

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Norton Radstock College

Date of visit: 7 October 2008

### Context

Norton Radstock College is a general further education college in a semi-rural location 10 miles south of Bath in north-east Somerset. The college recruits from areas of social disadvantage where there are high proportions of adults with poor literacy and numeracy. The college's minority ethnic population is just above the very low proportion of minority ethnic inhabitants locally. The college provides courses in 12 of the 15 sector subject areas (SSA) and has a small work-based learning provision. In 2006/07, there were 995 students aged 16 to 18 and 4,131 adults making a total of 1,609 full-time equivalent students.

The college was previously inspected in May 2007. Overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management were graded satisfactory. Three curriculum areas were graded satisfactory and one good.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates since the previous inspection?	Insufficient progress
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In 2005/06 the overall long qualification success rate for the college was slightly below the national average and success rates were at least at the national average in most SSAs. This overall success rate declined to 4% below the national average in 2006/07 and they were below average in nine of the twelve sector subject areas. The success rate at level 1 on long qualifications was 7% below the national average in 2005/06 and this declined to 13% below average in 2006/07. The success rate at level 2 improved from 1% to 3% above the national average between 2005/06 and 2006/07. At level 3 there was a very slight improvement over the two years but the success rate remained slightly below the national average.

Data is not yet finalised for 2007/08 as certificates for all qualifications have not yet been received from awarding bodies. College records indicate strongly that the level 1 success rate is likely to be well below average, but slightly above average at levels 2 and 3. Data indicates that all SSAs will have much improved success rates and they

will be satisfactory or better, with the exception of Preparation for life and work where they are predicted to be well below average.

## Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing a more thorough lesson observation scheme that can be used to improve the quality and consistency of teaching?	Significant progress
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The college has had a system in place for observing teaching and learning for three years, and a database of detailed information from the observations which have taken place over that period. Following the previous inspection, the college carried out substantially more observations, as part of its drive to improve the quality of learning as well as teaching, and to increase the proportion of outstanding lessons. More rigour and consistency in judgements has been made by increasing the number of paired observations. This has led to a change in the attitude of teachers towards lesson observation; the process is now seen as supportive and as a means of sharing good practice, rather than threatening. Although the largest numbers of observations have been carried out in curriculum areas with poorer performance, teachers have responded positively and results have improved. Work with three other colleges to establish peer review and benchmarking was presented at the Association of Colleges conference in October 2007.

Judgements on teachers' performance contribute to their evidence for appraisal. Teachers' development needs identified through observation are discussed with Heads of School, and teachers are given the opportunity to address these needs before their next appraisal. Support for teachers whose performance is no better than satisfactory has helped to raise teachers' aims. Teachers are no longer satisfied with a 'satisfactory' judgement and are helped to improve through focused workshops, the use of subject learning coaches, and a mentoring scheme.

Courses which have had a substantial programme of observations have shown improved success rates.

What progress has been made in improving target setting and planning for individual learning?	Reasonable progress
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Target-setting and planning for individual learning has been improved by giving learners greater responsibility for their individual learning plans (ILPs). New group tutorials have more time allocated, so tutors can work with individual learners to achieve their targets and ILPs. Learners are generally clear about their targets and find the feedback from their written work helpful in setting future targets. Staff and students have been working to improve target setting, ensuring targets are specific and time bound. An improved learner tracking system helps to raise learners' aims as well as their performance. Most learners have an initial assessment which guides

them in their choice of course, establishes any support needs and identifies preferred learning styles. Learners talk confidently about their learning styles and are able to discuss the implications of different styles in tutorial sessions.

The virtual learning environment is well-established and learners are using it confidently in a few curriculum areas. However it is less well developed in others and ILPs have not yet been changed to allow for less teacher input and more reliance on learners taking responsibility for their own learning.

Work experience is under-developed in some curriculum areas and learners who would benefit from it as part of their learning programme may not always be able to meet this need fully.

### Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the identification of key areas for improvement?	Reasonable progress
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Curriculum managers use a wide range of evidence when evaluating the performance of their areas throughout the year and at the end of each year. Evidence includes data on student recruitment, learners' retention, achievement, attendance and progression rates, student feedback through focus groups and questionnaires, external verifier reports and feedback from employers. The college works with a wide range of employers and curriculum managers are fully aware of the importance of meeting employer needs in order to best prepare students for employment. Improved tracking and monitoring systems enable the early identification of students who are not making sufficient progress on their courses. All curriculum managers receive regular data packs containing well-presented information about the performance of their area. Student questionnaire outcomes are scrutinised carefully but early leavers are not asked to complete exit questionnaires. The quality improvement plan is very detailed but is not sufficiently specific in identifying intended outcomes.

What progress has been made in implementing prompt and effective actions which have brought about improvements?	Reasonable progress
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The college has recently expanded its curriculum offer to better align it with student needs. Construction courses have been introduced in the last year along with pre-entry to employment and pre-apprenticeship programmes. The college is also engaged in the pilot for the Foundation Learning Tier. Heads of School are held accountable for the performance of their areas of responsibility and attend quarterly review meetings with senior managers. In addition to the quarterly reviews, Heads of Schools provide monthly progress reports to senior managers highlighting any students who are falling behind. Senior managers rigorously monitor departmental

actions and the progress made by underperforming students, but this system was not successful at preventing low performance in Preparation for life and work in 2007/08. Useful staff development courses include dealing with challenging behaviour and there is more encouragement for the professional development of staff. Heads of School attend monthly management meetings which are sometimes used for the sharing of good practice. Some curriculum managers have made helpful changes to the way they operate, such as grouping staff according to their teaching focus by qualification in order to improve communication. Others have made provision more flexible for students and altered timetables in response to student requests. Another area has undertaken a full review of the curriculum to better match its level and content to that of student ability and interest.