

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Hertford Regional College

Date of visit: 19 June 2008

Context

Hertford Regional College is a medium-sized, general further education college with a catchment area encompassing the areas of East Hertford, Broxbourne and Enfield, extending to Cambridgeshire in the north. There are two major sites approximately seven miles apart, located at Ware and Broxbourne, two learning centres at Bishops Stortford and Waltham Cross, plus a number of community learning centres throughout the area.

In 2007/08 there are 10,261 learners. Of these, around one third are aged 16 to 18 years and two thirds are adults. Around 13% of learners are from minority ethnic groups, compared with 7% in the East Hertfordshire population and 10% of the population of Broxbourne. Although the ratio of female to male learners is evenly split at ages 16 to 18, around two thirds of adult learners are female.

The college provides courses in all subject sector areas. Courses range from pre-entry to Level 4, including some higher education courses.

Hertford Regional College was last inspected in May 2004 and was judged to be satisfactory overall with good capacity to improve. Two curriculum areas were judged to be good and eight satisfactory. Science and mathematics, engineering and work-based learning in hairdressing were judged to be unsatisfactory. At the last monitoring visit in October 2006, which included reinspection of the unsatisfactory areas, science and mathematics, and engineering were judged to be satisfactory and work-based learning in hairdressing was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in improving success rates?	Insufficient progress
--	-----------------------

Long course success rates, at 69% in 2006/07, are just below the national average at 71% showing only a very small improvement compared with the previous year. With the exception of Level 2 courses, success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 in 2006/07 were below national averages, significantly so for Level 1 courses. Success rates for adult learners were in line with or better than the national average, except at Level 3 where success rates on access courses are low. Retention is improving, with the exception of Level 1 courses for learners aged 16 to 18. Pass rates for Levels 2 and 3 courses for learners aged 16 to 18 in 2006/07 improved marginally

and are in line with the national average, but pass rates on Level 1 courses fell significantly and are below average. Pass rates improved for adults at all levels and by a higher margin at level 3, and are broadly in line with national averages.

Actions to improve outcomes on Level 1 and 3 courses identified in the college's improvement plan as a result of self-assessment have been only partially successful. College data for 2007/08 indicate partial improvement in retention on Level 1 courses, but retention has declined in others and for adults at this level. Retention and achievement on GCE A level courses have also declined. The college will cease to offer GCE A level courses from September 2008 and is changing some provision at Level 1. The college has graded achievement and standards as good in the self-assessment report but data provided for 2006/07 indicate this is over generous. Success rates are not improving at the rate of the sector overall.

What progress has been made in raising levels of achievement and improving provision for key skills qualifications?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Pass rates have improved significantly from a very low base at the last inspection. In 2006/07, achievement of key skills at Level 1 and on communication courses at level 2 for learners aged 16 to 18 were high when compared with the low national averages. Achievement on application of number courses at Level 2 for learners aged 16 to 18 is low. At Level 3, achievements for all learners are low, although numbers are small.

Teaching and learning on key skills programmes have improved, with 63% of lessons observed in 2007/08 graded good or better. Strategies to improve the training and qualification status of key skills tutors are in place. Tutors are based in departments, which helps them make better use of vocational contexts to develop key skills. Plans to integrate key skills development more effectively with vocational lessons are underway, but it is too early to judge the impact of this.

What progress has been made in improving the framework success rates and the quality of assessment for work based learners?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Work-based learning success rates have improved since the last inspection to two points above the national average for apprenticeships, but well below the national average for advanced apprenticeships. College data for 2007/08 indicates further improvement for success rates. The completion rate for advanced apprenticeships within the time agreed remains low. The recent appointment of an assessment development manager helps provide support for areas identified as requiring improvement. Good practice is shared between departments and other colleges to raise achievement and standardise procedures. The combining of key skills into work-based programmes provides clearer and more relevant opportunities for learners to gather evidence of their competence for assessments.

More frequent and regular contact between learners and assessors has enabled the quality of assessment to improve. The college is working more closely with employers and assessors to improve the quality of provision and assessment further.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning for 16 to 18 year old and adult learners?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The profile of lessons graded good or better through lesson observations in 2007/08 has improved to 71% compared with 65% in the previous year. The proportion of inadequate teaching and learning has reduced further to 2% of lessons observed. Some variation between departments exists. Observation records are comprehensive and linked well to core teaching and learning criteria set by the college for evaluation and grading purposes. Records do not, however, highlight how learners meet their targets sufficiently well. The college's analysis of observation records recognises this. Observation records are monitored rigorously and moderated through the use of external consultants.

