

## MONITORING VISIT MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Riverside College Halton  
Date of visit: 1 & 2 July 2009

### Context

Riverside college Halton was inspected in November 2008. At this inspection the college's overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, leadership and management, quality of provision, achievement and standards, and six of its curriculum areas were judged inadequate. This monitoring visit assessed the progress made by the college in improving each of the areas for improvement listed at the front of the inspection report.

Since the inspection the college's leadership team has been strengthened and some new governors appointed. An interim principal and several new senior managers have been recruited.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving learners' chances of success?	Reasonable progress
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The college is implementing a wide range of improvements to the curriculum, support arrangements and to teaching and learning. These all have the potential to improve success rates. In-year retention has improved markedly and success rates for work-based provision have also improved, providing strong evidence that overall success rates will improve. Success rates for those courses which are internally assessed also show improvement. However a new set of overall success rate data will not be available until the autumn term.

### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the provision in the curriculum areas judged inadequate at the previous inspection?	Significant progress
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In-year retention has improved in all six curriculum areas graded inadequate. Success rates in work-based learning have improved overall.

Teaching profiles in the curriculum areas have improved, robust and effective action is being taken to eliminate inadequate teaching and the proportion of good or better teaching has increased markedly in each area. Teachers and curriculum managers speak persuasively about the improved culture of putting the student first, and that poor performance will not be tolerated. They say that there are good communications within departments and across the college. Performance management is more robust and there is an effective focus on improving teaching and improving the rigor with which students' progress is monitored. Absence is monitored closely and followed up. New information systems enable closer monitoring of students' progress and of curriculum activity. Students consulted during the monitoring visit confirmed that curriculum delivery has improved.

What progress has been made to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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Teaching and learning is placed very firmly at the heart of the college's work and staff recognise its importance; most are eager to improve their classroom practice and have done so through the high quality support provided by the advanced teaching and learning practitioners (ATLP), the ongoing programme of professional development and the sharing of good practice events. Teaching and learning is widely celebrated in the college's fortnightly bulletin and maintains a high profile in the work of the college.

The scheme for the observation of teaching and learning is thorough and implemented rigorously. All staff are observed over the first two terms of the year. All probationary teachers are observed during the first term with both a supportive and a graded observation. Action plans are set after each observation and their implementation is monitored closely by line managers, often through direct observation of teaching. The college has set a minimum of grade 2 (good) as the standard for the quality of teaching and learning. All teachers graded less than this have a follow-up observation around four weeks after the first one, usually after seeking advice and guidance from peers, the ATLPs and undertaking other staff development opportunities. The judgements in the written lesson observation reports are moderated thoroughly. Good progress has been made to ensure that comments on reports are evaluative and support the grade awarded for the lesson. Recent training for observers has helped this, although the college recognises that there is still more work to be done to ensure greater consistency between observers.

As a result of the college's actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning the proportion of good and better teaching has improved markedly in the short period since the inspection. Learners are more enthusiastic about their lessons and more of them are staying on their courses.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of learners' progress reviews and progress tracking?	Reasonable progress
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Arrangements for tutorial provision have been strengthened and the tracking of individual student's progress and the progress of student cohorts improved. Procedures are in place to check that teachers are conforming with requirements and conformance has improved. Increased use is being made of on-line systems which link learning targets, progress tracking and progress reporting. These new systems and procedures are having a positive effect on students' attendance, retention and progression.

Profession development work has been provided to help teachers make students' learning targets more focused and reports on progress more informative, but more needs doing. The quality of learning targets and reports on progress are inconsistent; not enough of the targets are clear enough or the reports sufficiently informative.

During the third term of 2008/09 there has been an appropriate concentration on ensuring students do all they need to do to achieve their qualifications and a positive destination.

What progress has been made in improving the rigour of advice and guidance?	Significant progress
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The radical changes made to entry criteria, noted in the inspection report, are now applied rigorously across all subjects offered on a full-time basis, making sure that learners are enrolled on the right programme. Revised and detailed enrolment procedures are in place for September 2009. Stronger links are being forged between college tutors and mentors in partners' schools to ensure that potential learners who face significant barriers to learning have the support they need as soon as they arrive in college. Criteria for learners' internal progression on to the next level of course have been implemented since the previous inspection. All learners receive a one-to-one progression interview with their personal tutor to ensure that they know what they need to achieve to progress to the next level of their course.

The significant steps the college has taken to improve the quality of advice and guidance since the previous inspection are having a positive impact on retention and projected internal progression. Projected internal progression to the next level of course in September 2009 has exceeded the targets the college set for itself. Applications to higher education have increased markedly when compared with the same period last year.

## Leadership and management

What progress has been made to improve the rigour of performance monitoring and target setting?	Significant progress
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The increased focus on the college's vision and priorities, provided by the new principal, underpins the increasing effectiveness of many of the initiatives already begun by the previous management team. A climate of challenge has replaced one of complacency which was evident in a number of areas in the college. Underperformance amongst staff is not tolerated. At the same time, a culture where staff are supported well to enable students to achieve is being created and embraced.

Systems to ensure greater rigour in performance monitoring have been strengthened and there is greater accountability at all levels. Course performance is monitored closely and is improving. Use of data has been increased; curriculum managers monitor weekly their departmental performance against targets in areas such as attendance and retention. Performance against these and achievement targets are scrutinised closely by senior managers.

The college has adopted a robust approach to rectifying underperformance in teaching and learning. Teachers are challenged to teach well. Detailed actions plans are set following a lesson observation, regardless of the grade awarded. Teachers whose teaching is deemed less than good are supported through mentoring and extensive professional development before being re-observed. The college has a good record of improving grades as a result of the support they receive. Decisive action is taken where teachers do not improve their performance.

Performance management has improved in other areas. For example, the quality directorate has been restructured to ensure quality systems are firmly embedded in curriculum areas. A revised performance management review process is currently being introduced to ensure individual targets for improvement, including for teaching and learning, are sufficiently challenging and aligned to whole college targets.

The impact of the college's actions to increase the rigour of performance review is having a marked impact. For example, retention has improved. The college anticipates that this will have a positive impact on success rates for 2009. The proportion of teaching and learning which is good or better has increased markedly.

<p>What progress has the college made in improving the accuracy and clarity of self-assessment and in establishing rigorous quality improvement procedures?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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Capacity to improve has been improved. New governors with extensive college leadership experience have been appointed. The leadership team has been strengthened and the college's vision, values and strategic aims have been restated and disseminated. The proportion of teaching undertaken by full-time or fractional full-time teachers has been increased. The accuracy and accessibility of retention and achievement data have improved. Enhanced audit arrangements are helping to ensure there is good conformance by staff to management requirements. Performance management arrangements have been strengthened. Professional development gives strong support to strategic developments.

Self-assessment proforma have been revised and linked more securely to outcome measures. Internal inspection arrangements to monitor the quality of curriculum areas have been improved and the moderation of course and curriculum area self-assessment has been strengthened. This will help to ensure a greater range of evidence and judgements will be available to inform the next college self-assessment report.

The college's assessment of the impact of quality improvement systems is more securely linked to student outcomes. Quality improvement plans have been brought together using an on-line system. They are updated on a rolling basis to reflect the outcomes of self-assessment, internal inspection and development planning as these become available during the year. The implementation of these plans is reviewed regularly.