

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Gloucestershire College

Date of visit: 11 June 2009

Context

Gloucestershire College (formerly known as Gloscat) is the largest of the county's colleges, serving learners from the urban areas of Cheltenham and Gloucester and also from other parts of Gloucestershire and beyond. The college offers courses from pre-entry to degree level and recruits around 2,300 learners aged 16-18 who make up about half of the full time equivalent (FTE) learners on long courses.

Approximately a third of learners aged 16-18 study courses at level 3. The college offers provision for around 200 learners aged 14-16 including young apprenticeships. It also receives around 50 Year 11 learners who no longer attend school. The proportion of the college's learners from minority ethnic groups at 11% is well above that in the local population.

The last full inspection was in 2008. Overall effectiveness and capacity to improve were judged to be good as were the quality of provision and leadership and management. Achievement and standards were graded as satisfactory. Of the six curriculum areas inspected provision was good in five and satisfactory in one.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in improving success and retention rates for 16-18 year old learners?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in increasing success and retention rates for 16-18 year old learners since the last inspection. According to college data, the success rate for 16-18 year old learners on level 1 courses has increased significantly from 68% in 2006/07 to 83% in 2007/08. For those on courses at levels 2 and 3, the progress has been reasonable. The success rate for 16-18 year old learners on level 2 courses has increased from 68% in 2006/07 to 74% in 2007/08 and for those at level 3 the relative increase has been from 68% to 73%. The overall success rate for long courses for this age group, at 78%, remains around the current national average.

College data on retention rates for this group also show an increase since the last inspection, from 79% in 2006/07 to 85% overall in 2007/08. For learners on courses at level 1, retention has improved from 81% in 2006/07 to 92% in 2007/08. For similar learners on courses at levels 2 and 3 the current retention rate has increased from 76% and 77% respectively in 2006/07 to 80% in 2007/08.

The college closely monitors attendance and retention. Unvalidated college data indicates that in-year retention for 16-18 year old learners is continuing to improve. Clear strategies have been put in place to improve retention and the impact of these is reviewed regularly.

How much progress has been made in improving success rates in key skills, particularly in tackling the low success in application of number and communication at level 1, and the low national average success rates at level 2?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in improving key skills success rates at level 1, from 34% overall in 2006/07 to 59% in 2007/08. Progress in improving success rates for key skills at level 2 has been reasonable, from 49% in 2005/06 to 57% in 2007/08. Success rates for level 3 key skills have improved from 13% overall in 2005/06, to 29% in 2007/08, but against a significantly reduced enrolment. A clear strategy is in place to improve outcomes across all levels and sector subject areas and management of key skills and Skills for Life provision has been clarified and improved. Effective management information and data systems have been introduced, to give managers a clear oversight of key skills outcomes by tutor, group and subject. Performance management measures have been considerably strengthened, with good staff development, staff support and effective sharing of good practice. Challenging but realistic targets are in place and in-year evidence suggests that the college is making good progress against its target for 2008/09.

How much progress has the college made in taking action to improve the declining success rates for apprentices?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving framework success rates for apprentices. Overall, advanced apprenticeship success rates have improved from 58% in 2006/07, to 64% in 2007/08 and to 77% in-year for 2008/09. Apprenticeship success rates showed a decline from 74% in 2006/07 to 53% in 2007/08. The college is aware of the reasons for low success rates in 2007/08 and has put in place measures to improve performance. The current in-year success rate for apprenticeships in 2008/09 is 69%, a little over the national average. Effective management of work-based learning ensures good liaison between vocational areas, employers and the college's work-based learning team. Enrolments for apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes have increased and the college is currently including new vocational areas.

Measures are in place to secure timely key skills outcomes for apprentices across all areas and target setting and review processes are improving. Over the past eighteen months, the college has had good success in assisting apprentices whose training has been disrupted by redundancy.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made to ensure that learners in all curriculum areas are set challenging targets and that these are effectively recorded?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in the setting and recording of challenging targets for learners. All learners have a clear package of entitlements to tutorial, review and guidance support and clear procedures are in place to establish students' minimum target and potential grades. Curriculum heads undertake frequent and comprehensive monitoring of students' performance and progress. A useful and well structured suite of electronic recording, target-setting and monitoring tools will be available to all staff from September 2009. This on-line system has been the subject of thorough and wide-ranging pilots across a number of curriculum areas and peer-review and moderation of systems have been undertaken with other colleges. A good range of measures is in place to ensure employer involvement in work-based learning reviews and target-setting.

Leadership and management

How much progress has the college made in the use of value added data to improve learner performance?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in the college's use of value added data to improve performance. According to college data, value added scores across AS, A2 and several BTEC courses have improved and are now significantly positive. Arrangements to extend and strengthen the use of value added measures are in place. These are now used as a performance monitoring and management tool for learners throughout their time in the college and across a wider range of courses. The college has made good progress in establishing these arrangements across the college so that they form an integral part of the marketing and promotion of courses and in the recruitment and selection of learners. The system is now better integrated with the college's arrangements for initial assessment, setting and reviewing learning targets and tracking performance. Senior management, governors and staff have been briefed and trained in the use of the new systems. The automated system, linked to the college's "Stars and Stripes" performance tracking tool is now used by around 80% of college staff. The arrangements, in their current form, are in the relatively early stages of implementation and their full impact on performance has yet to be assessed.

How much progress has been made in taking action to address the variation in attendance across the provision?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in taking action to improve the variation in attendance across its provision. An electronic registration system, introduced in September 2008 has strengthened the college's monitoring and tracking of punctuality and attendance. Detailed daily reports have enabled the college to take prompt action to tackle lateness and persistent absenteeism, particularly in the relatively few courses identified in the self assessment report where attendance was unacceptably low. These arrangements are well supported by attendance officers who are effectively integrated in the college's schools. Persistent non attendance or lateness are highlighted swiftly and effective action is taken at learner and school level.

The overall college attendance rate has remained at around 86% since the last inspection. However, the strengthened arrangements for monitoring attendance and punctuality have shown a clear impact on the attendance rate in a number of college courses identified as requiring improvement. For construction courses, which are predominantly full time provision and a core area for the college, the attendance rate has increased from 79% in 2007/08 to a current in-year rate of 85.8% according to college data. Attendance has also increased amongst the Year 11 reintegration students from an average of 65% in 2007/08 to a current 71.4% and for ESOL students overall from 72% in 2007/08 to a current in-year rate 73.9%. The overall rate of attendance for learners with learning disabilities in functional skills provision has decreased slightly from 68% in 2007/08 to a current in-year rate of 66.8%.