

# Portland College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Portland College is an independent specialist residential college, located near Mansfield. The college recruits nationally and provides for students aged over 16 with physical disabilities and associated neurological conditions, many with complex needs. Funding for the students is from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Residential Training Unit (RTU) of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). LSC funded students have individual programmes which include communication, independence and daily living skills, personal and social development, Skills for Life and vocational preparation. RTU students follow vocational courses leading to qualifications at levels 1, 2 and 3 in business related subjects, information technology, horticulture and Skills for Life.

The publication of the last inspection report was in April 2008. Inspectors judged overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievements and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management to be good. Both sector subject areas inspected, foundation for learning and life and preparation for work, were good.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Does self-assessment successfully inform quality improvement planning? | Reasonable progress |
|--|---------------------|

At the last inspection, self-assessment was good overall and the self-assessment report was broadly accurate. The college's quality assurance committee formed in 2008/09 has further strengthened the college's rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision. Comprising of senior managers, it meets each term to assist in identifying provision needing further attention and to inform self-assessment. The quality improvement plan for 2008/09 clearly identifies areas for improvement and timescales for actions. The monitoring of the plan is very effective. However, the plan's targets and outcomes to measure success are not clear. The draft self-assessment report for 2008/09, although providing a good overall evaluation of the quality of provision, contains insufficient substantive data and evidence to support judgements.

#### Outcomes for learners

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| Do students still achieve well and make good progress into further education, training or employment? | Reasonable progress |
|---|---------------------|

At the last inspection, progression onto positive destinations was judged to be good for LSC learners and outstanding for RTU students. All students gain in confidence and independence to enable them to integrate successfully into mainstream provision and employment after leaving the college. Students' feedback is very positive about

the support they receive from college staff in improving their skills to enable them to live more independent lifestyles. However, progression into employment for RTU students declined from 48% in 2007/08 to 38% in 2008/09. The college is taking steps to remedy this and to address the expressed concerns of students in relation to them having insufficient time within their programmes to focus on job seeking. The students are actively encouraged to participate in the life of the college and to make informed choices about their health and well-being. Students make senior managers very aware of their opinions on the standard of food and catering provided by the college. Senior managers continue to work with the food council, which includes student representation, to monitor and continually improve delivery.

How effective is the tracking of students' progress against targets? Significant progress

At the last monitoring visit, there had been insufficient progress made in the robustness of individual target setting for RTU students, although recent changes to improve this had taken place. At the last monitoring visit, it was too early to assess the impact of the actions taken. Targets set for students' achievements are now good, and relate well to medium and long-term goals. Thorough assessment processes are in place and successfully inform targets set for achievement contained within individual learning plans. Tutors systematically record students' achievements against targets at the end of every session. Staff quickly identify gaps when students are not achieving and take action to help them make speedier progress towards their medium and long-term goals.

Quality of provision  
 Has the Skills for Life provision for RTU learners improved since the last inspection? Significant progress

At the last monitoring visit, progress in developing the Skills for Life provision was reasonable. This is now firmly established with improved links between Skills for Life tutors and vocational areas. The routine practising of literacy and numeracy skills is now integral across all curriculum areas. Although no longer compulsory, attendance rates have increased with at least, on average, 88% of RTU students benefiting from the literacy and numeracy workshops on offer.

Leadership and management  
 Has the college been successful at improving the quality of teaching and learning through its lesson observation process? Significant progress

Teaching and learning were judged to be good at the last inspection and the college had been successful at the time of the last monitoring visit in ensuring that a higher proportion of good or better teaching had been achieved. Since then the college has paid further attention to improving the overall quality of teaching and learning. The

lesson observation feedback to teachers provides very detailed feedback and clear performance targets to improve their performance. These are very carefully monitored and previous observations are referred back to by college observers in preparation for the current round of observations. Teachers graded as satisfactory receive additional support and further staff development and training. The moderation of lesson observations is both internal and external, and observations provide an accurate picture of the overall quality of lessons across the college. The percentage of good or better lessons has increased to 74%. In 2008/09, no lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory. The vast majority of students surveyed for the monitoring visit are very positive about the quality of teaching and learning on their courses.

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