

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Royal National College for the Blind (RNC)  
4 March 2008

### Context

The RNC is an independent specialist residential college with charitable status, and is a company limited by guarantee. The college provides education and training for learners who are primarily blind and visually impaired. Some learners have additional needs which include medical and mental health needs. Some 6% of learners have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD)

The college is located in Hereford in 25 acres of grounds and is in easy reach of the city. There are 115 learners funded by the Learning and Skills Council; 15 funded by Education & Learning Wales. Two of the adult learners are day students. A contract for 60 adult learners is in place with the residential training unit (RTU) of the Department for Work and Pensions.

There have been recent changes to the RTU contract and adult learners on these programmes undertake courses lasting up to 12 months. Programmes for RTU adult learners are focused on them gaining employment by the end of the course. All learners have individualised programmes which all have core programmes for literacy, numeracy, information, advice and guidance, work related learning, ICT, independent learning skills and mobility and can also follow pre-vocational, vocational and academic subjects.

### Achievement and standards

How well developed are the systems to track progress of learners against their previous levels of attainment?	Reasonable progress
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Progress has been made in ensuring that pre-entry and baseline assessments clearly identify learners' starting points and predicted learning objectives for learners to achieve within a given timescale. The recently introduced electronic system for tracking learners' progress ensures it is regularly reviewed and updated. This system has the potential to provide accurate information to assess individual and overall learner progress over time. It will also provide comparisons of progress learners make in subject areas and provide useful strategic management and curriculum review information. However, objectives set for learners are not always measurable

and it is too early to evaluate the impact this new system will have on improving learner outcomes.

#### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing the provision of work related skills to improve destination outcomes for learners?	Significant Progress
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An employment strategy was introduced in July 2006 which provides a clear focus on improving progression into employment for RTU funded learners. Work experience opportunities have increased and various initiatives and projects including social enterprise activities has greatly enhanced learners' confidence and development of work related and job seeking skills. These initiatives, together with improved links with local employers have resulted in greater numbers of learners finding employment. In 2006/07 more than twice the number of RTU learners gained employment on leaving the course compared to 2005/06.

How much progress has been made in developing staff expertise in autism to ensure support for learners with ASD is effective?	Significant progress
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Staff development and training in autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) has resulted in a greater awareness of learners' needs and improved approaches and strategies being deployed to ensure learners make good progress. To date 33% of all staff have received training. Learners with ASD achieve similar destination outcomes to those of their peers.

#### Leadership and management

Have the strategies for gathering learners' views been successful in increasing their involvement in directing their own learning and in improving the quality of provision?	Reasonable progress
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There is an extensive range of approaches adopted to secure learners' views. Surveys and feedback obtained from learners during the monitoring visit indicate that they are very positive about the quality of provision the college provides, especially in relation to the high levels of support they receive. They play an active part in developing their own goals, objectives and targets, although report that opportunities to record their views are limited due to constraints they have in recording their comments on the electronic reviews. The college is developing ways of improving the gathering of objective and accurate views of learners. This is difficult given the nature of learners' visual impairments, the unavailability of suitable computer software and reliance on others to record their views for them. However,

the college are very committed to finding a solution and are linking with other organisations and specialists to try to address these issues. Although some improvements have been made as a result of learner consultation, learners met with during the monitoring visit report that the vehicles in place to express their opinions, such as the students union and learner forums, are insufficiently productive and do not fully take into account the views of all learners. A minority also feel that programmes designed to improve their employment skills and participation in enrichment activities are too inflexible and do not take into account their individual needs, interests and aspirations well enough.

Is the college fully compliant with equalities legislation and safeguarding?	Significant progress
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The college is fully compliant with legislation and safeguarding procedures are implemented effectively. Equality and diversity issues are well embedded within job descriptions for all staff. All staff and governors receive training and the disability equality scheme is very effectively linked to strategic planning and human resource policies and procedures. There is a greater proportion of learners and staff from ethnic minority backgrounds than within the local area. According to the college's analysis, there is no difference between achievement rates of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds compared to those of other learners.

How much progress has been made in improving the college's teaching accommodation since the last inspection?	Significant progress
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The college has a comprehensive and detailed strategy to improve teaching resources and accommodation. This includes a large capital investment to provide an impressive up to date sport and remedial therapy centre and new high quality residential building for learners situated across the road from the main site. The building of the sports and remedial therapy centre is underway. It will greatly improve sports accommodation and provide industry standard training facilities and equipment to enable learners to gain enhanced work experience opportunities. Improvements have also been made to the existing accommodation with includes much improved facilities for art and specially adapted kitchen space and equipment for independence skills development. Plans are in place to renovate existing residential accommodation into a dedicated regional assessment centre and to provide a new building for creative and performing arts provision.