

# City College Brighton and Hove

## Focused monitoring visit report

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Unique reference number: 130663

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Last day of inspection: 17 June 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education college

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

City College is a large general further education college located in two main centres in Brighton and Hove. The college provides full- and part-time courses from entry level through to undergraduate studies in 13 of the 15 subject areas. Provision includes part-time vocational programmes for local secondary school pupils, a broad range of vocational courses for adult and 16- to 18-year-old learners and higher education courses in partnership with the University of Brighton. In addition, the college has expanding programmes aimed at local businesses and a range of adult and community learning opportunities.

The college was inspected in February 2007 and was found to be satisfactory for most aspects of its provision. However, Skills for Life, one of the six curriculum areas inspected, was found to be inadequate. The college was reinspected in July 2008 and the Skills for Life provision judged to be good. The monitoring visit in May 2009 found that significant progress had been made in improving the evaluation of teaching and learning, developing the employer responsive provision and improving quality assurance. Reasonable progress was judged to have been made in improving outcomes for learners, embedding e-learning into teaching and learning, developing additional learning support and taking forward plans to redevelop and improve the accommodation.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

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| What progress has been made in further developing self-assessment and quality improvement in order to raise standards? | Significant progress |
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Self-assessment has continued to develop and quality improvement plans are now more robust. Further training in self-assessment for curriculum leaders has been put in place and curriculum reviews are now completed earlier in the academic year. The college has significantly improved the moderation of self-assessment reports. Managers at all levels are confident that self-assessment reports (SARs) are rigorously reviewed and lead to better target setting. The college SAR is an accurate and evaluative document and the quality improvement plan that accompanies it is improving standards. However, target setting at curriculum team level is still developing. A few reports have too many targets and some targets are not measurable. The college has established a very effective system for monitoring the progress against team targets and inspectors judge this is a process that is clearly working. Overall, progress in quality assurance and quality improvement has been significant.

## Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made improving outcomes for learner responsive courses? Reasonable progress

Overall success rates have continued to improve and in 2008/09 improved by eight percentage points to 80%. College data suggest that retention rates have improved compared to the same time last year. Long course success rates at all levels for learners aged 16 to 18 improved in 2008/09 and were at, or above, the national average for similar colleges. Long course success rates for adult learners in 2008/09 showed improvements at intermediate and advanced level and were at or above national averages. However, at entry and foundation level, success rates declined and were below national averages. Targeted work with courses such as the Certificate in Skills for Working Life has brought about improvements this year.

Success rates for a few learners from minority ethnic backgrounds were below that of their peers in 2008/09 and this was identified in the SAR. Actions have been taken and the retention rate has improved, notably so for learners in the Other Asian category. However, retention and predicted success for learners from Black African and Indian backgrounds remain below that of other learners. Managers recognise that this is work in progress and are taking vigorous action.

Outcomes for learners aged 14 to 16 are good and have improved. In 2008/09, the overall success rate was 79% and progression to further education was good. Key skills success rates have also continued to improve to 69% in 2008/09. Construction and motor vehicle portfolios demonstrate well-embedded and vocationally relevant numeracy activities.

What progress has been made improving outcomes for employer responsive courses? Reasonable progress

Employer responsive programmes have continued to develop and the numbers of learners and trainees have increased. The range of programmes has increased markedly and is helping to meet the need for training and development in Brighton and Hove. Apprenticeship success rates have continued to improve, rising from 59% in 2007/08 to a firmly predicted 75% in 2009/10. Timely success rates have also improved.

In 2008/09, the number of trainees on Train to Gain programmes doubled. Overall success rates, although improved, in 2008/09 remain well below the national benchmark. Current retention and completion data show improvement. Timely success rates, however, have not improved and are predicted to be below national average for the current year. Some unexpected changes to staff have had an adverse effect on assessments and the recording of trainees' progress has been delayed. Managers recognise this and have worked hard to cover the staff shortages. Both learner and employer satisfaction are high. Relevant procedures and policies are in place and managers are actively pursuing strategies to improve outcomes for learners.

