

RNIB College, Loughborough

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

RNIB College Loughborough is a medium-sized residential independent specialist college. Residential learners attend from across the country. The college is located in purpose-built accommodation, sharing a campus with Loughborough College with the aim of enabling access to the full range of provision of a mainstream general further education college for those that wish it. The majority of learners have a visual impairment, although some have chronic illness; hearing loss; learning difficulties; mobility difficulties or mild to moderate autism. Most learners have multiple difficulties and/or disabilities. Adult learners attend a Residential Training Unit and other programmes funded by the Department of Work and Pensions.

At the time of the monitoring visit there were 61 learners of whom 49 were funded by the Learning and Skills Council. Of these, 33% were aged 16 to 18, 57% were male and 18% were of minority ethnic heritage. The college received its last monitoring visit in February 2009 and was found to have made significant progress in: learners' achievements; the monitoring of specialist support; quality assurance and equalities legislation. It was judged to have made reasonable progress in the planning of teaching and learning and in target setting.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in strengthening quality assurance arrangements and the self-assessment process and report to clearly identify the college's priorities for improvement?	Significant progress
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The 2008/09 self-assessment report is written using the new inspection framework and makes clear judgments about each aspect of provision. The report uses trend data well to demonstrate an improving picture or show sustained improvement over time. For the five themes covered during the monitoring visit, the self-assessment report was found to be comprehensive, evaluative, and used to identify clearly areas for improvement. In addition, good use is made of quantitative and qualitative evidence including learners' and staff views to support the judgments made about provision.

Quality improvement arrangements continue to improve. The growing partnership working with another local specialist provider has strengthened the sharing of good practice further. For example, the introduction of an onsite eBay shop is developing a wide range of learners' skills and proving popular with learners. The college's quality improvement plans are detailed and, in most cases, have clear targets by which managers can measure progress. The monitoring and quality assurance of residential provision, an issue raised at the previous inspection visit, has been improved and progress against actions taken is reviewed frequently for impact. For example,

Careful reorganisation of learners' residential facilities has enabled staff to better manage student behaviour and meet learners' needs. In addition, care plans are now undertaken much earlier before learners enrol and with a greater contribution from learners and parents. The college has gathered student feedback on these changes but has yet to formally analyse these to gauge the overall impact of the changes on students' experience.

The college places a high priority on safeguarding its learners and has responded appropriately to the vetting and barring legislation. The college's approach to learner risk assessments has been reviewed to ensure they are more tailored to individuals and do not prohibit or deny learners from undertaking certain activities which can enhance their learning through better identifying and managing risk. In addition, work placements are reviewed much earlier and more systematically to review their appropriateness to learners' interests and needs.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in maintaining the high proportion of learners leaving into further education or employment and in developing learners' broader skills to support their future economic well-being?

Reasonable progress

The college has continued to extend the range of opportunities to support learners' work-related skills. Through active marketing, the college has further broadened work placements which now include a veterinary surgery, a plumbing company and a large local hotel. The achievement of key skills qualifications continues to be high both within the RNIB College and Loughborough College, however, the number of learners who took key skills qualifications at RNIB fell markedly in 2009. Work placements continue to be planned carefully to meet the learners' interests. The take up of work placements remains high with some 97% of RNIB-based learners undertaking a form of work experience in 2009. In 2007/08 an exceptionally high proportion of learners went onto full-time employment related to their study, or further education or voluntary work, although this fell to 75% for 2009 leavers as at the time of this monitoring visit. The college has good mechanisms for tracking learners after they leave the college and has extended their tracking of destinations to two years to better monitor long-term success.

The recent addition of two college shops and extended arrangements for learners to cook their own food in the week has helped widen the opportunities to develop learners' practical numeracy and budgetary skills. An adult temporary employment scheme has been introduced this academic year as an initiative aimed at increasing the number of job-related opportunities available for adult learners after they leave college. It was too early to judge the full impact of this at the time of the monitoring visit.

How much progress has the college made in improving the precision of some short-term targets? Significant progress

The college has focused its quality assurance processes to monitor the quality of target-setting further. Individual learning plans are audited frequently to ensure all targets are meaningful. In addition, training and clear guidance on target setting has taken place to raise the awareness of teaching staff of exactly what is required to ensure learners can make sufficient, measurable progress. The college's audits now show a greater number of staff using targets appropriately to stretch and challenge learners. Managers are not complacent and recognise this area requires constant monitoring, but already the number of learners' achievements is significantly higher than last year. The development of data systems has also ensured teaching and care staff can more easily access individual learning plans electronically and track learners' progress from baseline assessment.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning? Significant progress

The college has a comprehensive process for monitoring the quality of its teaching and learning. Rigorous systems are in place to moderate lesson observations by college observers to ensure greater consistency of judgment and documentation. A whole college focus on improving satisfactory lessons to good and good lessons to outstanding is beginning to have an impact. All teaching staff whose lessons are judged to be satisfactory receive support through mentoring and are re-observed within a negotiated period of time. College data show that many have improved the quality of their lessons with a much greater proportion of teaching and learning now judged to be good or better. Good and increasing opportunities have been established to share good practice through external links with other colleges and through peer observation. The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is reviewed frequently through lesson observation. The embedding of equality themes is enhanced by the promotion of an international theme, chosen by learners, and used over the period of a term to support cultural references and understanding through different learning settings, with China being the current topic.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in engaging with learners and employers to help drive improvement in the quality of provision? Significant progress

The learners' experience and learners' views are given a high priority in the college and supported through a comprehensive learner involvement strategy and implementation plan. Learners' feedback is collated frequently through questionnaires, focus groups and a student committee and the college responds well

to suggestions made. For example, learners requested a wider range of extra curricular activities and more independent cooking time. As a result, a wider range of activities were included this academic year and participation rates have doubled. Learners are now able to cook independently up to four times a week which has helped develop further their financing and organisation skills. The views of all groups of learners are considered although this is not made clear in the self-assessment report. The college is increasing the strategic influence of learners' feedback.

The engagement of other users is good although it is underplayed in the self-assessment report. For example, the college has good links with employers and works currently with around 30 employers to provide a wide range of work placements for learners. Employers' views are sought through breakfast meetings and formal work placement evaluations. The curriculum was adapted this year in response to feedback by employers to increase the broader practical-based skills of learners. Stakeholders are very positive about the work of the college and note particularly strong lines of communication. As yet employers and other stakeholders are not directly involved in the validation of the self-assessment report.

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