

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Royal National College for the Blind  
Date of visit: 7 July 2009

### Context

The Royal National College for the Blind (the college) is an independent specialist residential college with charitable status, and is a company limited by guarantee. The college's mission is to 'lead, innovate, develop, promote and deliver world class learning, products and services, driving standards of excellence'. The college is located in Hereford in 25 acres of grounds and is in easy reach of the city. Since the previous inspection, significant building developments have been completed within the campus environment including the Orchard Hall residence, 'thePoint4' sports, complementary therapies and conferencing centre, and the Gardner Hall assessment centre.

The college provides education and training primarily for learners who are blind and Visually impaired. Some learners have additional needs which include medical and mental health needs. Some 7% of learners have autistic spectrum disorders. There are 141 residential and seven day learners, of whom 35 are aged 16 to 18 and 113 are aged 19 years and over. Of those, 46 adult learners are funded by the residential training unit and three by the Employment Service through the Department for Work and Pensions; 10 learners are funded by the Welsh Assembly government, two are privately funded and the remainder by the Learning and Skills Council. There are 21 learners from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college was inspected by Ofsted in May 2008 and overall effectiveness was judged to be good. An interim principal has been in post during 2009 because the previous principal left in autumn 2008. The college is in the process of appointing a new principal for December 2009.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving learners' achievement since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college is making reasonable progress in improving learners' achievements since the previous inspection. Progress is carefully monitored in weekly tutorials and six-weekly reviews and recorded on the developing management information system. Learners achieve well on courses leading to qualifications. Pass rates on vocational qualifications are good. Learners continue to make good progress in developing the underpinning skills of literacy, numeracy, communication, Braille and information and

communication technology (ICT). Learners continue to make very good progress in developing their independence and personal skills.

A high proportion of learners achieve qualifications in literacy or numeracy at entry level and level 1. The college identifies accurately that pass rates are lower at level 2. Achievement of relevant Braille qualifications at levels 1–3 remains outstanding. Enrolments in ICT have increased with a wider range of provision offered; success rates in 2008 were 100%. At the previous inspection, inspectors judged that too few learners achieved grades higher than D on GCE courses. In 2008, the success rate for grades A–C was 34% for AS level and 54% for GCE A level. Data were not available to compare with previous years. College in-year data predicts an increasing trend in overall AS level success rates from 80% in 2007/08 to 90% in 2008/09. Predicted GCE A level results indicate an increase from 85% to 90% in the same period.

The college maintains a good focus on learners' development of work-related and job-seeking skills. Clear plans are in place to develop this area further. The number of residential training unit learners achieving successful outcomes is increasing. The college has a transitional employment posts project in place to employ residential training unit learners for six months after their funding ceases. The focus is on increasing employability skills. Of the 15 who have taken part in this project, six have progressed to permanent employment.

What actions have been taken to improve attendance?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

The college has made significant progress in improving learners' attendance. Data indicates that attendance has improved from 80% in 2007/08 to 85% in the current year. The attendance policy has been revised and comprehensive procedures are in place for monitoring and improving learners' attendance. These include a detailed weekly attendance report which is monitored well by tutors and managers. Self-certification is now in place for adult learners. Residential managers and nurses monitor a detailed weekly report of self-certification and sickness. A weekly attendance commentary report is produced by tutors which provides details of individual poor attendance with reasons. Percentage attendance is monitored weekly by course area. Clear plans are in place to develop trend data and link this to self-assessment.

What progress has been made in improving retention rates?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college has made reasonable progress in improving retention rates. A weekly learner status report identifies clearly those learners considered at risk of leaving and the individual support strategies in place. This process is well monitored. Data are used well to monitor learners' retention trends annually. Tracking records of learners who leave early provide detailed reasons. Overall retention is similar to 2007/08. Retention for LSC learners has increased from 93% in 2007/08 to 95% in 2008/09.

However, retention for RTU learners has decreased from 97% – 90% over the same period. Three RTU learners have since re-enrolled.

### Quality of provision

What actions have been taken to improve the consistency of the planning of individualised learning?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college has made reasonable progress in improving the consistency of the planning of individualised learning. The observation of teaching and learning process is effective in identifying where teaching is too directive and learning is not sufficiently individualized. Appropriate individual action plans are in place and monitored well by the curriculum team leaders. This process is linked clearly with individual performance review.

