

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Herefordshire College of Technology

Date of visit: 12 March 2009

### Context

Herefordshire College of Technology (the college) is medium-sized and shares a city centre campus in Hereford with a sixth form college and an arts college. The college has a second campus south of the city at the small village of Holme Lacy. This campus includes a farm, animal and equine centres, sports facilities, workshops and forges. It is used for the provision of courses in land-based subjects, sports studies and outdoor education as well as farriery, blacksmithing and rural craft provision. The college's catchment area includes Hereford city, as well as the sparsely populated, rural county of Herefordshire. The first phase of a major building project on the college's Hereford campus has been completed and is in full use. A second phase is well underway and is due to be in use from autumn 2009 with the entire project completed by December 2009.

In 2007/08 the college enrolled approximately 4,100 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded students. About a third of students were aged 16 to 18, an increased number from the previous year. The largest number of enrolments was at level 1. The percentage of students from a minority ethnic heritage remains very low and mirrors that of the local population. The college offers provision in most sector subject areas. It has substantially increased its Train to Gain provision over recent years. The college was last inspected in May 2006.

### Achievement and standards

How have success rates, especially for students aged 16 to 18 and for key skills qualifications, improved since the previous inspection visit?	Significant progress
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In 2007/08, success rates increased substantially and are above the average in similar colleges, and well above at level 1. The exception is the success rate on level 3 courses for students aged 16 to 18, where, despite a notable increase, the rate remains below the 2006/07 national average. Improvements were particularly marked in information and communication technology (ICT), science and mathematics, leisure, travel and tourism and in preparation for life and work. Success rates for key skills qualifications have mostly increased and are well above the low national averages.

Overall framework completions in work-based learning continue to improve and are high. Timely success rates on the growing Train to Gain programme have improved considerably since the provision started and are high for completers in 2008/09 at the time of the visit. The college analyses the achievement of different groups of students through self-assessment. The numbers of students from minority ethnic groups in the college are too small for meaningful statistical comparisons in separate categories. There are no significant differences by gender in success rates.

Students' retention rate part way through the 2008/09 academic year shows further improvement compared with a similar time in the previous year. The range of strategies and actions to bring about these improvements is good. It includes better advice and guidance, prompt and thorough initial assessment, closer monitoring of attendance, and rigorous monitoring of courses that are causing concern. The number of such courses has reduced by half since last year. The college has set appropriate targets for increasing success rates across courses.

#### Quality of provision

How effective are actions to improve teaching and learning, including the use of information and learning technology?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection visit the college has strengthened its procedure for the observation of lessons. The procedure is comprehensive in coverage and detailed summaries are made of the findings both at whole college level and by curriculum area. The use of the views of learners are gathered effectively and used as part of the overall evaluation of each lesson. The college makes good use of external consultants to support its ongoing commitment to ensuring a high level of rigour in the process. Teachers value the procedure in supporting their professional development. Specific targets and professional development needs are clearly identified after each observation. In a few cases, in their evaluations observers do not focus sharply on how quickly students acquire skills and knowledge. During 2007/08, the college identified that the quality of lessons delivered by part-time teachers was an area for development and put in place specific staff development to support improvement. Early indications from the lesson observations completed part way through this academic year show a much improved profile of good lessons delivered by this group of teachers.

The learning environment is much enhanced at the Hereford campus through the new building which benefits from careful planning and is used to maximise learning. Modern, light rooms and workshops are well equipped with specialist and information learning technology resources. There is a high emphasis on tidiness and professionalism in the working environment. The college recognises that the environment at Holme Lacy has shortcomings and has done much to resolve short-term concerns as well as putting in place long-term plans for improvements. Social space is constrained by the site layout.

A strong emphasis is placed on the use of information learning technology in learning. The development of a virtual learning environment has been stepped up from September 2008. A plan to increase its use and effectiveness is too general and insufficiently challenging. The self-assessment report makes limited evaluation of the quality of assessment in support of its self-assessed grade of good for the quality of teaching and learning.

How has the curriculum, especially for Skills for Life and key skills qualifications, been developed further?	Reasonable progress
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Implementation of the Skills for Life strategy has resulted in increased success rates in Skills for Life qualifications. Success rates for younger students are particularly high and they are much improved for adults. The college is successfully implementing a strategy to map the basic and key skills needed in vocational courses and embed contextualised support, both in lessons and in separate sessions. The strategy includes effective action both to raise awareness and to develop the ability among vocational tutors to recognise and support students' needs. Vocational tutors are being encouraged to gain specific Skills for Life tutor qualifications in this area. The college is the lead provider for two diplomas due to be launched in September 2009 and has piloted the teaching of functional skills in preparation, which has been well supported by the skills mapping exercise.

#### Leadership and management

To what extent have self-assessment procedures been improved further, including fully incorporating the merged provision at the Holme Lacy campus?	Reasonable progress
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Self-assessment arrangements are comprehensive and fully incorporate the merged provision at the Holme Lacy campus. Appropriate arrangements are in place to moderate course and curriculum area self-assessment reports. The summary report is evaluative and draws on appropriate evidence, including the performance of different groups and consideration of the progress students make in relation to their starting points. The quality of the separate curriculum area reports, however, varies. In some cases, there are conflicting strengths and areas for development. Quality improvement actions also vary in effectiveness. Most address the areas for development appropriately but some of the proposed actions lack clear and specific targets, particularly in the use of measurable success indicators.

How well has the college developed its approach to equality and diversity, and to ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are fully in place?	Reasonable progress
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The college is rightly reviewing the role of its equality and diversity group to ensure it is fully effective in monitoring and reporting on all aspects that are within its remit. In particular, this group's role in monitoring and reporting formally on success rates of different groups of learners and the effectiveness of other actions in place within

its equality action plans is to be increased. While a governor is part of the group membership, the link between this group's work and the corporation is insufficiently strong, especially in relation to the promotion of equality across learners' achievement rates. Impact assessments are underway, all policies have been screened and those identified as high risk ones have been completed. The self-assessment of the college's work to promote equality and diversity is insufficiently focused on evaluating the impact of this work and the grade awarded is not well supported by evidence in the report.

A revised draft safeguarding policy is close to finalisation following appropriate consultation externally and with a widened remit to bring together all aspects of the college's arrangements, including consideration of vulnerable adults. Arrangements for checking of all staff through the Criminal Records Bureau are in place. Training in child protection matters is provided regularly and is part of the induction process for new staff.

How well has the college developed the use of the learner voice in its work?	Reasonable progress
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The range of mechanisms to gather learners' views is comprehensive and includes twice-yearly questionnaires, a focus group of course team representatives and student governors. A particularly good mechanism is the collecting of learners' views following lesson observations. Views gathered through lesson observations, questionnaires or focus group meetings are summarised and discussed fully in termly course team meetings. There are some good examples of appropriate improvements, for example in course timetabling arrangements or in the timeliness of advice on fees, to meet learners' concerns raised in this way. However, learners are not yet routinely involved in more strategic or forward looking activities, such as developing the college's approach to equality and diversity. Their role in influencing some aspects of the college's work is limited.