

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Lincoln College

Date of visit: 31 March 2008

Context

Lincoln College is a general further education college in Lincolnshire. The college operates from its main site in Lincoln and also has sites in Newark and Gainsborough. In 2006/07, the college had around 10,500 learners, of which around 30% were learners aged 16 to 18 years and 70% were adult learners. The college offers provision in almost all of the Learning and Skills Council sector subject areas. The college's mission is 'raising aspirations, realising potential, delivering success'.

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 remained largely unchanged in 2006/07 and is likely to be slightly below the national average. One factor behind this static success rate is the impact of the merger between Lincoln College and Newark and Sherwood College in January 2007. The success rate for learners enrolled at the predecessor Lincoln College increased by 2% in 2006/07, but the equivalent rate for those originally enrolled at Newark and Sherwood College decreased by 5%. It is likely that the management information system at Newark and Sherwood College may have exaggerated success rates slightly in 2005/06 with a consequent suppression of success rates in 2006/07. Much work has been done to improve the accuracy of data in the merged college and work is continuing to further improve the rigour of data management, particularly at course level.

The overall success rate for learners aged 16 to 18 years on long courses was largely unchanged in 2006/07. A small increase was noted at level 1, but there was a decline at level 2, mainly due to an underperforming GCSE progression programme. This programme has now been amended and is subject to very close monitoring during 2007/08. The overall success rate for

adult learners was also unchanged in 2006/07. The success rate for adults on level 1 programmes was significantly below the national average and is an area for improvement. The college has made several changes to this provision in 2007/08 in order to improve retention and pass rates. The proportion of learners retained on level 1 courses in 2007/08 at the time of the monitoring visit was 90%. The equivalent retention rate for the whole of 2006/07 was 75%. Success rates on work-based learning programmes improved significantly in 2006/07 and were above the national averages.

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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In July 2007, the college held a training event for all teaching staff aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. This event was based on the areas for improvement identified during internal lesson observations at the predecessor Lincoln College and any issues derived from the inspection report for Newark and Sherwood College. In 2007/08 the college extended the robust lesson observation system that had previously been used in Lincoln to include all three campuses, all community venues and all staff. The outcomes of lesson observations for 2007/08, which have just been completed, will be used to establish a baseline for further improvements in subsequent years. Key changes implemented in 2007/08 include additional training days for teaching staff, with training events more focused on the required main areas for improvement. Stronger links are in place between lesson observations and staff appraisal and professional development. Managers monitor closely the action plans of curriculum areas with regard to improving teaching and learning, and more use is being made of learners' views to assess the quality of lessons. An initial review of internal observation records for 2007/08 suggests that that progress has been made in addressing many of the specific areas for improvement identified in 2006/07 and that the proportion of good or better lessons has increased.

How successful has the college been in improving its key skills provision?	Reasonable progress
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At Lincoln, data show that key skills success rates have improved significantly at all levels between 2005/06 and 2006/07. However, the different processes used at Newark prevent meaningful conclusions being drawn from merged

college data. Since merger, the college has focused on harmonising the significantly different arrangements for key skills at Newark and Lincoln. The college now has regular standardisation meetings and uses the same awarding body across all its sites. Additional staff development has been offered to staff at the Newark site to support them in embedding key skills in the curriculum. Good resources and effective strategies for key skills provision are shared across the college. Course tutors are now responsible for key skills provision within their programmes, and school managers carefully monitor success rates.

How effectively are learners who have recently arrived from Eastern Europe being supported in learning the English language?	Reasonable progress
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Around 95% of learners on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses are from Eastern Europe. The college works hard to meet the needs of migrant shift workers. The same lessons are offered in two different sessions each day, both in the college and on employers' premises. Learning resources are either adapted to fit the learners' contexts, or designed around employers' own sources of information. In one mutually beneficial arrangement, native English speakers join Eastern European learners for lessons. Native speakers learn more about grammar, and ESOL learners gain confidence in pronunciation, speaking and listening. Many learners benefit from information technology packages, through which they develop and reinforce skills at their own pace. The college is well advanced in its plans to offer units of accredited learning to ESOL learners so that those only staying in the area for a short time will be able to achieve some units. It also makes good use of personal and community development learning funds to engage learners through short, flexible courses until they enrol on accredited qualifications.

What progress has the college made in extending the range of entry level provision?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in extending its range of entry level provision for learners. Since merger the college has created new posts, including those at director and programme manager level, to promote a well focused and coherent strategy for entry level programmes. Curriculum managers now meet regularly and work as a team. Entry level provision is carefully aligned to the employment needs of the area, especially in

construction, care, retail, enterprise and horticulture. Another four areas are planned for 2008/09. Staff development in the provision of literacy and numeracy through vocational programmes is well advanced. Learners receive thorough initial advice and guidance about progression routes available to them, and this is reinforced in regular tutorials. Over three-quarters of learners completing entry level programmes in 2006/07 progressed onto other college courses in 2007/08. An increasing number of qualifications are now offered, and on non-accredited programmes learners' progress is now monitored through formal recognition and recording of progress and achievement. It is, however, too early to assess the outcomes of these measures.

How successful has the college been in improving progress reviews for learners?	Reasonable progress
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The college introduced electronic individual learning plans (e-ILPs) in September 2006 and these are now used by all full-time learners, all work-based learners and an increasing proportion of part-time learners. In addition, the attendance of learners and their marks for work completed are recorded on an electronic mark book. Progress on some aspects of a learner's programme may be recorded separately for awarding body purposes. Progress is discussed with personal tutors at least twice each term, and action plans are reviewed and updated. The quality of e-ILPs is reviewed regularly and actions for improvement identified. Some individual tutorials are observed, but this is not an annual process unlike the observation of teaching and learning. Use of e-ILPs has helped to improve communication between teachers, learners, personal tutors, support staff and parents. Staff training has also improved the quality of target setting in e-ILPs. There is, however, scope for further improvement in the setting and monitoring of targets to promote progress and monitor the quality of provision.