

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Portland College

Date of visit: 12 June 2008

### Context

Since the full inspection in February 2008, the college has revised its strategic vision to better reflect its mission. At the time of the monitoring visit there were 190 students of whom 38 are non-resident, 116 are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and 71 are funded by the Residential training Unit (RTU) of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Of these students, 151 are aged over 19 and around 5% are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

### Achievement and standards

In February 2008, progression was deemed good for LSC funded students and outstanding for progression into employment for RTU students. What does the college's final 2007/08 destination data show for these two groups of students?	Significant progress
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Opportunities for students to develop work-related and employability skills continue to be very good. Destination data are carefully monitored and analysed. Progression into employment for RTU students remains strong and improving on the previous year with 72% successfully progressing into employment. Destination outcomes for LSC funded students also remained high with 73% progressing into further education, work-based learning or employment.

### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in ensuring the college has a higher proportion of good and better teaching?	Significant progress
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The college has given an increasingly high profile to improving the quality of teaching and learning. It has further strengthened the rigour of its internal observation procedures and has introduced a wider range of formal approaches to sharing good practice. Its overall processes for assessing the

quality of teaching and learning are comprehensive and rigorous. A well-developed and supportive mentoring programme has become more established and is successfully leading to improvements in teaching and learning, with an increase in the proportion of good lessons the summer term of 2008.

The college has set a target of 70% good and better teaching for 2008/09 and has introduced a range of approaches to help it meet this. For example, from September 2008: it has introduced a detailed schedule of themed observations each half term to ensure greater consistency; it has introduced a structured programme of peer observation to enable teachers to observe teaching practice within and external to their own department; all learning support assistants now receive formal feedback and action plans as part of the lesson observation process; nine teaching and learning champions have been appointed to link with different aspects of the college's work, including numeracy, literacy and work experience.

A 'performance measures' framework has been introduced for 2008/09 to enable the college to create a baseline of information and data about teaching and learning themes to enable it to set ambitious targets for improvement. All relevant teaching and learning information, including a clear teaching and learning policy, has been produced in a comprehensive and well-received tutor handbook, which centralises all teaching-related information and useful exemplars.

Since February 2008 all specialist resources have been centralised through a college 'access centre' resulting in improved availability of specialist resources for students. A wide range of e-learning resources are being developed by the college to help break down the barriers to learning faced by many students. For example, Portland is part of a consortium of specialist colleges developing an alternative to electronic social networking for students with complex learning difficulties and/ or disabilities which is due to be launched in 2009.

What progress has been made in ensuring greater robustness of individual target setting to verify RTU students' progress and achievement?	Insufficient progress
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Progress has been made to strengthen target setting for RTU learners since February 2008 although some of this progress was not sufficiently swift or

comprehensive. However, from September 2008 all RTU students systematically receive an initial and a baseline assessment for employability to better tailor their timetables and meet their individual requirements for learning. Individual targets for RTU students are now centralised electronically and the setting of individual learning goals is more formalised. In addition, there is some increased monitoring and tracking of individual students to check on their progress. At the time of the monitoring visit it was far too early to determine the impact of these recent changes.

#### Leadership and management

What progress is being made in developing the employability and Skills for Life provision for RTU students?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection the college has revised its timetabling arrangements for Skills for Life and RTU students to better meet the individual needs of both students groups. The number of literacy and numeracy sessions has almost doubled with more effective banding of ability levels to better plan teaching and learning activities. The college reports students' attitudes to the literacy and numeracy workshops are far more positive with better engagement in lessons. However from September 2008 attendance at these sessions is no longer compulsory and as a result the attendance of some students is erratic. The college recognises this issue and has increased the formal tracking of individual students.

In numeracy and literacy lessons many teachers are successfully ensuring learning materials have an increased vocational element to help contextualise students' learning. For example, in the horticulture department one numeracy task focused on calculating the average temperature in a greenhouse and in the administration department, a basic literacy task on apostrophes was centred on specific business themes. Formal and informal links have been effectively created between the Skills for Life department and the vocational unit to aid the sharing of good practice. In addition, the dyslexia coordinator role has been increased from part to full-time from September 2008, providing increased support and guidance for students and tutors.

What progress has been made to align the college's marketing strategy to meet the needs of its strategic direction?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, the college has reviewed and rewritten its strategic aims and discussed this with governors and college staff. The revised strategic vision and is much more concise and places increased emphasis on the learner experience being at the heart of Portland College's work. The strategy is clearly linked to the college's sharply focused development plan and is reflected through its self-assessment report. With this in place, careful consideration is being given to how the promotion of the college can best support its future strategic vision. External consultants have held several focus groups with parents, staff, funding bodies and students to discuss ideas and feedback developments. The college is now finalising its marketing strategy to better meet its medium at long term strategic direction.