## Quality of provision

Has the quality of teaching and learning continued to improve following improvements to the rigour of lesson observations? Reasonable progress

Over the last year, managers and staff have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The college SAR now judges teaching and learning to be good. Teachers receive only 24 hours' notice of an impending lesson observation. In addition, the number of observations has increased this academic year and most teaching staff have now been observed at least once. Two thirds of teachers graded satisfactory have been observed again and many have improved their practice. Analysis of lesson observation judgements shows that further improvements are needed in the use of differentiated learning activities and the integration of literacy and numeracy in lessons. Observation judgements do not always give enough weight to the impact of teaching strategies on learning. The college has identified this as an area for further development. Occasionally, the feedback from observations is not prompt enough for teachers to benefit fully from the findings. The college has recently introduced the observation of teaching support assistants (TSAs). However, the judgements do not always focus sufficiently on how the support is helping those with identified learning needs.

What progress has been made embedding e-learning? Reasonable progress

E-learning has continued to develop and the number of learners using the college virtual learning environment for e-learning has increased significantly. A clear college strategy sets out the expectations for e-learning across the curriculum. All teaching staff with substantive teaching roles have been trained in developing e-learning techniques. Staff are positive about developing e-learning both in and outside lessons. A few curriculum teams have developed a good range of e-learning resources to support learning. The quality of on-line learning resources is now part of the observation of teaching and learning. Judgements regarding this are starting to have a positive effect on teaching and learning. Learners' feedback indicates that the quality of e-learning resources and the impact on their learning have improved this year.

What progress has been made evaluating the impact of additional learning support? Reasonable progress

Success rate data show that learners in receipt of additional learning support in 2008/09 made progress in line with that of their peers. Current retention data indicate that this improvement has been maintained. The college recognised that the work undertaken by TSAs was insufficiently monitored to evaluate the quality of support. Most TSAs have now been observed in their support role. This has led to further training for assistants in, for example, spelling and dyslexia. TSAs have been allocated to specific curriculum areas and they are involved actively in the review of learners' vocational progress. Teaching staff report that this has led to greatly improved communication and monitoring of learners' progress. However, the college

does not always set clear targets for learners in receipt of additional learning support or monitor their achievement closely enough.

### Leadership and management

What progress has been made in developing the curriculum, engaging with partners and developing the accommodation and specialist resources in order to meet the education and training needs of local communities? Significant progress

Due to circumstances beyond the control of the college, a substantial capital building project has been cancelled. The Learning and Skills Council made good some of the monies the college spent in developing the project. The college expects to make good the remaining losses by the end of the year through efficiency savings, and through staff changes at senior management level and in other areas of the college. A strategic decision has been made that, whatever reduction in funding occurs, there will be minimal cuts to the provision of teaching and training.

Learner recruitment is currently buoyant and the college is predicting an increase in learner numbers for 2010/11. The number of learners at City College East will continue to rise to 1,200 in autumn 2010. This represents a significant growth over the past three years. This site is developing well and now offers a good range of opportunities for learners in the East Brighton area. Increasing numbers enrolling for courses clearly demonstrate the college's aim of widening participation in education and training in an area of some deprivation.

The college is collaborating effectively with a range of partners. The horticulture provision will move to Plumpton College and some aspects of engineering will not run next year. However, despite the cuts and the disappointment of the capital building project, the curriculum for next year is wide and well structured to meet local and national priorities.

The college has continued to work actively with businesses, employers and the local council. Indeed, the college Train to Gain and apprenticeship provision is central to the training and engagement strategy that has been developed by the city council. Work is underway to rationalise the accommodation and the location of training across the city. In addition, the college has sound plans to refurbish and develop the accommodation in the Pelham Street area.

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