

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Newbury College  
Date of visit: 18 November 2008

### Context

Newbury College is the only general further education college in West Berkshire. Its catchment is predominantly rural, and includes West Berkshire, Reading and North Hampshire. Unemployment rates for West Berkshire are the lowest in the south east. The college is medium-sized and the majority of students are adults on part-time programmes. The large majority of students are of White British background. Many part-time courses are delivered in the community.

Newbury College was last inspected in March 2006. At that inspection, leadership and management, and the quality of provision were judged to be satisfactory. One curriculum area was judged to be good and six were satisfactory.

In 2007/08 there were 3,238 students on roll, amounting to around 4,319 enrolments and equating to 1,257 full-time equivalent enrolments. Of these, some 79% were adults.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success, retention and achievement rates?	Reasonable progress
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College data show that the success rate for all students improved in 2007/08 and is around the national average. This is due mainly to improvements at level 3 and by younger students at level 2. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 on long courses improved overall to the national average. Those for courses at levels 2 and 3 increased significantly, although the rate at level 1 dropped to below average. Success rates for adults on long courses improved, and are now around the national average. Those for short courses increased and are also now average. Success rates still vary between subjects. For example, those that demonstrate particularly low success include motor vehicle and construction. Success rates for courses in key skills improved significantly for students of all age groups, and are now good.

Achievement and retention rates for adults on most lengths and levels of courses continued to improve in 2007/08, particularly on short courses, and long courses at levels 1 and 3, and are at national averages. For students aged 16 to 18, there were good improvements in retention to above average on all long courses, due to a

strong focus on improving attendance. Although pass rates for long courses at levels 2 and 3 improved well to around national averages, there was a decline for courses at L1 which remain below average.

What progress has been made in improving success rates for apprentices?	Reasonable progress
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Overall framework success rates for work-based learners improved in 2007/08 by about 15 percentage points after a small improvement in 2006/07. Consequently, they are now at national averages. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 improved well at both levels 2 and 3. However, the improvement in success rates for adults varied, with those on apprenticeships increasing by ten percentage points, compared with a drop for advanced apprentices. Although the numbers of learners on engineering apprenticeships increased in 2007/08, too many learners on motor vehicle programmes still leave the course without achieving their frameworks, as was the situation in the previous year.

The rates at which learners at level 2 complete their apprenticeships within the planned timescale have continued to improve since 2004/05 and are now, at 60.5%, 13 percentage points above the national average. Timely success rates for those on advanced apprenticeships improved considerably in 2006/07 from a low base. However, although there was a further small improvement for younger learners in 2007/08, there was a decline for adults. Nevertheless, timely success rates for all learners, at 55%, are above the national average.

#### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the advice and guidance to students pre-entry and during induction?	Significant progress
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The college has used information from students' surveys well to amend and improve pre-entry and induction procedures. For example, more focus has been placed on the importance of using subject experts for interviewing applicants, and further curriculum taster opportunities were well attended. For 2008/09 the conversion rate of applicants to enrolments for full-time courses in the college, was higher than is generally seen in similar colleges. The college routinely analyses the reasons for applicants not enrolling, including an analysis by gender and ethnicity to determine whether these are significant factors.

With more emphasis on induction to the course, as well as to the college, students feel more confident that they have chosen a programme appropriate to their needs and interests. Consequently, the number of students who transfer courses has reduced significantly. During the six weeks' induction period, students' progress is checked through effective individual discussions with tutors. Regular tutorials and

study skills sessions ensure that students can develop their personal skills whilst at college. Students on vocational courses speak positively about the advice they receive on progressing after they leave college. In particular, some comment favourably on how it has encouraged them to continue to higher education.

What improvement has been made in ensuring the consistency of tracking and monitoring students' progress?	Reasonable progress
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The consistency of tracking and monitoring of students' progress has improved. The college has introduced detailed reporting systems which enable managers to closely monitor attendance and in-year achievement. Setting of assignments is carefully scheduled and completion is tracked. Senior staff carry out frequent reviews with curriculum managers to monitor students' progress. During 2007/08 the college introduced independent learning study sessions to support students' progress and these have recently been implemented across the curriculum. They are managed by the course leader and supported by a learning support assistant.

Although the monitoring of students' progress has improved, the number of different tracking systems used within the college makes it difficult for senior staff to interrogate each of the systems to obtain consistent information. The college has plans to introduce a central system for this purpose. The clarity and consistency of tracking systems for information on students' support needs are recognised by the college as further areas for improvement.

#### Leadership and management

What improvements have been made to curriculum management to raise the quality of provision in sports, performing arts & media, and motor vehicle?	Reasonable progress
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Curriculum managers in each of these areas have effectively implemented the recent cross college developments to raise the quality of provision. Attendance is monitored rigorously and prompt action is taken if students' attendance is a concern. Consequently, attendance and retention of students have improved. The assignment schedules for individual programmes are better planned and monitoring of students' progress has improved. The new independent learning sessions are timetabled to ensure that students' can attend and there is greater use of learning support. The use of data to monitor and evaluate students' progress and achievement within these curriculum areas has also improved.

Retention has improved on sports programmes and is currently at 94%. In this curriculum area the use of college systems, particularly to track students' progress, has improved. The staffing issues in performing arts and media have been effectively resolved, and student recruitment has increased to 135 students for 2008/09 from

76 in the previous year. On motor vehicle programmes, overall attendance has improved and there is better monitoring of students' progress and achievement. The effectiveness of recruitment onto these programmes has improved, particularly through the use of initial assessment specific to the curriculum area. Induction arrangements and links with the student advisor have been strengthened. Motor vehicle resources have also improved and a curriculum specific learning record for students has recently been introduced.

<p>What progress has been made towards the accurate monitoring of teaching and learning and its continuous improvement, particularly with part time staff?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college has well developed processes and procedures to monitor teaching and learning, and established arrangements for external moderation. All teaching staff are observed at least once each year. The use and implementation of individual action plans has improved. The proportion of good or better lessons observed by college staff has shown steady improvement in the previous three years, at 72% for 2007/08 compared with 52% and 61% respectively in 2005/06 and 2006/07. The college has recognised within the current self-assessment the need to reduce the proportion of satisfactory lessons and the few unsatisfactory lessons, particularly at level 1. Data for lesson observations of full- and part-time staff are not sufficiently analysed to provide precise information; however, overall trends indicate that the proportion of good or better lessons delivered by part-time staff is improving and is closer to that of full time staff.

Teaching staff have a wide range of development opportunities and college training, including for the use of information and learning technologies (ILT). They have frequent opportunities to share good practice at section and course team meetings. The peer observation scheme has been successfully piloted and is now being spread more widely across the college. The college has recently introduced mentoring and coaching arrangements for teaching staff with low lesson observation grades. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this initiative.