

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Kirklees College
Date of visit: 13 November 2008

Context

Kirklees College is a new college, formed from the merger of Huddersfield Technical College (HTC) and Dewsbury Tertiary College (DTC) in August 2008. The previous inspection of HTC was in March 2008 and of DTC in April 2006. One curriculum area, information and communication technology (ICT), at the HTC inspection, was inadequate.

This monitoring visit focused on the progress made to improve the quality of ICT provision at HTC and on some of the other areas for improvement noted at the HTC inspection. It also considered progress made in employer engagement and in implementing a learner engagement strategy.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates overall, and particularly at level 1 and at level 3 for learners aged 16 to 18 years?	No discernible progress
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Little time was available post-inspection to implement changes which would have an impact on the success rates for 2007/08. Data provided by the college for 2007/08 were incomplete for adult level 1 provision at HTC. However, this is not likely to affect the overall success rates for HTC significantly other than at level 1.

- The overall long course success rates in 2008 at both HTC and DTC lost ground to the national average and remain well below the national average.
- The success rates at both HTC and DTC for students aged 16 to 18 and for adults are well below average and are not making gains on the national averages. No success rate is closing the gap on the national average.
- The success rates at level 1 at both centres are low for adults, even when uncounted achievement is taken into account. For students aged 16 to 18 the rate is low at HTC and at the average at DTC. No category is making appreciable gains on the national average.
- The success rate at level 3 for students aged 16 to 18 at DTC is losing ground to the national average and is very low. At HTC this rate is gaining slightly on the national average but is low.

The Train to Gain success rate is high. On the Entry to Employment programme the rate is improving. A high proportion achieve their learning objectives and over half gain a positive progression outcome. Advanced apprenticeship success rates, timely and overall, have improved and are above average. Apprenticeship success rates have fallen but remain above average.

What progress has been made in improving student retention?	Reasonable progress
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Student retention was low overall in 2008. Little time was available, post-inspection, to make changes which would impact on the retention rates in that year. The college is making changes in 2008/09 which have the potential to impact positively on retention. These include a more consistent application of the criteria for entry and a more rigorous recruitment process for students who apply in September, swifter initial assessment and provision of additional learning support, closer monitoring of students' progress, better support for students who are at risk of leaving early and an early review of whether students are on the right course. There is now a greater ownership of retention data among staff and realisation that it is the responsibility of teaching teams to resolve issues promptly.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the quality of the provision in the ICT curriculum area at the Huddersfield centre?	Reasonable progress
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The ICT post-inspection improvement plan includes all the areas for improvement noted at the previous inspection. Success rates improved in 2008, markedly so for students aged 16 to 18 studying at level 3. Retention currently is significantly higher than in the previous year at the same point in the year.

Teachers have been observed teaching by the head of faculty and the ICT curriculum manager. The outcomes of teaching observations are now being used more effectively to support improvements in teaching. Areas for improvement arising from lesson observation are now compiled into an action plan for each teacher. Progress in implementing improvement plans is monitored regularly. Teachers have received professional development on the use of the college's virtual learning environment and have visited the Dewsbury centre to observe the use of technology which allows interactive monitoring of students' use of computers in the workshops. Improvements have been made to the tutorial process and individual learning plans are now completed online.

The level 3 programme of courses has been revised to make it more appropriate to the students recruited. Little progress has been made to improve opportunities for

learners to experience the workplace. Entry criteria were more clearly defined and applied for students recruited in September 2008.

The poor use of additional learning support in lessons is being resolved by improving links between the sector subject area and the additional learning support section. Online individual learning plans are being used to help monitor the achievement of learning targets. Teachers are now working more closely with additional learning support tutors.

Some learning resources are still unreliable. Smart boards and air cooling systems have been installed. Some rooms are too long so that students cannot easily see the teacher and the smart board.

