

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Riverside Halton College

Date of visit: 27 November 2007

Context

Riverside Halton College is a general further education college with a sixth form campus operating on four sites in Halton. The college was created from the merger of Halton College and Widnes & Runcorn Sixth Form College in August 2006. The merger was a result of the Strategic area review of Halton that identified Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College as a failing Sixth Form College with poor achievement rates and poor financial health. Halton College had interim principals before and after the merger. The current principal was appointed in June 2007.

The college is currently developing its accommodation strategy. This will focus on the establishment of the college on three sites, and include a full re-build of the Kingsway campus and a significant refurbishment and part new build at Cronton. Each campus will have a unique identity; Riverside Sixth Form Centre is now established. Restructuring is complete, adverse publicity in the local press following the merger has affected recruitment of A level students.

Riverside Halton College has not yet been inspected. Halton College was inspected in 2002 and re-inspected in 2004. Widnes & Runcorn Sixth Form College was inspected in 2006 and was found to be inadequate it has not been re-inspected.

Achievement and standards

<p>What action has been taken and what progress has there been in raising student success rates? Has the college been successful in improving the outcomes for A and AS level students?</p>	<p>Insufficient</p>
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Many actions are being taken to improve success rates but there is no clear overall strategy for improving retention, achievement and value added which is shared with and understood by staff.

Attendance support officers are proactive in following up attendance and college data indicates an improvement in attendance and retention. Students confirm that the college operates a rigorous system of investigating absences. Course teams monitor learner performance regularly throughout the year. Information advice and guidance for A level students has been improved. Entry criteria are set and used. The college introduced a new system for student support at the sixth form centre in September 2007. Workshops have been introduced at the sixth form centre for students to receive additional subject support from academic staff. Schemes of work and assessment strategies have been revised. Data is accurate and well used by college managers to monitor recruitment, retention and achievement.

Many of these measures are new and have not yet impacted on students' success rates. College estimates for the success rates for 2006-7 indicate that success rates for long courses at levels 2 and 3 (16-18) and at level 2 (adults) are close to the national averages for similar colleges. At level 1 (16 - 18) and at L1 and 3 (adults) they are below the national averages. Recruitment to Train to Gain has been good but success rates are low, apprentices achievement of frameworks are improving but are still low.

The commercial system for measuring value-added shows that the overall institutional value-added-performance for advanced level subjects is improving, and was satisfactory in 2006-7. However, the LSC funded value added system shows significant under-performance in both 2005-6 and 2006-7.

Attendance has improved by 3 %. There are indications that there has been a small improvement in retention so far this year.

Quality of provision

<p>Has the proportion of good or better teaching continued to improve and has inadequate teaching reduced? Is there improvement across all sector subject areas?</p>	<p>Reasonable</p>
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Much work has been done to improve teaching and learning at the college. Peer referencing with Oldham, Knowsley and Liverpool community college is well established and productive and continues to have an impact. Good practice is shared within college and between partners.

The college has published these actions in a strategy “improving teaching and learning in 2007/08”. Much activity has taken place but it is too early to judge the full impact. Clear targets for the improvement of teaching over a 3-year timeframe have been set and shared with staff.

Observation of teaching and learning is rigorous, and supported by staff development for observers and teachers. The college supports teachers with satisfactory or unsatisfactory observation grades to improve. The work of advanced teaching and learning practitioners (ATLP) has been enhanced and more ATLPs have been recruited and trained. Teachers who achieved a grade 1 last year could opt out of being observed in 07/08. These teachers are required to support colleagues to improve. This allows the college to focus resources on satisfactory or unsatisfactory lessons. The college has recently introduced Learning Trios, teachers work in groups of three to improve their teaching. Staff were very positive about the learning trios. Some managers are currently reviewing the success of the Trio system. Staff development focused on teaching and learning so far this year has included use of ILT, questioning techniques and differentiation.

The observation grades awarded to agency staff was a particular concern to the college. Agency staff are supported and to improve may attend college staff development sessions, grades awarded to the lessons of agency staff have improved.

Managers moderate lesson observations reports. An overall college report, the lesson observation profile is produced. However, the summary does not adequately identify key aspects of teaching and learning for the college. Opportunities for planning staff development are lost. In some curriculum areas for example hair and beauty where 84% of teaching is good or better this is not identified as a strength of the provision. There is low attendance in many of the lessons observed. The college is working to improve learners’ attendance but does not identify low attendance as a weakness in lessons.

Records of some lesson observations, including the lesson summary, do not focus sufficiently on key aspects of teaching and learning.

How successful has the college been in bringing about improvement in curriculum areas identified as unsatisfactory in the previous inspection?	Insufficient
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The college is realistic in its assessment that some SSAs remain unsatisfactory. Self-assessment process is inclusive and builds up from course reviews carried out by course teams.

Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) are devised for each SSA and are monitored regularly by managers. However, some termly QIPs, used by curriculum teams, lack clear accountabilities and targets. Key issues are prioritized and an Academic Recovery Plan of the main priorities is produced. Senior managers closely monitor progress with the ARP and progress is reported to governors. The Teacher Education area was put into recovery in 2006, significant action has been taken to bring about improvement, in part due to the reorganisation of staff. The college self assessment indicates a significant improvement but, it is too early for inspectors to judge the full impact of these changes. Management of A level provision has been restructured and a new senior post holder is to be appointed. The college in the draft SAR for 2006/07 judges A level provision to be improved but evidence particularly success rates may not support this.

Leadership and management

How successful has the merger and restructuring been managed? What has been the impact on learners and staff?	Reasonable
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The new structure has been introduced in 2006/07. Conditions of service have been harmonised. The college is currently recruiting two senior post holders one leading A level development and the other employer engagement and vocational provision. Staff report the new management structure is supportive and that they have been empowered to take responsibility for their teaching and students in their curriculum areas. Students are very positive about their experience for 07/08 to date especially compared with 06/07, when there were issues of continuity of teachers at SFC. Some developments such as the use of non-academic staff as personal tutors for A level students need further embedding and evaluation. Considerable savings have been made from the restructure, improvements have been made to building and the college has identified good practice from both predecessor organisations in the revision of its policies and procedures. It is too early to judge the full benefits of the restructure.