the value of quality improvement strategies.

At the last monitoring visit inspectors judged that lesson observation records were detailed and comprehensive. They identified a more rigorous and consistent approach to grading than was apparent at the last inspection. The lesson observation process has been strengthened further, in particular with arrangements for the re-observation of teachers whose lessons were previously graded satisfactory or inadequate.

The reinstatement of the course tutor role has helped to develop a culture of responsibility and accountability amongst teaching staff. This has had a very positive impact on the quality of course management, leading to regular, rigorous course review with an appropriate focus on retention of students and their achievement, and on teaching and learning. Self-assessment at subject area level has been strengthened further through the introduction of validation panels involving peer review and a selection of students from the area.

### Outcomes for learners

How much progress has the college made in raising success rates for learners both overall and specifically for students aged 16 to 18 on long courses at intermediate level and for adult learners on long courses at foundation level? Significant progress

Long course success rates for students aged 16 to 18 in 2008/09 improved significantly on the previous year so that they were just above the national average. Above average pass rates contributed to this, whereas the proportion of learners staying on until the end of their course was just below average. Long course success rates for adults have remained static over the past three years and in 2008/09 were at the national average. The retention rate was just below average whereas pass rates were above average.

Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 on long courses at intermediate level in 2008/09 increased significantly from the previous year to broadly average. The retention rate was just below the national average, but pass rates were in line. Success rates for adults at foundation level improved significantly to a point just below the national average for 2008/09. The retention rate was below average for this group, but pass rates were in line.

College data show that in-year retention for 2009/10 has improved significantly with a far higher proportion of students staying on to the end of their studies.

The proportion of apprentices achieving by their planned end date (timely success rate) in 2008/09 rose once more on the previous year and was well above the national average. Overall success rates remained above the national average and almost all students who achieved did so by their planned end date. Timely and overall success rates improved further in the college's Train to Gain work and were well above national averages.

To what extent has the college reduced the variations in learners' achievements between subject areas? Significant progress

At the last inspection, success rates between different subject areas showed a wide variation in performance. In 2007/08, success rates in over half of these areas were below the national average. Final data for the 2008/09 academic year show that success rates for learners were at, or above, the national average in most subject areas. The data show that keeping learners on courses (retention rates), rather than their pass rates, has been the key challenge for the college, even in a small minority of those subject areas where success rates were at or above average.

The college has made significant improvements in improving retention rates. College in-year data for the current 2009/10 academic year show an increase in retention for learners aged 16 to 18 and adults, and a further reduction in the variation of performance across the range of subject areas.

#### Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in improving the use of targets to monitor and improve students' progress? Reasonable progress

Students are appropriately focused on achieving their target grades and value the detailed feedback on the quality of their work and how to improve it. The value of target setting in work-based learning in apprenticeships is demonstrated through the improvement trend in the proportion of learners achieving by their planned end dates. This was well above average in 2008/09.

Although electronic individual learning plans (e-ILPs) are now in place across the college, the college acknowledges that the use of targets remains a work in progress. The precision of target setting for personal development is not yet of a consistently high standard. The frequency and regularity of use of electronic individual learning

plans by tutors and students are, as yet, inconsistent across the range of the college's work. The college is taking well-conceived steps to improve the standard and effectiveness of target setting through measures that include: more thorough collection of students' prior attainment data; additional training for staff; and, the introduction of personal target cards for students to supplement their e-ILPs.

### Leadership and management

How much progress has the college made in raising the proportion of good or better lessons? Significant progress

The college has taken further steps to increase the proportion of teaching staff that are observed each year, and almost all staff were observed in the 2009/10 academic year. The lesson observation process has been strengthened further, in particular with the introduction of the unannounced re-observation by a different observer of teachers whose lessons were previously graded satisfactory or inadequate.

Staff development is focused precisely on teachers' development needs. Before and after self-evaluation enables teachers to reflect on what they have learned from staff development activities and provides valuable information for managers. Teachers rightly value the supportive and developmental work of learning coaches in helping them to develop their professional practice. Teachers provide insightful reflection on how they have improved the quality of their lessons.

The proportion of lessons that were good or better has increased significantly from the previous year. The college has been successful in improving teachers' practice where their lessons were previously graded either satisfactory or inadequate.

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