

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college:       Huntingdonshire Regional College

Date of visit:         Tuesday 6 November 2007

### Context

Huntingdonshire Regional College is a small general further education college in Cambridgeshire. The main site is in the town of Huntingdon but there is also provision in St. Neots. Courses are offered in all but one of the LSC sector subject areas, with the most significant numbers of learners in preparation for life and work and health, public services and care. In 2005/06 the numbers of learners aged 16 to 18, and 19 or over, were 1,212 and 4,659 respectively.

Judged to be inadequate by Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate in 2002, the college was fully reinspected in March 2004. Inspectors found the overall provision to be adequate. Specifically, provision was good in three areas of learning, satisfactory in six, and unsatisfactory in just one area. Work-based learning remained unsatisfactory. The financial position of the college was an area for improvement.

### Achievement and standards

<p>At the AAV in October 2006, inspectors found that overall success rates were improving and at the national average. What progress has been made in improving overall success rates on long and short courses for learners of all ages since the last inspection?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Overall, the college has made reasonable progress in raising success rates. This is clearly the case for learners aged 16 to 18 on long courses, which is an expanding area of provision. However, in some areas, particularly for adult learners at levels 2 and 3, there is little discernible progress.

### Learners aged 16 to 18

Success rates for learners on long courses at all levels rose significantly in 2005/06. On the basis of completed data for 2006/07, the rate of improvement has slowed at levels 1 and 2, so that, overall, success rates are now broadly in line with the most recent national averages. Success rates for learners on short courses have not risen significantly and are just below the national average. By contrast, success rates for learners on very short courses, which attract more enrolments, are outstanding.

### Adult learners

Changes in success rates for learners on long courses presented a mixed picture in 2005/06. Success rates improved at level 1, were fairly static at level 2, and actually fell at level 3. Overall, success rates were just below the national average. On the basis of completed data for 2006/07, success rates are rising, particularly at level 1, but the overall rate will remain below the national average. Success rates for learners on short courses have not improved over the 3 years to 2006/07 and are below the national average, whereas learners on very short courses succeed in line with the 95% national average.

The self-assessment report is broadly accurate.

### Quality of provision

The arrangements for key skills were an area for improvement at the last inspection. What progress has been made in ensuring that key skills' provision is effective?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the arrangements for key skills. Although the self-assessment report for 2005/06 identifies some strengths in key skills, particularly the improvement in success rates, the position deteriorated in 2006/07 when key skills' success rates fell, and, at level 1, were very low.

Additional staff resources have now been provided. Three full-time key skills coordinators have recently been appointed. Each sector subject area will have a named coordinator responsible for the provision of key skills. Assignments are vocationally relevant. Key skills training is now scheduled early in work-based learning programmes and this is having a positive impact on framework completions rates for apprentices.

Tutors and assessors are encouraged to gain key skills qualifications. However, a full training needs analysis has yet to be completed to determine the amount of support which teachers need in order to support learners appropriately. Arrangements are in place to improve the monitoring and recording of key skills during reviews.

The most recent self-assessment makes several references to the need to improve tutorials. What progress has been made in addressing these issues?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress is being made by the college in addressing areas for improvement relating to tutorials identified through self-assessment. A range of actions have been taken. Actions to change tutorial arrangements began in 2006/07, including the creation of a new post, director of student services, which was filled in July 2007. A new model for tutorials for full-time students was implemented in September 2007 with the aim of providing a more consistent level of support for students. The tutorial programme is now provided by a team of student tutors, (formerly employed as mentors) rather than by teachers, as previously. Schemes of work and lesson plans are being developed. These contain more explicit connections with the Every Child Matters themes, but at present there is insufficient differentiation between the schemes for the various levels of study. The college is reviewing the arrangements to ensure that there are sufficient resources to enable all of the individual tutorials to be completed in a timely fashion. As the new tutorial arrangements have been in place for less than 3 months, it is too early to judge their impact or effectiveness.

Construction is a relatively new and 'rapidly expanding' sector subject area within the college. What progress has been made in addressing the significant areas for improvement noted in the December 2006 self-assessment report?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in response to areas for improvement identified through self-assessment of the construction provision. A newly-appointed learning director for construction has undertaken a complete review of the curriculum and has quickly gained accreditation for some additional courses. Learner numbers have increased and the deployment of staff is now better planned and more efficient.

Some provision has been subcontracted to a private training provider as it was recognised that the college had insufficient qualified assessors. Electrical installation learners have recently been invited back to the college to complete outstanding assessments and as a result have now successfully completed their qualifications. Arrangements for the performance management of staff and subcontractors have improved. Newly appointed staff are vocationally competent and are supported whilst undertaking appropriate teaching qualifications. A peer review with four partner colleges has been completed.

As many of these actions are recent it is too early to make a secure judgement about their impact on learners.

Work-based learning was unsatisfactory in 3 areas of learning at the last inspection. What progress has the college made in rectifying the weaknesses?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the quality of work-based learning. The good progress in improving framework completion rates noted at the last annual assessment visit slowed a little in 2006/07, but the overall success rate remains above the national average. The extent to which apprentices complete within the planned time period is below the national average.

A number of strategies have brought about improvement. The model for the provision of key skills has been revised. Initial assessment is completed at the time of initial interview, followed by an intensive week of college-based induction during which key skills are introduced.

The roles and responsibilities of staff have been more clearly defined with a greater focus on teaching and assessment by vocational teachers. Following the appointment of liaison officers, relations with employers and learners in the workplace have improved. The quality of teaching and learning has improved, including the better use of information and learning technology in hairdressing and beauty therapy, for example. Newly recruited staff receive appropriate support to undertake teaching qualifications. Arrangements for initial advice and guidance have improved. Monitoring of individual learner progress has also improved through the use of appropriate software to record achievements. This information is then used during reviews to agree action plans. Overall success rates are discussed each month by the senior management team.

## Leadership and management

The financial position of the college was judged to be an area for improvement at the 2004 inspection. The AAV in 2006 highlighted improvements made. What progress has been made in ensuring that the college is in a sound financial position?	Significant progress
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Significant progress in controlling costs and increasing revenues has put the college in a much stronger financial position than at the time of the last inspection. Better monitoring and control of part-time pay, whilst also improving average class sizes, has enabled pay as a proportion of income to fall from 72% in 2003/04 to 62% in 2006/07. The current ratio has moved from a very low figure to one in line with sector averages. The college now achieves satisfactory operating surpluses whereas it was in deficit at the last inspection. The accumulated deficit has been replaced by a modest reserve. The college meets its LSC targets and has increased the number of learners' aged 16 to 18 on long courses by one-third since the last inspection. Success rates for these learners have improved faster than the national rate. The college has also brought in some significant new funding, for example through Train to Gain provision. The college's financial category has improved. The college is now in a much better position to improve resources and to make significant strategic decisions about the college estate.