

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Huntingdonshire Regional College
Date of visit: 7 October 2008

Context

Since its inspection in February 2008, the college has completed a significant management restructure and additional reorganisation to further support its responsiveness agenda. Changes to the funding allocation for 2008/09 have led the college to review and alter its provision further in order to maximise its efficiency and avoid a financial deficit.

At the time of the monitoring visit there were 954 students aged 16 to 18 enrolled at the college, 1291 adult students and 211 learners following work-based learning programmes, with recruitment running ahead of the previous year. The college exceeded its targets for recruitment to the new specialised diploma in creative and media, recruiting 19 students to Level 2 and 20 students to Level 3.

Achievement and standards

At the previous inspection there had been significant improvement in success rates for students aged 16 to 18. Does the initial 2008 data suggest this improvement has continued?	Reasonable progress
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Final success rates were not available at the time of the monitoring visit as achievement data were still being processed. However, early in-year college data indicates overall retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 improved on the previous year. The most significant rise was at Level 2, where the college enrolls the highest proportion of students aged 16 to 18, which improved by five percentage points to above the national average. Retention rates at Level 3 fell slightly to below the national average in 2008 after a strong upward trend over three years. The college has identified the main two courses that had significantly low retention in 2008 and each course has a clear plan of action for improvement.

What progress has been made in improving the previous low success rates for adults at level 2, adult short courses and key skills, particularly at level 1?	Reasonable progress
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Final success rates were not available at the time of the monitoring visit as achievement data were still being processed. However, the retention rate for adults on Level 2 courses improved by six percentage points to slightly above the most recent national average. Initial data on retention and pass rates indicate the success rate is likely to improve on the previous year.

Retention rates on short courses longer than five weeks increased notably in 2008, from 86% to 94%, achievement data processed so far have already exceeded the low success rate of 2006/07, with college data indicating the final success rate likely to be at least in line with the national average.

The key skills success rate for students aged 16 to 18 at Level 1 improved by ten percentage points in 2008 but remains low. There was a rise in both pass and retention rates for adults, with the key skills Level 1 success rate rising to just above the national average

The college's overall key skills success rate has continued to improve markedly for all ages. The success rate for those aged 16 to 18 at Level 2 continued its strong upward trend and was high in 2008.

Does the 2008 college data suggest that outcomes for work-based learners remain good?	Significant progress
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Revised management structures were introduced at the end of 2007/08. These changes reflect the increased focus placed by the college on employer engagement and services to business. The changes also bring together aspects of work-based learning, such as apprenticeships and Train to Gain, under the direction of a senior manager. The college is continuing to expand its work based provision in 2008/09 with the introduction of new apprenticeship programmes in catering, information technology and warehousing.

Achievement and standards on work-based learning courses have improved in 2008 and are good overall. College data indicates that success rates on apprenticeships have continued to improve significantly and are high. Overall timely success rates on apprenticeships have also improved significantly and

now stand above national rates for 2007/08. Learners in Train to Gain have maintained high success rates.

Quality of provision

How effectively is the college increasing the proportion of good or better lessons and ensuring there is regular sharing of best teaching practice?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, the college has introduced a number of changes to improve teaching and learning further. The college's internal observation process has been modified to include greater reference to recognition and recording of progress and achievement and *Every Child Matters* themes. High priority has been given to all staff, both full and part time, gaining recognised teaching qualifications. The college is making clear progress in introducing arrangements to record and monitor Continuing Professional Development requirements with the Institute for Learning. Focused staff development workshops have been carried out within individual curriculum areas to support other well-established, cross college staff development events. Targeted peer observations are also being developed in some areas of the college, although these are not yet fully integrated within overall college performance management systems.

Early indications from the draft self assessment report for 2007/08 are that these measures are having a positive impact in improving the quality of teaching and learning overall. There is clear evidence that progress has been made in raising the grade profile of some individual teachers. The college is aware that more work remains to be done in reducing the difference in observation grades between some full- and part-time staff.

What progress is being made in developing the use of individual learning plans to support students target setting to help them improve their work?	Reasonable progress
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The college has taken clear actions to ensure greater consistency in the use of individual learning plans across the college. Following a detailed review of options by senior managers, the college has purchased and introduced a new computer based learner tracking and reporting system. This is currently being piloted within the faculty of technology, following staff training in target setting in August. Early indications are that the new system is providing staff

with much clearer information on individual learner progress to inform target setting.

What progress has been made in developing the use of work experience, particularly in increasing opportunities for full time students?	Reasonable progress
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The college recognises that its provision of work experience for full-time students was underdeveloped. Since the previous inspection, it has developed a clear work experience strategy which is being introduced progressively across the college. Under the revised college structures for employer engagement, contacts with employers have been effectively rationalised. The college is now implementing a more comprehensive college wide database for employer links which draws on previous experience and employer contacts within different curriculum areas. Work experience programmes which focus on matching employer needs and learner skills are now being piloted for learners within a number of curriculum areas, including creative studies and media, computing, and care.

Since April 2008, the college has also implemented an extensive and well structured work experience programme for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Particular care is taken to match individual learners' capabilities with suitable placements and workplace activities. Early feedback from learners is that these work-placement opportunities are highly appreciated.

Leadership and management

How well is the college ensuring consistency in the thorough evaluation of data to help support its decision making and judgements within self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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The college has strengthened its quality assurance processes for course reviews and the use of data. Training for managers on how to complete course reviews, including the evaluation of performance data was run in the summer term. All curriculum managers are now expected to use a consistent set of data to analyse their department's progress and help them make a more informed judgement about the quality of provision. This includes data on key skills and where applicable, value added data. The recent

management restructure has placed greater accountability and ownership of data at course level. It is too early to judge the full impact of all the actions taken as the self-assessment process was only in its early stages at the time of the monitoring visit.

The use of data to review the achievement by different groups, particularly gender, is not yet fully embedded within all course reviews.

What progress has been made in developing the learner voice to help the college improve further?	Reasonable progress
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The college has a clear, regularly reviewed action plan to improve the promotion of the learner voice across the college. The organisation of allocating course representatives has improved on previous years and virtually all courses now have a course representative in place. The group have already instigated a student-led committee for entertainment and fundraising through their first meeting this term. There is good representation of student governors including an adult student, a student aged 16 to 18 and a work-based learner. The groups of students spoken to at the monitoring visit feel they are listened to by the college; that their views are taken seriously and that their contribution is valued.

In many cases student feedback and views are used well to improve college provision. Student feedback gathered through tutorial reviews, for example, have led to changes in tutorial delivery and planning for this coming year. Part of the reviews looked at students' interpretation of what equality and diversity mean to them. The feedback led to a redesign of the tutorial scheme of work to better promote aspects of equality and diversity and to help remove some myths and preconceptions.

Not all aspects of the learner voice are fully established. For example, the college does not currently have formal forums for capturing the voice or views of vulnerable groups of students and the involvement of students in strategic decision making roles is underdeveloped.