

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: East Devon College  
Date of visit: 9 June 2009

### Context

East Devon College is located in Tiverton. Around 85% of learners are aged 16 to 18. Unemployment is lower than the national average overall although the college serves some rural areas that have significant deprivation. The number of young people gaining five GCSEs at grades A\* to C in the areas is significantly higher than the national rate. The college provides courses across 14 of the 15 sector subject areas.

The college's last full inspection was in February 2007. At that inspection, leadership and management were judged to be inadequate. Overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards and quality of provision were judged to be satisfactory. Two curriculum areas were judged as satisfactory, but science and mathematics, and preparation for life and work were inadequate.

The college was re-inspected in July 2008 when leadership and management, science and mathematics, and preparation for life and work were found still to be inadequate. The college merged with North Devon College on 1 August 2008.

### Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in improving success rates on the East Devon College site?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates in 2007/08 for students aged 16-18 on level one and level two long courses rose to around the national average. For students aged 16-18 on level three long courses success rates fell by five percentage points to 7% below the national average. For students aged 19+ on level one courses, success rates rose by 17%, although they remained significantly below the national average. Success rates on level two courses for students aged 19+ fell slightly and remained below the national average. On level three courses, success rates rose by seven percentage points and were above the national average.

Managers have carried out very detailed and frequent analyses of course performance since the merger. Comparisons of in-year retention in 2008/09 with 2007/08 show a very marked improvement in the proportion of students who have remained on their courses. For example, for students aged 16-19 on level one courses, in-year retention has risen from 75% in 2007/08 to 90% in 2008/09, on level two courses it has risen from 72% to 86% and on level three courses it has

risen from 82% to 86%. In-year retention on courses for students aged 19+ has also risen, as it has for work-based learning provision.

In the inadequate area of science and mathematics, in-year retention has improved markedly on AS level and GCE A level courses. On AS level physics and AS level chemistry in-year retention is 100% and on AS level biology it is 88%. In-year retention on GCSE mathematics is over 92% and it is significantly improved in literacy and numeracy. For example on level two literacy courses it has improved from 40% in 2007/08 to 100% this year. Attendance is now monitored very thoroughly and has risen from 80% in 2007/08 to 87.5% this year to date.

How much progress has been made in sustaining improvements in work-based learning provision?	Reasonable progress
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Apprentice framework success rates are satisfactory and improving. For 2007/08 overall success rates of 69% were satisfactory, and above national averages. Timely success rates have improved by 5% to 56%. The college predicts a success rate of 73% for key skills in 2008/09. Attendance at key skills lessons has improved and is now good. Key skills are now delivered in a more vocational context, increasing their relevance to the workplace. The college has improved its links with employers and now has contact with some 300 organisations. Learners' progress is discussed with employers who are also involved in training and in progress reviews. Hairdressing employers receive a handbook explaining the framework and expectations of employers and learners.

#### Quality of provision

How much progress has there been in improving the consistency of judgements made in lesson observations so as to raise standards?	Reasonable progress
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The system of lesson observations used successfully at North Devon College has been adopted on the Tiverton campus. Historically there was some over-grading of lessons. Observers have received good quality training which focussed appropriately on making judgements about the quality of learning and students' progress in lessons. It also involved detailed discussion about what constitutes a good and an outstanding lesson, about which there is now agreement within the college. Judgements made following observations are now moderated rigorously and there is evidence of some grades being changed to lower grades as a result of this process. This new system of lesson observation has given managers a clearer picture of the quality of teaching and learning.

The outcomes of lesson observations are used to inform staff development for individual teachers and for the college as a whole. Staff also take part in developmental observations where they work with peers in lessons. This is an effective way of sharing identified good practice in teaching and learning. Staff are very supportive of the new lesson observation scheme and regard it as an example of where the stated aim of raising the standard of teaching and learning is being translated into practice by college managers. Whilst it is too early to judge the impact of the revised procedures on students' achievements, there is clear evidence that improving the quality of teaching and learning is a vision that is shared amongst staff at the college and they are very enthusiastic about future possibilities and developments. In a few instances, standard practice is recorded on observation forms as a key strength.

### Leadership and management

How effective has the merger been in raising standards at the Tiverton campus?	Reasonable progress
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Staff are very positive and enthusiastic about the changes made this year. They very much welcome the increased emphasis placed by managers on improving the quality of teaching and learning and improving outcomes for students. They feel very well supported through this period of change. Staff speak enthusiastically about how well they are kept informed of developments and changes in policies and strategies. Staff morale is high. The new management structure places much more emphasis on the key aspects that affect students and their success.

Team meetings have standing agenda items such as attendance, retention, students' progress and teaching and learning. These issues are firmly at the top of the agenda for action. The self assessment report is moderated thoroughly and there is an increased emphasis on supporting teams to evaluate their provision thoroughly.

The management information system is complemented by the highly effective "On Campus" record system which is used well by staff and plays a major role in the tracking and monitoring of all aspects of student and course performance. Again, staff value very highly the support they are provided with in this important area.

Managers rightly revised all information, advice and guidance procedures very quickly. Students are now recruited more effectively to courses that meet their needs and this is reflected in the greatly improved in-year retention rates in evidence. A detailed analysis of the curriculum has also been carried out and changes are being made to ensure that courses better meet the identified needs of the student population.

The above developments have already had a significant impact on the ethos of the college. Managers have explained and articulated the vision for the college extremely effectively. Staff clearly understand and share the vision and are enthusiastic about meeting the challenges that lay ahead. Students speak highly of the support they receive from teachers. However, it is too early to judge the impact of the above on students' achievements.