

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Tresham Institute
Date of visit: 17 November 2008

Context

Tresham Institute is a large further and higher education college with four main campuses, one in Kettering, one in Wellingborough, one in Corby and the Rutland College in Oakham. In 2006/07 12,123 learners were enrolled at the college, of whom around a quarter were aged 16-18. The college provides courses in most subject sector areas. At the previous monitoring visit, an acting chief executive was in post. The new chief executive took up his role in January 2008. Since that time the college management structure has changed. Nine directors manage different aspects of the curriculum through the heads of 11 sector subject area schools, three heads of engagement with external partners, and a Skills for Life manager. Several improvement strategies have been put in place, although it is still too early to judge fully their impact.

Achievement and standards

How successful has the college been in improving the achievement and retention of learners in 2007/08	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the monitoring visit in November 2008, around 2% of the qualification outcomes were still unknown. Success rates at Level 1 for learners aged 16-18 have risen by seven percentage points, and are high at 78%. They have slightly increased and remain satisfactory at Levels 2 and 3. Success rates for adults on Level 1 courses are high at 75%, 13 percentage points above the figure for 2006/07, but have remained low at Levels 2 and 3. Success rates for AS and A-level courses for learners aged 16-18 are low, but they are above national rates for adults. Success rates for work-based learners are satisfactory. Key skills' success rates remain above national rates for all but Level 3 communications and ICT.

Achievement rates are at least satisfactory, but some retention rates are low. The previous monitoring visit identified this as the main factor contributing to low success rates. The college has implemented a number of strategies to improve retention. These include more advice and guidance at interview, to ensure that learners are enrolled onto courses that match their abilities; extending the range of Level 1 and Level 2 programmes; and regular monitoring of learners in the first six weeks of their programme, and moving them to other courses when appropriate. Staff now carefully monitor learners identified as being at risk of leaving, to enable focused support and advice to be put in place promptly. Teachers are encouraged to offer a variety of incentives, based on praise and recognition of progress, to encourage learners to remain on programme. Retention rates at Level 2 declined between 2004

and 2007, but increased in all categories during in 2007/08. Retention rates at Level 3 have improved significantly by 13 percentage points for full-time adult learners. For part-time learners aged 16-18 on long courses they have improved by 10 percentage points, but remain low. Retention rates are low for part-time learners at Levels 2 and 3 and full-time learners on very short courses. Retention rates for learners of minority ethnic heritage are lower than those for white learners.

Quality of provision

What improvements have been made to the observation of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection an area for improvement was to increase the number of good and outstanding lessons. At the previous monitoring visit, positive judgements were made about the improvement in learning environments. The college has recently introduced a range of activities and processes to improve the rigour and accuracy of the observation of teaching and learning. These include a close scrutiny of the performance of the college's newly-formed sector subject area schools, including analysis of data and observations against a structured teaching and learning checklist. One of these checks has already taken place and has provided the school with a detailed and realistic action plan, with specific target dates for completion. Four more of these whole school checks are timetabled for the current year. In addition, each of the college's four centres is timetabled to be observed for a week during the current academic year. During this week, all full-time and part-time staff attached to the centre will be observed. The observations will be carried out by a team of 23 observers from the college. They observe against a detailed set of criteria, moderate each others' judgements and work closely with other colleges to ensure consistency of standards. Currently the college is redeploying experienced curriculum leaders to be teaching and learning champions in each school. Their role will be to mentor and coach teachers to help them with the areas for improvement identified in their lesson observations. It is too early to judge the impact of these changes on the quality of teaching and learning.

