

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Peterborough Regional College
Date of visit: 10 June 2009

Context

Peterborough Regional College (the college) is a large general further education college, serving the city of Peterborough and the surrounding areas. The main campus is located close to the city centre and there are two other sites, including new premises in the city centre housing media and journalism curriculum opened in October 2008. At the time of the monitoring visit there were approximately 12,535 enrolments, of which 7176 are full time and 5359 are part time. The college has around 400 work-based learners. Some 34% of students at the college are of minority ethnic heritage, much higher than the local community. The college has increased its employer responsive provision, redefined the curriculum portfolio across its 14 sector subject areas and increased partnership activity with local schools since the last inspection.

The college was last inspected in April 2008. At that inspection, the college's overall effectiveness was judged as satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

How effectively has the college improved its headline success rates and overall trend of improvement?	Significant progress
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The college's long course success rate in 2007/08 continued the upward trend from 2006/07, rising by a further seven percentage points to 75% to be in line with similar colleges. Success rates improved for both age groups and at all levels. For students aged 16 to 18, the success rate was high at level 2, above average at level 1 and satisfactory at level 3. For adults, the long course success rate increased by eight percentage points to be broadly average. The long course success rate at level 1 for adults improved notably although remains below average. The level 2 success rate improved and was broadly satisfactory and, for long level 3 courses, the success rate also improved notably and was high in 2007/08.

To sustain and build on improvements in success rates since the previous inspection, the college has initiated a number of key curriculum changes such

as introducing a more structured programme of learning for each individual student and increasing the accountability of curriculum managers.

In-year college data suggests strongly that the trend in improvement is set to continue for 2008/09, with the college on schedule to at least meet its overall success rate target of 80% and long course success rate target of 78%. College data show an in-year retention rate at 12 percentage points higher than at the same point last year, standing at 95% at the time of the monitoring visit. Attendance rates also appear to have sustained improvement and overall the rate is high at around 89%.

How effectively has the college improved its success rates for adult students on long level 1 programmes, identified as a key area for improvement at the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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For students aged 19 or over, long course success rates at level 1 improved markedly by 14 percentage points in 2007/08 but remain below average. The college's self-assessment report clearly identifies this as a continued area for development. The college has taken a range of actions to address the previous low success rates at level 1 for adults, particularly in the areas of information and communication technology, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and key skills provision. Actions taken include improving the quality of advice and guidance at enrolment, improving the use of data, focusing on students' progression routes and increasing the rigour of course performance monitoring.

College in-year data show the retention rate on adult level 1 courses standing at 87% with a predicted success rate of 74% in 2008/09, representing a potential increase compared with the previous year. Students' progression data are monitored closely and show a positive picture with over 60% of students progressing from level 1 to level 2 this academic year.

What progress has been made in increasing the success rates for minority ethnic groups in the college?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates for most minority ethnic groups improved in 2007/08, particularly for students aged 16 to 18 where success rates for most groups compared favourably to both their respective national average and the college's average success rate. For adult students, the statistically significant minority ethnic groups had success rates broadly in line with the college average with the exception of two which were well below; these include the 8% of the total adult cohort who chose not to disclose their ethnicity and the 3% who categorised themselves as 'Any Other'.

The success rate for 'White Other' students, the biggest minority ethnic group for both ages at 12% of the total cohort, improved notably in 2007/08 and was broadly satisfactory. The overall proportion of students, particularly adults, whose ethnicity is 'unknown' is very high and stands at 13%. In response, the college has revised its application form to capture this information more effectively on enrolment and has identified this issue as one of its six targeted equality and diversity impact measures. Again, the college's self-assessment clearly identifies improving the success rates for minority ethnic groups as a continued area for improvement. To support further improvement for 2008/09, a wide range of strategies are in place and the college's in-year data for each minority ethnic group show retention rates are high.

The self-assessment report analyses the performance of minority ethnic groups and clearly reports on trends over time. However, it does not analyse sufficiently or report performance of these groups by long level qualifications or separately identify the category of 'White Other' students for comparison, the college's largest minority group, which could potentially skew any emerging picture of improvement or area of concern.

Quality of provision

How effectively is the college ensuring that teachers' use of initial assessment is more consistent in planning teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in ensuring that initial assessment of students' development needs in literacy and numeracy is used more consistently by teachers in planning teaching and learning. Since the previous inspection, the college has introduced an improved screening tool for literacy and numeracy to support the initial assessment process and to target students' development needs more effectively. This has now been used with all full-time students, as well as some part-time students. Extensive staff training has taken place to support the introduction of the screening tool across the college. The outcomes of tests are routinely discussed at regular course team meetings.

