

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: City College Norwich

Date of visit: 7 May 2008

Context

City College Norwich is a large, predominantly vocational college of further and higher education based in the city of Norwich. Most of the provision is based at the college's central campus but it has a new bespoke facility in the city centre which provides services for the National Skills Academy in Financial Services. Although the region is one of comparative affluence there are pockets of significant disadvantage. Using the Index of Multiple Deprivation, Norwich is the second most deprived district in the eastern region. Two thirds of the city's wards are within the 20% of most deprived wards in England. Some 44% of the city's children live in households dependent upon means-tested benefits. The proportion of learners who achieve five GCSE grades A*-C is well below the national average at 56%. In 2006/07 the college received additional funding in respect of disadvantage for more than 2,000 learners.

During the last complete academic year, 2006/07, the college enrolled 14,200 learners, 57% of them funded through the LSC recurrent grant. Some 57% of learners were female, with 11% having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds at the college was 7%, which was above the proportion of people from these backgrounds in Norwich.

The college provides courses in 14 of the 15 sector subject areas as well as a range of work-based learning programmes which include level 2 and advanced apprenticeships and Entry to Employment. The college also works with more than 30 schools to provide courses for learners aged 14-16.

The college is a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for hospitality and catering and for finance and accounting. It is also leading a collaborative CoVE in computing and networking with two other Norfolk colleges. The college has achieved National Skills Academy status for Financial Services and is an associate college of the University of East Anglia.

Achievement and standards

Have the improvements in success rates identified at the previous monitoring visit been maintained?	Reasonable progress
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The college success rate on long courses improved by 4% to 70% in 2006/07, with the most significant improvements being for learners aged 16-18 at level 1 and learners aged 19+ at level 3. The rate of improvement is slightly above that seen nationally in similar colleges. Improvements have resulted from better pass rates.

Retention rates for students of both age groups have remained static during the past three years, but college data for the current year suggests an improvement of some 3% in retention in 2007/08. Attendance remains a major concern in the college. In 2007/08 the attendance rate improved slightly to 75% but is still very low.

The college has taken positive action to improve the quality of performance in GCE AS and A level subjects. The management of the provision has been changed and courses where there has been a history of poor performance are subjected to much stricter monitoring, including the removal of provision in extreme cases. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these changes on achievement and standards, but value-added information indicates that learners achieve what is expected of them, based on their starting points.

Outcomes for learners on work-based learning programmes have shown consistent improvement over three years and LSC data for 2007/08 indicate that framework completion and timely framework completion rates for all apprentices have improved to above national rates.

The number of learners who started a key skills qualification in 2006/07 was 45% lower than in 2005/06. Success rates however, have improved and although low are now close to the last published national averages at levels 1, 2 and 3. College data for 2007/08 suggest a significant improvement on this picture.

Quality of provision

What measures has the college taken to increase the proportion of good or better lessons?	Reasonable progress
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The college's lesson observation system provides a valuable source of information on the quality of teaching. Results of lesson observations are analysed carefully and are used appropriately to identify areas where further staff training is needed. The small team of observers provides consistent judgements. Analysis reveals that the number of lessons graded good or better has improved and that teachers who were observed for a second time after achieving a satisfactory observation judgement improved significantly. The college has yet to demonstrate how this improvement is reflected in learners' attendance, retention and success rates.

The college is introducing a system of internal inspection which is intended to clarify the correlation between the quality of teaching and other aspects of provision and learner outcomes. Although it is too early to assess the impact of these inspections, they have been well-received and valued by teachers.

What progress has the college made with improving the effectiveness of additional learning support?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates for learners receiving additional learning support were higher than for other learners in 2006/07, with the difference most marked for adult learners on level 1 courses. The number of learners with an identified additional support need

has increased. The management of additional learning support has recently been revised. The current acting programme manager has cross-college responsibility for additional learning support and key skills support. Members of the 'Essential Skills Team' have been linked to each school within the college to provide support and advice on how to integrate essential skills with vocational aspects of courses. A programme of staff development has been provided to help tutors offer informal in-class additional learning support and improve the quality of initial assessment. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new arrangements as no analysis has yet been carried out of their impact on attendance, retention and achievement.

What progress has the college made with improving tutorial practice and target setting?	Reasonable progress
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The college has a clear structure of individual and group tutorials. The content of group tutorials is defined by the head of each school to meet the needs of course schemes of work. A college-wide schedule of themes is used during tutorials to promote enrichment activities, linked to the five Every Child Matters themes.

All learners have the opportunity to discuss their work, attendance and progress in individual tutorials. Many students are also able to request additional tutorials when they require extra guidance and support. A pilot project using electronic individual learning plans in all schools has helped communication between students, additional learning support staff and tutors. Students appreciate the greater opportunity this pilot has given them in agreeing their personal and academic targets. A further pilot project is being used within work-based learning to collect employers' views and feedback in tutorials. The outcomes of tutorials are used as the basis for discussions during parents' evenings for students aged 16-18. Tutorials have been included in the sample of activities in the pilot internal inspection monitoring arrangements.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made with incorporating the views of learners in its work?	Significant progress
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The college has implemented a wide range of procedures to gather the views of learners and the representation of the learners' voice in the college's work is strong. There are three student governors, class representatives on each course team, individual school councils, a student parliament and a range of procedures to gather learners' views on the quality of their courses. There are also plans to include learners in the assessment of the quality of teaching in future. The college can quote a wide range of examples where they have acted on the information they have received from learners to bring about improvements.