

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Lincoln College
Date of visit: 10 February 2009

Context

Lincoln College is a general further education (GFE) college in Lincolnshire. The college operates from its main site in Lincoln and also has sites in Gainsborough and Newark, with which it merged in 2007. In 2007/08, the college had 13,550 learners, of whom around 28% were aged 16-18 and 72% were adults. The college offers provision in almost all of the Learning and Skills Council sector subject areas. The college's mission is 'raising aspirations, realising potential and delivering success'.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in raising success rates on long courses for all age groups?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in raising success rates for all age groups. Success rates on level 3 programmes have increased to 76% for learners aged 16-18 and 70% for adults. They remain around the national rates. At level 1, rates have improved by three percentage points to 68% for learners aged 16-18, and by 10 percentage points to 63% for adults. Level 2 success rates for learners aged 16-18 have increased by five percentage points to 67% but have remained at 64% for adults. At levels 1 and 2, success rates remain below national rates.

At all levels, retention is considerably lower than achievement. The college has put in place several measures to rectify this. It has identified accurately specific areas which are contributing to lower retention rates. The college has now a clear focus on developing learner-centred strategies to raise retention. These include fortnightly meetings between senior managers and managers of courses with low retention rates to discuss and monitor action plans for improvement. In cases where this does not show improvement a team of appropriately experienced managers conduct a week long observation of the whole learner experience in that area. This has had to a significant impact on curriculum design, and learner support and guidance. Following adaptations to make the curriculum more focused on learners' success, success levels have risen significantly in several areas. For example, those in level 1 sport at the Newark campus have risen from 40% in 2006/07 to 75% in 2007/08. Although it is too early to judge the full impact of all the interventions, the current retention rate has increased to 93%, with 94% attendance. At the same point in the previous year, retention was 84% with 91% attendance.

What progress has been made to improve timely success rates for work based learners?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in improving timely success rates for work-based learners. The rate of improvement in timely success rates is good, particularly for those learners based in Newark. A greater focus has been placed on the recruitment and preparation of both learners and employers. Staff providing initial advice and guidance ensure that potential learners make appropriate choices about their programmes and fully understand all parts of the apprenticeships. A team of business advisors helps employers to understand all aspects of apprenticeship programmes, including the need for timely completion of the programme, prior to the recruitment of any learners. The successful completion of key skills qualifications is highlighted as essential to success on the overall apprenticeship. Key skills training and support has improved. Staff are offered additional support if they lack confidence in their own skills and more emphasis is placed on the timely completion of key skills during progress reviews. Good use is made of assessors in the work place to collect portfolio evidence. Training coordinators communicate well with employers about the rate of progress of individual learners. Monitoring of individual learners' progress is more closely monitored and staff have received training in the setting of specific and time bound targets to drive improvement where needed.

Quality of provision

Has the college made progress in raising the quality of teaching and learning across all its sites?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning across its sites. It has developed further the improvements noted at the previous monitoring visit. Since then, it has changed its observation policy to grade learning rather than teaching. Initial results from this, taken from 94 observations, show that approximately 70% of learning is good or better. Following observations, teachers receive constructive feedback on how to improve learning. Improvement strategies are reinforced further through meetings between teachers and line managers within a month of the observation. The college has high expectations of teachers. Since the previous monitoring visit, all teachers who do not achieve a learning grade of good or better are supported by a mentor and subject learning coach. Teachers benefit from training in assessment for learning and the use of peer learning. The college now focuses on ensuring that each lesson enables learners to learn and be assessed. Learners' views about their lessons are gathered on the virtual learning environment, and used by teachers to improve their practice. The college has created further coherence between practice by ensuring that teachers work across sites, and college observation strategies and teaching and learning policies are applied consistently. Teachers share good practice regularly in their teams, between teams and with partner colleges.

Has the college made progress in monitoring the use of enrichment activities, including work experience?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in monitoring the use of enrichment activities, including work experience. An improved range of activities has been introduced across the college since the previous inspection. Learners from all schools within the college participate in varied and interesting activities, many of which are related to their courses. The college provides transport to enable learners to access activities held on each campus. Accurate data are collected on the attendance, purpose and outcomes of activities through the use of an enrichment log. All activities are designed and monitored to ensure they have clear learning aims. Learners provide feedback on the usefulness and effectiveness of each activity and this is evaluated carefully. Learners' involvement in enrichment activities has increased by 14% compared with this stage in the previous academic year. Many learners gain useful additional vocationally relevant qualifications, such as licensee certificates for hospitality learners and information communication technology qualifications for administration learners. Better use is made now of existing work placements and the number of placements has increased. For example, full-time hairdressing learners replace apprentices in salons to gain relevant realistic experience while the apprentices attend their off-the-job training. All second year learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities attended a work placement in the last academic year.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in promoting equality and diversity in lessons and work based learner reviews?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in promoting equality and diversity in lessons and work based learner reviews. Senior college managers give strong direction in the promotion of equality and diversity. Staff receive regular training on relevant topics. A series of skeleton schemes of work is devised for each programme showing relevant equality and diversity content. A range of useful resources is available within each of the three learning centres and learning advisors work closely with curriculum teams to design appropriate materials to support learning. Frequent email updates on diversity topics are sent to all staff. They use this information appropriately to develop the content of group and individual tutorials. Good use is made of the experiences of individual learners to promote discussion about discrimination in lessons. Inappropriate language and behaviour are effectively challenged. Progress reviews for work based learners include discussion about learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues prompted by a list of standard questions. The inclusion of relevant issues is measured during the course of regular observations of teaching and learning.

<p>What progress has the college made through its self-assessment and quality improvement plan in bringing greater consistency to provision across its sites?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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The college has made significant progress in creating greater consistency between sites through its self-assessment and quality improvement plans. The self-assessment process is inclusive, starting at course level, where staff and learners are closely involved in identifying the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. The involvement of learners in writing the self-assessment has increased consistency in terms of ensuring that the learners' experience is central to developments. Many courses are held at more than one location, so self-assessment meetings create an understanding of the quality of the provision overall as well as on the individual needs of sites. The process has helped to develop consistency in amenities, for example more water fountains and an extension to a workshop at Newark. It has also created a consistent approach to entry and recruitment strategies. Feedback from staff through the self-assessment process has impacted on college strategies. For example the current self-assessment report cites the use of data as an area for improvement. Following staff comments on its complexity, the college is implementing a much simpler balanced score card which can be used at individual, course, programme and whole college levels. Data are now readily available for all staff at all sites, and senior managers expect teachers to understand what the data tell them about their courses. The college now shares a vision of the importance of learning, and increasing learners' success rates which is reflected in the areas for improvement in all programme area self-assessments. Course teams have been trained in making judgements of their capacity to improve against criteria which apply to the whole college.