

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Huddersfield Technical College

Date of visit: Wednesday 10 October 2007

Context

Huddersfield Technical College is a large general further education (FE) college serving the town of Huddersfield and surrounding districts of Kirklees. Currently the main college site is located in the town centre but provision is also delivered in 21 community venues. In 2005/06 the college had 34,778 enrolments from 15,247 learners on roll. Approximately 25% of learners are 16-18 and 75% 19+. The college serves a diverse local community. Some 19.8% of learners are of minority ethnic origin. According to the OPDM index of deprivation 9 wards are in the 10% most deprived in England.

Unemployment stood at 2.6% in April 2007, slightly higher than the national average. Currently the college is going through a type B merger with Dewsbury College which if approved by the Secretary of State will be completed by August 2008.

Huddersfield Technical College was last inspected in February 2004. At that inspection, leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. In curriculum areas, the college was awarded three grade 2s, nine grade 3s and provision in construction was judged to be inadequate. In work-based learning, the college was awarded, 2 grade 3s, a grade 4 in construction and a grade 5 in hairdressing. Guidance and support were judged to be good, and educational and social inclusion were judged to be outstanding. At the subsequent re-inspection in January 2006 the provision in construction including work-based learning and hairdressing were both judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in embedding the college retention strategy and in improving college success rates?	Reasonable progress
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Staff are aware of the college retention strategy and are implementing appropriate improvement measures. These include the development of a whole college approach to what is expected of staff and learners, ("Striving for Excellence"), a more consistent application of college entry criteria, a

thorough analysis of performance data for different learner groups, the identification and timely support of learners at risk of not succeeding and close monitoring of the performance of courses judged to have under-performed previously. In-year learner retention rates show that retention at level 3 has improved in 2006/07 but at levels 1 and 2 the rates are broadly the same as for the previous year.

Success rate data for 2006/07 were not sufficiently complete at the time of the visit to enable a meaningful analysis. Success rates in 2005/06, for both adults and learners aged 16 to 18, were closer to the national averages than in the previous year but still slightly below them. At level 1 for 16-18 year olds the gap between the success rate and the national average is widening and currently the success rate is well below the national average. Success rates for students aged 16-18 at levels 2 and 3 and for adults at levels 1, 2 and 3 are either keeping pace with national averages or rising at a faster rate than them.

<p>Has performance in the following sector subject areas improved: science and maths at levels 1 and 2, leisure and travel at all levels, languages at level 1, preparation for life and work at level 1, business administration at level 1?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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In science and maths at level two, success rates were low but improved significantly to 64% in 2005/06, slightly below the national rate. College data in 2006/07 confirm a further improvement at 68%. At level three, success rates have been very low up to 2005/06 when they were only 47%. Good improvements have been made in 2006/07 according to college data which indicate success rates of 59%.

In leisure and travel at level one success rates have improved in 2006/07 to 67% according to college data. At level two success rates have declined but recovered to 59% in 2005/06. College data in 2006/07 confirms success rates have been maintained at 60% but they remain below the previous year's national average. At level three success rates have declined but recovered to 65% in 2005/06 in line with national rates. College data in 2006/07 confirm that success rates have dipped again at 59%.

In languages at level one success rates have been very low in all years up to 2005-06 when they were only 36%. College data for long courses in 2006/07 indicates no improvement but in this area the data were incomplete at the time of the visit.

In preparation for life and work at level one, success rates improved up to 2005/06 when they were 60% but still below national rates. College data in 2006/07 indicates no improvement but in this area the data were incomplete at the time of the visit.

In business administration and law there has been slow progress in improving success rates at level one up to 2005/06 when they were only 52%. College data in 2006/07 confirm that success rates have improved to 60% in line with the national average for the previous year.

Are framework success rates on apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and progression rates on entry to employment (E2E) continuing to improve?	Reasonable progress
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Overall advanced apprenticeship success rates are satisfactory at 56% and timely success rates continue to improve. Good progress has been made on improving overall apprenticeship success rates which are now 73% well above national rates. More apprenticeship learners are achieving by their planned end dates. Small improvements have been made to NVQ 3 success rates but good improvements to NVQ 2, generally NVQ success rates are in line with framework success.

Sustained improvements have been made to construction overall success rates for advanced apprenticeships at 68% and apprenticeships at 79% both well above national rates. On hairdressing and hospitality apprenticeship overall success rates are improving and are satisfactory at 66%. In business administration apprenticeship success rates are being maintained at 75%, well above national rates. In engineering there is slow progress improving advanced apprenticeship success rates, currently they are only 37% significantly below national rates. Timely success rates are very low and have declined. However good progress has been made in improving apprenticeship success rates in engineering which have more than doubled to 74%.