The college has also placed particular emphasis on ensuring that students' individual needs are clearly recognised within lesson planning processes. Additional training has developed detailed schemes of work further to model best practice in differentiation, and to help teachers map individual students' needs into their lesson plans. Staff now feel more confident in interpreting the results of the literacy and numeracy screening for students. Students receive timely support for literacy and numeracy. The college's observation of teaching and learning process now routinely monitors the use of differentiated outcomes for students within teaching and learning.

At the previous inspection, the identification of students requiring additional learning support was good, and this support was provided promptly. Since then, the college has revised its learning support staffing arrangements and procedures substantially to further improve the effectiveness of the support provided by the college. The college reports significantly improved retention and success rates for students receiving additional learning support. The college has also introduced a team of personal learning coaches to help students with a range of behavioural and personal support needs. There are clear indications that this work is having a very positive impact on student retention.

How has the college improved the effectiveness of its tutorials?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in improving the effectiveness of its tutorials. At the previous inspection, the consistency in quality of group tutorials was found to be variable, and targets agreed with students in individual tutorials were often too general.

Following the inspection, the college has taken a number of steps to improve the effectiveness of its tutorial arrangements. It quickly established a tutorial focus group with representatives from all curriculum areas, as well as some support staff. This group has since reinforced and clarified common aspects of the tutorial programme, and has developed additional guidance to support tutors, particularly those new to the tutor role. The college increased the time allocated for tutorials to two hours per week from September 2008. A range of training has taken place for all tutors to improve the consistency of approach and to improve tutors' confidence in their role. The working group has also developed a range of well used resources, which are available on the college virtual learning environment, to support the delivery of key tutorial themes. Tutors make good use of additional expertise, such as that provided by the college's team of youth workers, to address issues such as knife crime, diversity and sexual health within group tutorials.

Substantial additional training has been provided for staff in setting more appropriate targets to help individual students improve. A new system of weekly planners has also been introduced recently to encourage students to determine short term, achievable targets and to take greater ownership of these targets. This will contribute to discussions and target-setting within existing individual tutorials. The college is currently piloting the use of an online tutorial and student monitoring system which is to be introduced across the college in September 2009. It was too early at the time of the monitoring visit to assess the impact of this change.

Student satisfaction surveys indicate good levels of satisfaction with the support provided.

What progress has been made in improving the quality monitoring and evaluation of tutorials?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, the college recognised that its quality monitoring and evaluation of tutorial provision was underdeveloped. Since then, the college has taken positive steps in continuing to improve its quality monitoring arrangements for the evaluation of tutorials.

A revised audit process now identifies and includes tutorial and individual learning plans within the college's quality assurance cycle. Since January 2009, the college has undertaken an audit of tutorial compliance, and has audited course files, tutorial records, and individual learning plans in all of the college's curriculum areas.

At the time of the previous inspection, the college had recently introduced the monitoring and evaluation of tutorials into its observation of teaching and learning processes. These processes are now well established. In 2007/08 the college graded 68% of observed tutorials graded as good or better; in 2008/09 to date, the college profile was 81% of tutorial observations graded good or better.

The college has also introduced observation of its additional learning support processes. In the current year to date, 35 observations of additional learning support have been completed. One aim of these observations has been to focus on the improvement of communications and links between in-class support workers and class tutors. This approach to observation is now being shared within the region as an example of good practice.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made by the college in responding to equalities legislation and promotion and monitoring of equality of opportunity?	Significant progress
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The college has improved its promotion of equality of opportunity markedly since the previous inspection. Its judgement in the 2007/08 self-assessment report that the promotion of equality of opportunity is now satisfactory appears generally well founded. The college has taken positive steps towards meeting its legislative duties. A well considered structure of equality committees, which include student and external representation, has been introduced and is successfully raising the profile of equality and diversity across the college. Race and disability policies are clear and implementation plans are monitored frequently. However, although the college's separate equality and diversity policy and plan incorporates gender, along with the other equality strands, it is not yet sufficiently gender explicit in relation to

specific and measurable actions or targets for the promotion and improvement of gender equality.

The college recognises that several aspects of equality and diversity promotion will take time to embed fully, however, the action taken by managers so far is already having a significant impact on students, both in terms of success rates and in raising their awareness of equality, diversity and culture through the curriculum. For example, success rates for minority ethnic groups improved notably in 2007/08, particularly for those aged 16 to 18. Success rates for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also improved compared with the previous year for both ages, but again markedly for those aged 16 to 18 where the success rate was significantly higher than those who declared no learning disability and/or difficulty. The college's observations of teaching and learning, which now specifically report on how equality and diversity, show it is promoted well in lessons.

Since the previous inspection, all staff, governors and senior managers have received appropriate training. The reporting of the performance of different groups of students to the governing body is much improved and is monitored closely. The college has worked hard to engage with students and staff in developing its approach to promoting equality of opportunity. Student survey results on equality themes are very positive. In addition, the college has expanded its 'diversity day' celebrations this year which has been very well received by students, and it is rigorously promoting its 'Respect' agenda through student induction.