

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Harrow College
Date of visit: 24 September 2008

Context

Harrow is a medium sized tertiary college in the outer London borough of Harrow. In 2007/08, the college enrolled approximately 3,200 students aged 16 -18 and 4,700 learners aged 19 or over, including around 330 work-based learners. In addition, there were around 150 pupils under 16 years old. The college offers programmes in most sector subject areas. Collaboration between the college and local secondary schools has resulted, since 2006, in a collaborative partnership, known as the Harrow Collegiate, to deliver sixth form provision.

The last full inspection of Harrow College was in January 2006. Overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory, as were achievement and standards. Capacity to improve, quality of provision and leadership and management were good. Of the six curriculum areas inspected, three were good and three were satisfactory.

At the last monitoring visit in October 2007, inspectors judged the college to have made reasonable progress in relation to improving teaching and learning, gathering and using students' views and implementing workforce reforms. The college had made significant progress developing employer partnerships. However, insufficient progress had been made to improve achievement and in the analysis and use of value-added data to raise standards. Too many students had not achieved as well as would be expected, given their prior attainment.

Achievement and standards

How successful were students in 2007/08?	Insufficient progress
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The data available at the time of the visit, at this very early stage in the 2008/09 academic year, indicates a mixed picture for 2007/08 in terms of retention, achievement and success rates.

Success rates on long courses at level 1 improved in 2007/08 but remain below the 2006/07 national average for general further education colleges (GFEs). At level 2, success rates for long courses rose to above the GFE national average for those students aged 16-18 but declined for those aged 19 or over. Students who completed BTEC first diploma courses achieved well. GCSE success rates improved

and the proportion of 16-18 year old students gaining high grades in science and mathematics was above the 2006/07 average.

Long course success rates at level 3 improved for younger learners but fell for those aged 19 or over. Success rates on BTEC national programmes were broadly in line with national averages but the overall figure masks considerable variations between vocational areas. The success rate for AS students at the college who were not part of the Harrow Collegiate was low, having fallen from 64% in 2006/07 to 61% in 2007/08. Success rates, though, for Harrow College A2 students rose in 2007/08, to close to the 2006/07 national average for sixth form colleges. The proportion of high grades increased and value-added data suggests that the extent to which students make satisfactory or better progress has improved. However, ensuring that students achieve at least in line with expectations, given their prior attainment, remains an area for development for the college.

The performance of adult learners on NVQ programmes varied across curriculum areas, with success rates lower than average at level 2 but higher at level 3. English provision for speakers of other languages recovered well in 2007/08, with success rates above the 2006/07 national averages.

How successful is work-based learning provision?	Reasonable progress
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The curriculum for work-based learning remains narrow but provides valuable additional options for learners in Harrow. Overall and timely success rates of apprenticeship frameworks have gradually improved over the last three years and overall success rates exceed national averages. Timely success rates, though, remain lower than the national average.

The number of employer associates working with college managers to improve curriculum design and delivery has increased to over a hundred. These associates provide helpful information and advice to students through seminars on job opportunities and work-based learning. The number of learners following the Train to Gain and employer responsive programmes is increasing, with a target of 900 for 2008/09. Strategic partnerships continue to widen and increase participation. For example, the college is working with Harrow Borough Council in the delivery of a project for the Inland Revenue, leading to NVQs at level 3 for the workforce. The college also works effectively in partnership with Stanmore College to deliver the Learning4 workforce development programme to support employers and this has expanded to include ten new courses this year. 'Entry to Employment' programmes have been discontinued, replaced by an inclusive new mainstream programme, 'Progress to Success'.

Reasonable progress has been made in improving quality and further developing work-based learning. Managers are now exploring new avenues to widen participation still further and to increase opportunities for progression to higher levels.

