

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Northampton College

Date of visit: 28 February 2008

Context

Northampton College is a large general further education (FE) college situated in the East Midlands. It was created by the merger of the original Northampton College with Daventry Tertiary College on 1 August 2004. During 2006/07 there were 3,794 learners on full-time programmes and 6,165 studying on a part-time basis. The college offers provision in 14 out of the 15 Learning and Skills Council sector subject areas. The college's mission is 'to provide our community with the opportunity to develop through learning'.

Achievement and standards

How successful has the college been in improving the achievement and standards of learners in 2006/07?	Reasonable progress
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The overall success rate on long courses increased from 63% in 2005/06 to 67% in 2006/07. The overall success rate for learners aged 16-18 on long courses increased by 3 percentage points to 66% in 2006/07 and is likely to be slightly below the national average. Success rates for 16-18 year olds improved by 5 percentage points and 6 percentage points at levels 1 and 3 respectively, but remained unchanged at level 2. The overall success rate for adult learners increased by 4 percentage points in 2006/07 and is likely to be broadly similar to the national average. Success rates for adults improved by 10, 2 and 5 percentage points at levels 1, 2 and level 3 respectively. Success rates on work-based learning programmes in 2006/07 improved significantly for advanced apprentices but remained largely unchanged for apprentices. Success rates for key skills declined slightly in 2006/07 and remain an area for improvement. College data show that around 3% more learners had been retained on their programmes at the time of the monitoring visit in 2007/08 compared to a similar time period in 2006/07.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in increasing the proportion of teaching which is good or better?	Reasonable progress
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The college has restructured management roles to have clearer and stronger responsibilities for improving teaching and learning. It has improved the rigour of observations of teaching and learning. Managers analyse the results of observations and provide training in areas for improvement, particularly for any teachers whose lessons were not graded as good or better. Additional advanced practitioners have been appointed, and subject learning coaches put in place to improve standards in individual subjects. A coaching and development network is now in place to share good practice and provide support to teachers, including part-time members of staff. The college has established an ILT facility for teachers which provide learning resources, addresses of useful websites, teaching and learning activities and examples of good practice including schemes of work and lesson plans.

What progress has been made in integrating language, literacy and numeracy support into full-time programmes?	Reasonable progress
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The 2006/07 self-assessment report indicated that the integration of language, literacy and numeracy skills into full-time programmes was an area for improvement. Following an audit into the extent of integration, the college appointed new managers and developed the roles of existing managers to ensure greater focus on these skills in full-time programmes. Since September 2007, some subject schemes of work and lessons plans have been cross-referenced to learners' language, literacy and numeracy requirements. The college provides teachers with training on how to link language, literacy and numeracy to particular subjects. At the time of the monitoring visit, however, the college had not formally assessed the impact of these arrangements.

How successful has the college been in using target-setting to improve the progress made by learners?	Reasonable progress
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There have been steady improvements made to the progress review arrangements for learners since the last inspection. The college introduced an

electronic individual learning plan (e-ILP) for all full-time learners in 2006/07. In its first year, the e-ILP was used for around one-third of all full-time learners, but this has increased and is now in place for around three-quarters of full-time learners and is also used on some part-time courses. In areas where the e-ILP is not yet used, a similar paper-based version is employed. The e-ILP is set up during induction with targets for achievement being negotiated on the basis of prior attainment. Progress towards targets is monitored during personal reviews that take place at least three times each year. Each review involves developing an action plan to support learners to achieve their targets. Although the actions in these plans have generally improved in terms of clarity and focus, a significant proportion are still not sufficiently specific or measurable. The key advantages of the e-ILP system are that it aids monitoring and quality assurance of progress reviews, and facilitates communication. At present, however, methods of measuring the impact of reviews on the progress made by learners are underdeveloped.

What progress has the college made in assessing and improving the impact of additional learning support?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection, inspectors found that the uptake of additional learning support was low and few systems were in place to assess the impact of support. All full-time and substantive part-time learners now receive an initial assessment of their additional learning support needs. Support is put in place promptly and includes individual and group support outside of lessons, and help in lessons depending on learners' needs. The take-up of support has improved significantly since the last inspection from around one-third to approximately three-quarters of learners in the current year. The college now analyses success rates of learners receiving support on the basis of each course and takes action if there are issues. The overall success rate for learners receiving support for learning difficulties and/or disabilities was the same as for the college as a whole in 2006/07.

Leadership and management

How successful has the college been in improving the use of targets in quality improvement plans?	Reasonable progress
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Curriculum quality improvement plans are reviewed formally three times each year. Performance against targets is now measured for attendance, observations of teaching and learning, learner satisfaction, and retention,

achievement and success rates. Quality improvement plans have generally improved in terms of their focus on the experiences of learners, measurable outcomes and impact of the provision. In order to make further improvements, the college has introduced a wide range of quantifiable indicators in 2007/08 to assess the performance of curriculum areas and cross-college activities. These indicators are used to assess the quality of provision, monitor equality of opportunity and inform self-assessment. Plans are in place to make further use of these indicators to set a wider range of targets in quality improvement plans.