

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Cornwall College

Date of visit: 3 March 2009

### Context

Cornwall College is one of the largest providers of post-16 education and training in the south west. It provides programmes in all 15 sector subject areas (SSAs) and at all levels from foundation to higher education. It has extensive work based learning (WBL) provision and rapidly growing Train to Gain provision. It has sites around the county. The college has approximately 41,000 students. Most of them are over the age of 25 years. Around 70% of the students live in Cornwall and 85% of them study part time.

The college had its last full inspection in May 2006. At that inspection, leadership and management and capacity to improve were judged to be good. Effectiveness of provision, achievement and standards and quality of provision were judged to be satisfactory. In curriculum areas, the college was awarded one grade of good and five of satisfactory. At the last monitoring visit in March 2008, the college was judged to have made reasonable progress in five areas inspected, but to have made insufficient progress in improving the promotion of cultural awareness and diversity in the curriculum.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in continuing the improvements noted to achievements and standards described at the last inspection visit?	Significant progress
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There have been significant improvements in standards and achievements over the last three years. The college sets itself far reaching targets for raising success rates and has met or exceeded nearly all these targets over the last three years. Long course success rates have risen from 61% to 74%. Retention rates on long qualifications have improved again in the last year and now stand at 83%. Short course success rates have also improved well. The college's overall headline success rate is now 82%. Improvements in work based learning success rates now mean that the college is significantly above the national average for overall success rates for both apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes. There have been strong improvements in the success rates on key skills provision. In 2005/06, the key skills success rate was 53%: in 2007/08 this had risen to 70% with a cohort of 3,800 students. Consequently, the college has a much smaller proportion of its provision

that does not meet minimum levels of performance (MLP) criteria than it did previously. For example, the percentage of long courses that meet or exceed MLP criteria is now 98.4%, compared to 93.8% in 2005/06. Specific areas of concern in previous inspections, such as retention rates on adult provision at levels 1 and 2 and in some curriculum areas such as construction, have also shown significant improvements. Rates of retention on provision for adult students have improved by 16% at level 1, 2% at level 2 and 8% at level 3 in 2007/08. Rates of retention on construction courses have risen from 78% to 91% in the last year.

What progress has been made in improving outcomes at GCE AS and A level across the college?	Reasonable progress
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There has been a specific focus introduced over the last two years to raise standards in GCE AS and A level provision across the college. This is proceeding well and there are clear signs that standards are improving, in some areas very rapidly. Nearly all the college's GCE provision is based at either the Camborne or St. Austell site. While there has previously been some working together between staff at both sites, they have now been brought much closer together to share good practice and this has benefited the provision at both sites. Key managers of GCE provision have visited a high performing sixth form college to gain new ideas and insights which they are now successfully introducing in Cornwall College. There have been a wide range of staff development activities and many changes have been made to improve students' experiences on their GCE AS and A level programmes. For some programmes, entry standards have been raised or amended to ensure that students have the best possible chance of success on their course. There have been new management structures introduced and greatly improved approaches to setting far reaching targets for students to motivate them to improve their performance.

These actions are already leading to improvements. The college now uses a commercial system that shows how well students perform compared to their expected performance predicted by their GCSE grades on entry. This data shows that performance at GCE A level overall has improved over the last three years and is now judged as good by the system. GCSE AS level performance has also improved and is now judged to be satisfactory by the system. While there are still a few GCE subjects with performance that is below the MLP, there are fewer than in previous years.

## Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing the promotion of cultural awareness and diversity in the curriculum?	Significant progress
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At the last monitoring visit, the college was judged to have made insufficient progress with regard to this aspect of its work. It has now made significant progress and has introduced a wide range of new and improved approaches to support the promotion of cultural awareness and diversity into the curriculum. The college appointed a coordinator for this work soon after the last monitoring visit who has responsibility across all the college sites. A strong focus now exists on cultural awareness and diversity in the self-assessment report. Cultural diversity and awareness are now included in the teaching and learning strategy and there are clear action plans to support improvements. A good range of teaching materials and links to further resources is available on the college's virtual learning environment (VLE), which are accessible to both staff and students. Some areas of the college continue to need further support and encouragement to become fully engaged in this work, but there has been very rapid progress in many areas of the college, and the work is showing definite benefits for students. In November 2008, the college held a Cultural Awareness day and is celebrating diversity with a week of activities in March 2009. In the summer term, the college is organising a three day event at the nearby Eden Project to promote cultural awareness and diversity to which all the schools in Cornwall are invited. The Students' Union is supporting this work well, and many students are involved in projects of their own choosing that the student union and the college support and publicise widely.

What progress has been made to develop further the college's work in Work Based Learning and Train to Gain?	Significant progress
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Significant improvements have been made in standards and achievements and the delivery of work based learning (WBL), and in the recruitment and delivery of Train to Gain. The overall success rates for WBL are significantly up by 10.4% at 75.4%, 11.5% above the current national average. Timely success rates have improved more slowly and are now at 50.5%, an improvement of just under 2%, further improvement is a priority for the college this year. Train to Gain success rates are good at 83%, an improvement of 3% from the previous year and recruitment has increased significantly from 24 learners last year to 376. Reliable performance data is tracked regularly to monitor framework achievement and timely completion. Cornwall College Business (CCB), an arm of the college set up to link with businesses, provides a single point of contact for employers to help them to recruit to these programmes. Employer engagement is more extensive and proactive with close monitoring of employer satisfaction levels. A well regarded recognition of

achievement awards ceremony is held annually and attended by over 100 local businesses. CCB has successfully established a corporate image for this aspect of college provision. It provides bespoke staff training and has established greater consistency for WBL and Train to Gain across the college's different departments.

### Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the standards of teaching and learning in areas where the college has identified this as a priority?	Reasonable progress
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The self-assessment report judges that teaching and learning is improving. Student surveys in the college show that students feel that the teaching they receive has improved over the last year. Reasonable progress has been made in improving the strength of the teaching and learning observation process at the college over the last year, resulting in greater reliability of the grading of sessions and more consistency to the procedures used. External observers are employed as a further aid to moderation and standardization. Almost 800 lesson observations were undertaken in 2007/08, providing a comprehensive view of the quality of teaching and learning on which the college can make plans for improvements. Lesson observations this year have recorded twice as many strengths (1218) as areas for improvement (758). Faculties have been given more responsibility for monitoring and improving their own teaching and learning profile and deploy a range of thoughtful, well devised strategies and resources to address any weaknesses seen in teaching. This support includes the use of teacher mentors, critical friends, peer observations, spontaneous 'walk in' visits and filming and sharing good practice. The education and training team provide a swift and effective intervention and support service, which departments can access when problems occur. However, there are still some areas of the college where weaker teaching remains. These are identified in the self-assessment report, and there are actions plans for improvements over the next year.

How has the college continued to develop the links between quality assurance and quality improvement?	Significant progress
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Progress in improving the quality of provision has proceeded swiftly and surely since the last monitoring visit, and is having a demonstrable effect on the quality of the provision, the learner experience and achievement. Many targets set for this period have already been exceeded. For example, rates of retention in 2008/09 are already 5% above the target set for this stage in the year. The strength of the quality assurance procedures shows that processes are firmly embedded and owned by staff across faculties and sites. The self-assessment process is inclusive and subject sector area self-assessments focus clearly on the way that key weaknesses of the previous year have been addressed; the strengths of the current provision; the key areas for improvement over the next year, and the department's capacity to improve. The college's quality improvement plan is detailed, with clear milestones and lines of

accountability. Evaluation notes record how far the college has progressed in achieving its targets and how the outcomes and success criteria will be demonstrated when these have been met. The college has a clear perception of how SSAs will improve over the next year based on their current performance. The college confidently predicts that the number of areas graded as good will more than double and that there will be three areas that will be judged to be outstanding. Their predictions are soundly based on their evidence and well argued.