

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Abingdon and Witney College

Date of visit: 10 February 2009

Context

Abingdon and Witney College is a medium sized general further education college in a semi-rural location in South and West Oxfordshire. The college has three main sites: the largest in Abingdon; a rural skills centre at Common Leys, near Witney; and the third in the centre of Witney.

Programmes for 14-16 year olds from local schools currently lead to land-based industries, care, media qualifications, beauty, carpentry and motor vehicles. Partnerships with 3 local schools' consortia are developing 14-19 diploma programmes. Creative industries, engineering and ICT will start in September 2009 and horticulture in 2010. The college delivers Train to Gain programmes as part of a local consortium but is developing its own provision in horticulture and cleansing. This provision has yet to commence.

The most recent inspection report was published in March 2008. The college was graded satisfactory, grade 3, in the headline grades of effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management. Two out of the five curriculum areas that were inspected – horticulture, equine studies and animal care and preparation for life and work - were graded satisfactory and three curriculum areas – information and communications technology, arts media and publishing, and business administration and law – were graded good.

Achievement and standards

How successful has the college been in improving success rates of learners aged 16 – 18 on long courses at Level 2?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Overall, the college has made reasonable progress in improving the success rates for learners aged 16-18, on long courses, at Level 2. The long courses success rate improved to 71% in 2007/08 and is satisfactory. Success rates for main qualifications are good at 79%. Success rates for high grades for GCSE improved to 40% in 2007/08 and are also satisfactory in the context of the low national average for similar colleges.

How successful has the college been in improving success rates of learners aged 16 – 18 on long courses at Level 3?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college has made reasonable progress in improving the success rates for students aged 16-18 on long courses at Level 3. College data shows rates improved to 75% in 2007/08 and are now satisfactory.

How successful has the college been in improving success rates of adults on long courses at Level 2?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

The college has made significant progress in improving long courses success rates for adult learners on at Level 2. Success rates improved and are high at 78% for 2007/08. Success rates were very low at 11% for information and communications technology long courses at Level 2, in 2006/07. Courses have now been restructured and a more flexible curriculum introduced. Enrolments in ICT have decreased significantly from 386 in 2006/07 to 25 in 2007/08. Success rates improved and are high at 88% for 2007/08.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in the development of literacy and numeracy teaching, including key skills?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college is making reasonable progress in improving literacy and numeracy teaching. The college has shown a strong commitment to developing effective practice by carrying out a strategic review due to be completed at Easter. A new assistant director post to coordinate key skills also demonstrates its high priority. The introduction of a sharper and more specific screening and a wider range of skills for life courses have ensured that programmes for students are planned to suit their abilities and aspirations. Well focused work to provide details of the requirements of each course has clarified the skills students need and the demands on teaching staff. Successful pilots in some subject areas have developed a range of useful approaches to teaching and learning to ensure students study stimulating and relevant material. Effective support for staff includes mentoring, team teaching, formal training and advice from external consultants. The college has still to evaluate fully the effectiveness of pilots to determine how to move forward. As these measures are new, impact on success rates is not yet clear. Success rates on literacy at Level 1, and numeracy certificates at Level 1 and 2 have risen and were 75%, 78% and 71% respectively in 2007/08. However key skills success rates remain low, at 41% for communications at Level 1 and 36% at Level 2.

What progress has been made by the college in raising the standards of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college has made reasonable progress in raising the standard of teaching and learning. The new college structure defines clear and well-resourced roles to promote improved teaching and learning. Partnership arrangements with other colleges are enhancing the skills and experience of observers. The college has made good use of curriculum advisors to encourage innovation and develop good practice. Teachers have received intensive training on areas for improvement identified by inspectors and are encouraged to develop their skills continuously. Information and Learning Technology (ILT) champions in many subject areas are having measurable impact in improving tutors' skills and confidence. Substantial investment in new equipment has improved access to computers and interactive whiteboards. Developments in the lesson observation system have focussed strongly on capturing systematic information about the techniques used in lessons. Observation forms prompt staff to record detailed information about many aspects of learning strategy. However, records are still too focused on processes rather than recording what learning is taking place.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the management of the GCE A/AS provision?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

The college has made reasonable progress in improving the management of the GCE A/AS provision. An assistant director, appointed in June 2008, has had a significant impact on addressing the needs of learners and the management processes. New sixth form centres in Abingdon and Witney provide an inviting environment and clear identity for college learners and those from local schools taught on college premises. Additional student learning facilitators and advanced tutors have also been appointed and are working well to support learners. Trained and qualified staff provide a strong network of support for lesson observations and for sharing good practice. Information, advice and guidance resources and processes for induction have been strengthened. Interviews by specialised tutors enable learners to have a greater understanding of the curriculum offer and course requirements. Taster sessions provide learners with an insight into the courses and improved tutorial arrangements have helped to increase current retention rates to 97%. Many of the management improvements have recently been introduced and yet to impact fully on the 2008/09 cohort.

What progress has been made in improving the collation, analysis and use of data to manage the provision?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college has a clear set of objectives to meet its 2012 vision and has taken positive steps to address inadequacies in the use of data for management decision making, identified at the previous inspection. Electronic class registration has been introduced. Sophisticated management information is now used very effectively to monitor and manage attendance, retention and achievement. Responsibilities for all staff are clear and weekly monitoring of attendance by a member of the College Management Team (CMT) enables quick and appropriate interventions by relevant staff to support learners. Management information is used well by Assistant Directors (ADs) and Programme Area Managers (PAMs), particularly to monitor non-attendance, achievement and success trends. A traffic light warning system signals the progress of rates thus ensuring that the college is monitoring progress against its key objectives of its 2012 College Development Project. Some aspects of the use of data to manage the decision making process have been recently introduced and it is too early to measure the impact.