What actions have been taken to improve the consistent quality of target setting?	Insufficient progress
---	-----------------------

The college has made insufficient progress in improving the consistent quality of target setting. Staff training on setting appropriate and measurable targets took place in summer 2008. The college identified that this training took place with too large a group. An exercise focused on improving targets took place in the autumn term for managers and teams. A development plan is in place for 2009/10 but this is not sufficiently timely as actions for further staff development are not sufficiently clear. Inspectors found during the visit that while some targets are clear and specific, others remain too broad. A detailed flowchart outlines the process for setting and measuring progress against targets, but the process of monitoring the quality of the targets is not systematic.

### Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to develop equality and diversity arrangements further in the college?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

The college has made significant progress in developing the equality and diversity arrangements further. Since September 2008, the college has established strategic and operational equality and diversity groups which meet monthly. The remit of these groups is clear and detailed. Good communication is in place through the chairperson of each group participating in both meetings. A comprehensive action plan is in place for the strategic and operational development of equality and diversity with clear timescales for completion of actions. Progress of actions is monitored well by the use of a tracking sheet. The operational group now monitors responses to complaints and their impact on learners in relation to equality and diversity. Minutes of meetings indicate an ongoing thorough review of the promotion of equality and diversity across the college. Actions to promote improvement are clearly identified and monitored well. Senior managers have attended training on

implementing equality impact assessments. A training day with an external consultant is planned in July. The focus is clearly on developing a workshop approach to impact assessments and involving staff in this process. The action plan indicates clearly that an equality impact assessment schedule will be produced in July.

A range of data reports in relation to the monitoring of involvement and performance by different groups of learners have been produced in the last three months. The board of governors approved the format in June. Clear plans are in place for data to be analysed by the learning directorate management team to inform strategic direction. Initial analysis has been used to inform the marketing and recruitment plan and develop activities, such as a football team for female learners.

What progress has been made in improving the quality assurance arrangements?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

The quality arrangements continue to develop well. A key focus since September has been to improve the observation of teaching and learning. This now includes observations of tutorials, information, advice and guidance sessions, and individual sessions with key workers. During the autumn term, joint observations were carried out by senior and middle managers. The clear aim was to improve the consistency of the judgements. The observation process now includes curriculum team leaders as observers. In the spring term, team leaders took part in a series of joint observations with senior managers. A very recent formal moderation process has taken place which sampled 23% of the joint observations. The records of moderation clearly identify key areas for improvement in relation to the observation of teaching and learning, especially where evidence is insufficient to support the grade given. However, there are no plans to revise the grades in such instances.

A quality manager is now in place to support the development of the self-assessment process. The self-assessment process has been revised. A detailed guidance document now supports college areas in development of their reports. The use of management information system continues to develop. Plans are in place to develop the learners' journey management information system for September 2009 with reports generated and analysed monthly. The college are beginning to analyse data systematically to inform planning for equality and diversity. Plans are in place for curriculum team leaders to monitor the quality of learners' targets but this is not fully implemented or systematic. Curriculum team leaders now have a stronger role in quality monitoring. College strategic and operational targets are precise and monitored well.

What actions have been taken to develop college facilities further?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

The college has made significant progress in developing college facilities further. In March 2009, a newly built 56 bed residential facility was opened. The aim is to support a strategic approach to developing learner independence. The residence

includes a range of single bedroom apartments as well as single rooms, communal and independent kitchens. The recently opened 'thePoint4' centre is a state of the art building which includes a large indoor sports arena, external sports facilities, a bistro and veranda, spa and therapies facilities, as well as gymnasiums for both learners and the public. Care has been taken with the security systems between different areas. The well-planned strategy is to promote greater involvement of the community within the college as well as further opportunities for learners to develop work-related skills. The strategy also involves relocating tutors' rooms on the top floor and hiring out a room to a beautician and hairdresser. The college will be hosting the world blind football championship at 'thePoint4' arena in 2010. A new assessment centre is due to open in July 2009. This will include a low vision assessment room and a wide range of specialist ophthalmic and optometric equipment. It is planned that the centre will become a centre of excellence for low vision through the Vision 2020 initiative. The centre includes six dedicated assessment rooms, a conference room with kitchen facilities, 21 bedrooms, as well as an information and welcome centre, a retail facility and an orangery and terrace. The centre is purpose-designed to support new and existing partnerships as well as to offer learning opportunities for both college learners and those of partners.