Progress towards achieving qualified teacher status for all staff is good with almost all staff qualified or in training. Part-time hourly-paid staff are supported effectively to access training with around a half of the cohort fully qualified, and a further 20% working towards qualification. Teaching and learning co-ordinators located in departments support staff effectively in developing their teaching practice and conduct observations in partnership with heads of department. A wide range of development activities are in place to improve teachers' practice including supporting good teachers to improve further. The improvement in the quality of teaching and learning has yet to impact on improving outcomes for all learners across the college.

What progress has been made in improving the timeliness of the provision of additional learning support, and the quality of provision for part-time learners who need additional literacy and numeracy support?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

A greater focus on identifying support needs when learners apply to the college enables students to access support within the first three weeks of starting their course. The retention of learners receiving support has improved in 2007/08 and success rates in 2006/07 are similar to those learners not receiving support. The availability of support is well advertised. Support staff work closely with the college information centre to identify learners with barriers to learning. Recently appointed link advisors in departments help teaching staff identify and provide support for learners to aid achievement. To raise staff and learner awareness, staff development activities and information are promoted across the college. All part-time learners are offered English and mathematics skills checks. Support for part-time learners in literacy and numeracy has increased with the provision of discrete courses to

improve their skills. Support for the use of information technology (IT) is also available.

<p>What progress has been made in improving and expanding progression routes, the take-up of enrichment opportunities and provision of work experience?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
---	----------------------------

The college has collaborative partnerships with schools and has expanded its 14 to 19 provision. Progression routes for part-time learners are promoted through the prospectus. The college recognises that improvements are required to advise and guide part-time learners more clearly and encourage them to progress on to other courses.

The college has responded to learners' feedback that indicated a lack of awareness of enrichment activities through increased promotional activities. Enrichment is organised well with a range of regularly scheduled activities. Attendance at events is increasing and learner surveys indicate a high satisfaction rate. The college has introduced a work experience group to promote work experience for all learners. This year all departments have participated in work experience activities and the college is seeking to extend these opportunities to other groups of learners.

<p>What progress has been made in improving the quality of tutorials and target setting for learners?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
---	----------------------------

A detailed scheme of work and tutorial calendar supports tutors in planning their tutorial sessions. The learner services manager works closely with lead tutors in improving the quality of tutorials. Tutorial staff are supported through the college's virtual learning environment with a range of learning resources. Observations of tutorials indicate that over a half of the sessions graded were good or better.

In individual learning plans, short-term targets are clear, measurable and relevant to individual learners. Progress reviews summarise clearly the progress learners make and new and continuing targets are set and reviewed at the next meeting. Audits of individual learning plans provide tutors with helpful feedback on good practice and areas for improvement. However, it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these improved individual learning plans on raising achievement across the college.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving provision identified as inadequate in the college's 2006/07 self-assessment report?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

The college judged provision in history, humanities and social sciences to be inadequate in their self-assessment in 2006/07, due largely to low success rates. The college is to cease offering GCE A levels, which form the bulk of this provision, from September 2008. A new full-time post of programme manager for access courses has been created recently with a clear focus to improve the quality of provision. Courses have been restructured with a greater focus on improved initial advice and guidance to ensure learners are placed on appropriate level courses. Regular tutorial contact has been planned to maintain learners' motivation and confidence over the summer holiday period.

In skills for life, also graded inadequate by the college, new management arrangements are in place since February 2008. Appropriate initial advice and guidance ensure learners are enrolled at the appropriate level. Course structures have been changed to enable learners to take examinations throughout the year to increase achievement opportunities. A greater emphasis on tracking learners' attendance and progress is in place, and early indications show improvement in both attendance and retention. It is too early to comment on the impact of management actions on improved success rates for learners.

What progress has been made in improving access to some key areas of the college for learners with limited mobility?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

The first phase of the college's building programme is due for completion in September 2008, with two further phases due in September 2009 and 2010. This is being carefully managed on the college's existing sites. Whilst the college is accessible to learners in wheelchairs, access to science laboratories on the Broxbourne campus is restricted. Contingency plans to move provision to more suitably located facilities are in place should they be needed. Staff are provided to guide learners with limited mobility through the site to ensure they are familiar with how to access the college safely. The college has recently enrolled more learners with limited mobility through the 'Improving Choices' project and offers a visually impaired support service in partnership with the RNIB.