Inadequate quality assurance is being improved. Observation of teaching is now being used better to improve teaching, and validation processes are helping to improve the rigour of the self-assessment process and the accuracy of the self-assessment report. There have been substantial changes to the teaching and management team.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in establishing and implementing a learner involvement strategy?	Reasonable progress
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The learner involvement strategies for HTC and DTC have not yet been combined. New initiatives are being implemented. These include learner forums within each sector subject area which have already led to improvements. Learners have also been involved in 'merger' focus groups. They are playing a more active role in the college's 'Aim Higher' programme. Some are designated Aim Higher Ambassadors, with a role to work with college staff to increase school pupils' awareness of what the college offers by taking part in question and answer panels at parent evenings. The college is now responding more quickly to the issues raised by students in the annual perception questionnaires. It is planned to draw together the good practice which exists in each centre and disseminate it across the new college.

What progress has been made to achieve greater consistency in the application of quality assurance arrangements and in strengthening the college's capacity to improve?	Reasonable progress
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New procedures and proforma have been developed to promote better consistency and rigour and a quality cycle established. Much management energy has been focused on ensuring that curriculum self-assessment reports are more rigorous and accurate. Although not completed, this work is having a positive impact on the process and the reports. Staff have received appropriate professional development.

Sector subject area self-assessment reports have been taken through moderation and several grades have been downgraded. The new sector subject area self-assessment reports grade profile is more consistent with the success rates for the college as a whole. The self-assessment report format is now clearer and better supported by evidence including data. Reasonable progress has been made in improving the sharpness and accuracy of the judgements, but some judgements are still not sufficiently clear, and some targets for improvement not SMART enough.

A new proforma for the termly review of course quality has been established, together with a rolling action plan and a destination log. It is planned that these action plans will be monitored for implementation more closely than previously and that the final course review reports will more easily inform the writing of the departmental self-assessment reports.

The observation of teaching process and its implementation and impact have been improved. However, evaluation of the learning that takes place during observations is insufficient. Observers have received professional development to help ensure there is a greater focus on learning during observation and that judgements are more realistic. The process is being more tightly managed. The moderation of the grades and judgements has been strengthened. The profile of lesson grades is now more realistic in relation to the college success rates and as identified at the previous inspection. The links between observation and teacher appraisal and professional development are being strengthened.

What progress has been made in establishing new arrangements to manage the new college and in recruiting students to it?	Reasonable progress
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Full-time student numbers (for students aged 16 to 18 years) increased in September 2008 compared with the previous year.

The governing body has been expanded to include five of the previous governors of DTC. New management structures are being established. The management tier of vice principals is established. The next management tier of directors is currently being selected. It is intended that tier four sector subject area leaders will be appointed by April 2009. It is envisaged that there will be significant cost savings and it is projected that the deficit projected for 2008/09 will be turned into a surplus in the following year. It is intended that the delegation of management responsibility and authority will increase to reflect the larger college of £54m income, 20,000 students and ten sites.

Policies are being developed, some have been completed, for example the student charter, but inconsistencies across the two sites and within them still exist. Currently two management information systems are in use. They provide accessible and accurate data. Different arrangements exist for the observation of teaching in the

two centres and the quality of sector subject area self-assessment is inconsistent. It is intended that a full sector subject area review will take place in 2008/09 in order to eliminate duplication, streamline management arrangements and reduce areas of poor performance.

What progress has been made in increasing employer engagement?	Reasonable progress
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The college has maintained its strengths with respect to employer engagement. Heads of school at the Dewsbury centre are now fully involved in the college's Enterprise unit meetings. A manual and self-assessment report for Train to Gain work has been produced, resolving an area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Management positions in the Enterprise Unit are being increased to include a quality manager and a management information position. The college has delayed its formal application for the Training Quality Standard so that the Dewsbury centre will be included and is now working towards this standard for the spring 2009.

The college has substantial and increasing provision in the areas of Train to Gain, apprenticeship work and Entry to Employment. Commercial work was of relatively small volume in 2007/08. The target for 2008/09 is ambitious and will increase the volume substantially if met. The college forecasts that international work will increase markedly.