How successful has the college been in increasing the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in the curriculum?	Insufficient progress
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The use and development of the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) remains variable across departments. Since the annual assessment visit in November 2006 progress in increasing the use of ILT in the curriculum has been slow. Recent and very positive changes are now in place to improve this position. For example, a significant investment has equipped all classrooms at the Kettering site with electronic whiteboards to enliven teaching and learning. Staff training has increased on the use of the VLE. Currently the college is redeploying experienced curriculum leaders to be ILT champions who will be attached to each school to help promote best practice and develop electronic learning materials. The recently implemented regular curriculum health checks are planned to improve the quality monitoring and

reporting of the use of ILT. However, to date only one of the schools has received this check, which included 23 lesson observations.

From the 274 lessons observed by the college team in 2007/08, 39% identified the use of ILT. However, the college did not analyse how effectively ILT was used in these lessons to promote learning. To remedy this, two on-line ILT surveys, one of staff and one of students are currently taking place to review the use of ILT in order to measure impact and plan improvement. The college recognises that the use of ILT is underdeveloped and has identified it appropriately as a continued key focus for improvement.

What improvements have been made in setting specific targets for learners?	Reasonable progress
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The college has continued to improve its approach to setting individual learner targets. Managers now expect that all full-time and substantial part-time learners will have an individual learning plan which is reviewed three times a year. Procedures for delivering progress reviews are more structured and formalised. Progress review weeks are fixed within the college calendar and learners' group tutorial sessions are used to increase their skills in preparing for progress reviews. In addition, a central team now sends all progress reviews to parents and/or carers to improve lines of communication. The college has defined clearly a set of standards for personal tutors to follow. It has developed a range of helpful tutorial material and training to aid the consistency of progress reviews across the curriculum. Systems to monitor the quality of tutorials have been improved through the newly introduced curriculum health checks aimed at checking the quality of provision in each school. These result in clear plans of action and are shared with all managers to promote best practice. However, these checks are new and as yet no regular formal checking is in place across the curriculum to determine how well the new one-to-one progress documentation and individual learner targets are being applied. It is too early to judge the full impact of all the most recent changes.

How effective has the college been in extending its range of enrichment activities?	Reasonable progress
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From September 2008, enrichment and curriculum enhancement activities have been planned more carefully to embrace the 'Every Child Matters' themes, both cross-college and within each school. The college is in the early stages of aligning enrichment activities to complement tutorials and other events. For example, the college is planning programmes or events to promote healthy eating activities before and after the Christmas period.

At induction the college offers a range of activities and promotions to support learners' initial team building skills and introduction to further education. Although the number of activities has doubled, attendance at these events is not collated to determine how effective or popular they are. The college offers a small and satisfactory range of central enrichment. Overall feedback from learner

questionnaires shows a positive picture and improving trend in learner enjoyment although learner views are less positive about their participation in trips and visits.

College data show an increase in learner participation to around 31% in 2007. The analysis of enrichment participation is limited. For example, although overall learner participation figures are available, these are not broken down by campus to monitor attendance across the college. The college recognises that the overall promotion and monitoring of cross-college enrichment and increasing learner involvement in activities requires further improvement and is planning to centralise enrichment further during this academic year.

Leadership and management

Does the self assessment report accurately identify areas for improvement and how effective is the process for quality improvement?	Reasonable progress
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The self-assessment report and quality improvement plan for 2006/07 were written before the college was restructured by the new chief executive. The draft self-assessment report for 2007/08 identifies accurately areas for improvement. The process is inclusive of the views of staff, learners and employers. Processes for quality improvement are now redesigned and are robust. Managers and schools have regular weekly meetings at which they analyse learner attendance figures and take action where these indicate problems. Managers moderate and monitor action plans monthly. All schools now have challenging targets for retention, achievement and success rates. Learner surveys will now be carried out through a national company and results will be analysed against external benchmarks. All these changes are recent. However, staff can now access accurate and up-to-date data on their computers and the draft self-assessment report indicates that these data are understood and being well used to identify accurately areas for improvement. Regular meetings at all levels in the college and the increased consistency and rigour of processes for monitoring curriculum areas and the quality of teaching and learning provide a firm framework for quality improvement.