Quality of provision

How effective is teaching and learning? What has been the impact of all the measures taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning last year?	Reasonable progress
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Measures introduced in 2007 to improve the quality of teaching and learning have been evaluated and revised and feedback from staff and students has guided development strategies. Resources for observations and staff training workshops have been increased, with a sharper focus on new tutors and those judged to be, at best, satisfactory. Attendance was low last year at workshops to support teaching and learning. This year, participation in the workshops is obligatory for all tutors whose teaching is graded less than good. A development week for all staff in July was effective in raising awareness of good teaching practice. Two senior managers, having completed an accredited higher education programme in lesson observation training, have been involved in training a dedicated team of observers. Procedures for standardising observation practice and moderating the outcomes have been refined. Student perception surveys indicate a gradual improvement in levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning support. Those students interviewed by inspectors report well-prepared and appropriately resourced lessons and good levels of support from teachers.

The college is yet to undertake a more detailed analysis, to review the correlation between workshop attendance and improved teaching skills and also between lesson observation grades and student outcomes.

How effective is the Harrow Collegiate?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made a strong contribution to the development of the central consortium of the Harrow 16-19 collegiate, consisting of six of the eight Harrow High Schools and Harrow College, through a two-year franchise arrangement which has had a positive impact on local opportunities for young people. The college has built good working relationships with its partners and supported the development of common timetabling, quality assurance procedures and the sharing of good practice. The collegiate has provided access to a broad AS/A2 level curriculum and has improved advice and guidance to school pupils on the full range of opportunities available. The overall AS success rate for the first cohort in 2007, at 78%, was just below the average for sixth form colleges. Success rates for collegiate students following AS courses based in the college are above average for sixth form colleges, and the proportion of high grades rose significantly in 2008 to above average. Success rates for collegiate students on the courses based in high schools, but attributable to Harrow College under the franchise, were more variable; these also improved in 2008. The first cohort of A2 level collegiate students achieved above average overall success rates on college-based courses. In high schools there was

again more variability from below to above average. The proportion of high grades was below average.

To what extent has the college maintained the strength around educational and social inclusion, identified at the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Social inclusion continues to be a strong feature of the college. The college offers a broad curriculum from entry level to level 4, and has continued to adjust its curriculum to meet identified needs. It includes provision for 14-16 year old school pupils and for vulnerable groups, for example the hearing impaired. There is a large programme in skills for life and work, including courses enabling learners to develop employability skills alongside their language, literacy and numeracy. The college enables many learners who have previously failed elsewhere to develop their motivation and confidence and to succeed.

A mentoring project has successfully supported learners at risk of underachieving, and an Aim Higher programme has raised aspirations and the proportion of students progressing to higher education. Data on participation, learner support and outcomes are analysed by ethnicity and other categories, although the use of these data is not evaluated in the self-assessment report.

This academic year, educational inclusion is being assisted by the recent increased focus on better course placement, supported by careful initial assessment. Improved attention is being given to the support needs of all learners as well as those with specific difficulties. Greater emphasis is being placed on a more consistent approach to tracking, follow-up and target-setting to make students aware of progress against their goals.

Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to raise standards for the current cohort of students?	Reasonable progress
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A new principal took up post in April 2008. Much has been done to help staff and students to focus on raising expectations and standards. New entry criteria for AS and BTEC National programmes have been introduced. Most new students aged 16-18 are undertaking an enterprise qualification in addition to their main programme of study. Punctuality and attendance are being rigorously monitored. As noted above, revised systems are in place for target-setting and tracking. All AS provision is under internal scrutiny, including those subjects where performance has been satisfactory or better. Staff are aware of the target to 'keep one more, pass two more', reflecting the need to improve retention and, more critically, also achievement. Modifications have been made to the organisational structure. Clearly, the impact of these measures will not be evident until the end of the academic year and when results are

known. However, managers and teachers report that they feel energised and that they are positive about the renewed focus on raising standards.

How effective are governors in challenging the senior management team?	Reasonable progress
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Good working relations have been quickly established between the governing body and the recently appointed principal. The governors have been effective in offering a degree of challenge to senior managers, within a friendly and supportive context. Governors have set demanding objectives for the college with a clear focus on overall development and improvement, especially in terms of student outcomes in curriculum areas where success rates are low. They acknowledge that progress during the last year has been slower than expected. The board is composed of members able to offer a good range of knowledge and experience and they are kept well informed of the work of the college. Governors have frequent communication with the college and attend special events, such as awards ceremonies and exhibitions, in addition to scheduled meetings for the board and sub-committees. Good communication is maintained through staff and student representation on the board.