The college leads an Entry to Employment partnership. Progression rates are satisfactory at 50% but progress on improving them has been slow. Progression to employment without training is too high. The college has recently secured a large Train to Gain contract leading a consortium of providers. Success rates to date are good.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in improving the teaching of theory and in the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching?	Reasonable progress
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The college recognised, in its SAR for 2005/06, that the above two issues are key development points. Around 50 interactive white boards have been purchased and professional development is ongoing, with some 64 teachers trained in their use in the last ten months. There is increased use of the college virtual learning environment. The college has established a team of three advanced practitioner teachers and eight subject learning coaches. These staff represent the college at QIA regional meetings and are engaged in a variety of professional development activities with college teachers.

The college recognises in its draft SAR for 2006/07 that more needs to be done to ensure practice is uniformly good across the college in these two aspects of teaching and learning.

The college observation of teaching scheme has been revised. The grade profile derived from internal observations looks to be over-stating the quality of teaching when compared with other evidence such as the teaching grade profile derived from the college's internal inspection process and the college's overall success rates. Moderation is to be undertaken shortly using external consultants.

Does the academic and pastoral support provided through the tutorial process enable learners to make good progress?	Reasonable progress
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The college has an appropriate tutorial entitlement which applies to all full time and substantial part time learners. Full time students have termly one-to-one reviews and part time learners two per year.

Group tutorials take place weekly but in a few areas, for example access studies group tutorials are appropriately integrated into the curriculum. Schemes of work for group tutorials are not standardised but there are several good examples on the college portal. The individual learning plan (ILP) is completed early and is used to good effect in one-to-one reviews. Targets set within the ILPs are challenging but achievable. Learners have a copy of their ILPs and can recall their targets. Progress towards learners targets are monitored at weekly group tutorials. Tutors are able to make appropriate referrals to a pastoral team of specialised support staff, in addition to 1.5 full time equivalent councillors and good links to external agencies. Most tutorials are timetabled and take place as planned. Attendance in group tutorials is slightly higher than the college average attendance. Learners value tutorials and feel that they help them to make good progress. Feedback from learners confirms that 75% rate tutorial support as good or very good.

Although tutorials are incorporated into the teaching observation process, the findings are not routinely used to evaluate their quality. Some audits and checking of ILPs and tutorial records take place on a local level but these are not coordinated centrally. A mentoring process has been developed where experienced tutors support new teachers recently assigned to course tutor roles.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in continuing to widen participation and in improving the performance of learners from ethnic minority backgrounds?	Significant progress
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The college is building on the assessment made at the last full inspection that its response to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. It is very active in its work with disadvantaged groups, through, for example, Saturday clubs for young people who are unlikely, without positive action, to progress to further education. It also has outreach work in areas of disadvantage, it works with a large number of 14-16 learners who are disadvantaged, and leads the partnership of Entry to Employment providers. A high proportion of the college's 16-18 cohort lives in areas of severe disadvantage. Learner performance data are analysed in detail to assess the performance of different groups. Data provided by the college shows that the performance in 2005/06 of learners from different minority ethnic groups is improving at broadly the same rate as for the college as a whole, although most groups perform less well than the college average.

The success rate of the large number of Pakistani heritage learners aged 16-18 improved by more than that for this age group for the college as a whole and was slightly above the college average in 2005/06.

Is the course review and evaluation process effective in improving the provision? How are learners views incorporated into the process?	Reasonable progress
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The course review and evaluation process effectively informs self-assessment. The process is mainly summative but other activities ensure that review and monitoring is on-going, for example the monthly monitoring of provision between the vice principal and heads of school. Courses causing concern are effectively identified and supported. The proportion of courses causing concern has not reduced but this is partly because the retention thresholds are appropriately increased year-on-year. Courses causing concern are sometimes paired with high performing courses and this has helped to share good practice. Most course reviews result in well formulated action plans to remedy areas for improvement. Course review meetings incorporate the views of the whole course team. Some course teams have learner representatives but this is not consistent. Learner and employer views are normally fed in through the analysis of feedback and evidence is often quoted within the reviews. During the current year learner focus groups are being established but it is too soon to judge the impact of these. The process and progress towards action plans is closely monitored by the quality manager and heads of school. When courses have not responded with appropriate improvements appropriate action has been taken to close them or find alternative provision.

The course review and evaluation process has had some impact on improving the provision. After very poor performance in sports studies and public services, performance recovered to the bench mark, but in a few instances improvements have not been sustained. Retention is still too low on many courses. A few courses have been causing concern for too long.

What progress has been made in ensuring staff development is appropriate to need, that it supports new teachers well and contributes to the achievement of whole college priorities?	Reasonable progress
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The last inspection judged that the observation of teaching and learning programme was not used systematically to inform staff development. Since then the college has linked teaching observation closely to the performance management system. The needs of staff identified at the performance management meeting are fed into staff development activity. Staff development also addresses the needs identified by senior managers through self assessment, during college development planning and on an ongoing basis. Heads of schools are allocated staff development budgets which they can use to address development issues particular to their schools. The new teachers interviewed said that they received good support, both during their induction and afterwards. They were very positive about working at the college. The draft SAR for 2006/07 recognises that sharing of good practice should be placed on a more systematic basis and that the accelerating pace of development in ILT requires a more coordinated college response.