

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Harrow College

Date of visit: 17 October 2007

### Context

Harrow is a medium sized tertiary college in the outer London borough of Harrow. In 2007/08, the college enrolled approximately 3,200 students aged 16 - 18 and 4,700 learners aged 19 or over, including around 330 work-based learners. In addition, there are 158 students who are under 16 years old. The college offers programmes in most sector subject areas. Collaboration between the college and local secondary schools has resulted, since 2006, in a collaborative partnership, known as the Harrow Collegiate, to deliver sixth form provision.

The last full inspection of Harrow College was in January 2006. Overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory, as were achievement and standards. Capacity to improve, quality of provision and leadership and management were good. Of the six curriculum areas inspected, three were good and three were satisfactory.

### Achievement and standards

To what extent do success rates for 2006/07 indicate continued improvements, across all levels and curriculum areas?	Insufficient progress
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Success rates for 2006/07, although improved in many areas, do not indicate an improvement trend across all levels and curriculum areas. On many programmes, the success rates reflect high retention but lower than average achievement. Data relating to short courses and English as a second language (ESOL) were not available at the time of the visit.

Success rates at level 1 for students aged 16-18 have been low over the last few years and this was identified as a weakness at the last inspection. In 2006/07, level 1 success rates for this age group improved but were still low at 60%. At level 2, success rates have remained stable for long courses, above national average for 16-18 year old students but below for those aged 19 or over. Success rates for NVQs at this level improved in 2006/07, particularly for the small group of students aged 16-18. Work-based learners taking NVQs generally achieved well, too. At GCSE, the proportion of students gaining higher grades improved in 2006/07.

Success rates for first diplomas in travel and tourism, art and design, media and performing arts were all significantly below national averages.

At level 3, success rates for long courses have risen for both age groups. In 2006/07, success rates for BTEC national certificates in art and design, media and business were all high. However, many of the GCE A level students do not achieve as well as would be expected, given their prior attainment. External analysis by the Advanced Level Performance System (ALPs) summarises performance as relatively weak. The success rates for GCE A level, at 90% for 16-18 year old students, have remained the same for the last three years. During this same period, the national average has been rising. The proportion of students gaining higher grades at GCE A level fell in 2006/07. GCE AS success rates recovered in 2006/07, after a dip in 05/06, and are broadly in line with national averages. However, the proportion gaining high grades fell and remains below average.

### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in helping staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning to good or better?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning. At the previous inspection most teaching was found to be at least satisfactory, although the quality of teaching and learning in lower level courses needed to be improved. Arrangements for lesson observations were comprehensive, but the findings were insufficiently used in course reviews. Managers now place greater emphasis on the use of course reviews as part of quality improvement. Reviews evaluate the quality of provision against the key questions in the Common Inspection Framework. Over 40 staff co-ordinate the findings of course reviews and these are incorporated into appropriate actions plans.

Changes have been made to the arrangements for classroom observations. Re-training of observers has led to greater consistency and more accurate evaluation. Focus for observation and support is now placed on teachers with observation grades lower than 2. A team of 12 senior and experienced tutors each take a case load of eight teachers with whom they work closely to provide support. This team includes four advanced practitioners who work with curriculum managers to identify and prioritise areas for improvement. The college has introduced faculty days for staff training to focus on teaching and learning and additional days for staff training for those teaching entry level and level 1 courses. Greater emphasis has been placed on peer observations to support the sharing of good practice. However, many of the measures are new and they have yet to make a full impact on improving students' success rates.

Given the current emphasis on the 'student voice', what progress has the college made in gathering and using students' views?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving its arrangements for gathering and using students' views since the previous inspection when the views of learners and staff were generally being used effectively. The college has an established student council which meets termly, and student executive meetings are held weekly. Two student representatives have been appointed to the college board. Student council members hold lunch-time surgeries in the refectory when students can raise issues.

The frequency of meetings between students and college staff provides sufficient opportunities for students to feed back their views. Extension of the council has enabled students who act as course representatives to meet with curriculum managers as part of the process for reviewing courses. For example, complaints by students about the unpopularity of discrete sessions for key skills have contributed to the embedding of key skills within theory and practical sessions. An annual programme of student perception surveys is completed, including the opportunity for students to feedback their views on-line. Student reviews provide complete coverage of all courses and incorporate all aspects of college life. Data from the evaluation of course surveys are included within the college self-assessment report and used appropriately to inform judgements.

#### Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the analysis and use of 'value added' data?	Insufficient progress
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The extent to which managers, teachers and students use information about 'value added' is too variable. Not all curriculum self-assessment reports use the available information effectively to analyse performance or inform planning. Students value highly the support they receive from teachers. However, target-setting with students to ensure that they achieve as well, if not better, than expected is not consistently rigorous. Senior managers have begun to address this issue and this year have introduced new posts - student achievement managers and student achievement team leaders - in a drive to focus tutorial support more on academic achievement. It is not possible, at this stage, to make judgements about the impact of this new arrangement.

What progress has been made in the development of employment partnerships?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in developing partnerships with employers. Inspectors at the previous inspection noted that staff had established good links with employers in health and social care, although in other areas these links and the opportunities for students to gain work experience were not well developed. The college has improved its strategies for employer engagement. There is greater recognition in its three-year development plan of the need for better employer engagement.

Employer engagement is now a standing agenda item for senior manager meetings. The college commits itself to supporting local and national skills needs priorities outlined in the annual plan of London West LSC.

Operational plans for employer engagement, with set targets, have been put in place for each curriculum area. The set targets were exceeded in 2005/06. The college has established a register with over 40 employer associates, companies which have agreed to work in partnership with the college to provide occupational expertise. In some cases, for example, employers sit as panel members to evaluate college courses. The college has engaged the services of an external agency to provide an increased number of work placements for students and to support them at work. The agency provides guidance to employers on the type of work activity which will support the course requirements. The college now has a register of over 500 local and national employers willing to provide services to supplement students' learning.

The college is actively involved in local consortia and partnerships to support learning and business needs. For example, the college is involved in the delivery of Train to Gain programmes to support lower-skilled council workers and to deliver bespoke training on-site to meet the workforce needs of local firms.

What progress has the college made in relation to recent workforce reforms?	Reasonable progress
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The college has responded well to workforce reforms. A small group of full-time teachers are working towards a teaching qualification and others have already qualified. Hourly- paid teachers are recruited through an agency and the college is providing teacher training for around 15 agency staff, who work regularly at the college.

Curriculum managers have been briefed on the reforms and staff have been directed towards the Institute for Learning website. At appraisal, in the summer term, teachers will discuss their continuing professional development needs. The college has a clear action plan for workforce development.

Those teaching ESOL are undertaking subject specialist teaching qualifications this year and increased support has been provided for newly qualified teachers in their first year.