

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Hugh Baird College

Date of visit: 14th January 2009

Context

Hugh Baird is a further education college situated in the centre of Bootle, in the south of Sefton. Its mission, through the provision of excellent education and training, is 'to transform the lives of every one of its learners and to make a real contribution to the regeneration of South Sefton.' The college operates in a competitive environment; within a 20 mile radius there are five general further education or tertiary colleges, three sixth form colleges and over 30 schools with sixth form provision. All wards within the South Sefton pathway area are within the 10% most deprived wards in England and Wales. More than 60% of the college students are recruited from the 5% most deprived local authority wards in England: 82% of learners are from areas with a high widening participation factor. The college has achieved many quality marks including the Training Quality Standard, Positive about Disabled People, the Matrix Quality Award for Embedded Advice and Guidance (IAG) Standard, the Basic Skills post-16 quality mark and Investors in People. Its overall effectiveness was judged good at its last Ofsted inspection. The college offers courses in all of the 15 Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) sector subject areas.

Achievement and standards

How effectively is the college tackling areas of underachievement and low retention rates?	Significant Progress
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Over the last three years the college has achieved and sustained improvements in success rates for both the 16 to 18 and 19+ cohorts. For example, for learners aged 16 to 18, success rates have improved at level 1 from 71% to 75% and at level 2 from 64% to 74%. For 19+ learners, success rates have improved at level 1 from 74% to 85% and at level 2 from 62% to 71%. Level 3 success rates for 19+ learners, while demonstrating improvement, remain below the national average for similar colleges. Achievement rates demonstrate significant improvement. For learners aged 16 to 18 on all long courses, achievement rates have increased between 2005/06 to 2007/08 from 85% to 92%; for 19+ learners over the same period from 87% to 93%. For both cohorts these rates are above those for similar colleges. The college acknowledges low retention on a number of courses which impacts on overall success rates. Many learners have a tradition of low attainment and attendance rates at school and initially struggle to settle into college life. Over a

three year period, from 2004/05 to 2006/07, retention rates increased by just 1%. Comprehensive strategies are in place to tackle retention and are now demonstrating some impact. Retention improved in 2007/08 by over 1% but this has further accelerated in 2008/09. For example, most recent data indicates significant improvement in retention rates for the first term of 2008/09 when compared with a similar period in 2007/08. When the college retains students they do well and many make good and often excellent progress. Key Skills success rates, an area identified as a weakness in the previous inspection report, have improved to 9% above the national average.

Significant improvements to teaching and learning and the effectiveness of additional learning support are reflected in strong contextual value-added for 2007/08. Learners who have additional learning support achieve higher success, achievement and retention rates than the college average. The percentage of outstanding lessons has improved. Staff development opportunities are extensive and the innovative use of information and learning technology (ILT) has contributed to the development of effective approaches to differentiation and the promotion of independent learning. Attendance rates have improved and were at 88% in 2007/08.

While there has been significant progress within the last twelve months in tackling aspects of underachievement, the college self-assessment report acknowledges the need for further progress, especially with regard to improving retention rates for both 16 to 18 and 19+ learners.

Quality of provision

How has the learning environment been improved since the previous inspection?	Significant Progress
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The college continues to make improvements to premises, including classroom and workshop areas. In particular it demonstrates a strong commitment to embedding the use of ILT across the curriculum. The innovative and expanding use of ILT is a key driving force for improvement within the college. There are now 117 Smartboard installations which are used extensively by both staff and students to enhance teaching and learning. The innovative development of 'Hugh Tube' has led to the installation of touch screens in joinery workshops, hair and beauty salons and kitchens, so that students can access supporting materials and demonstrations on video. This innovation has promoted a culture of independent learning within these curriculum areas that is impacting on learner success rates. Inspectors observed the effective use of this technology during their visit. The college has developed an integrated learning suite adaptable to a wide range of ILT teaching and delivery modes. This extensive and effective use of ILT has enhanced approaches to differentiation both in classrooms, workshop areas and in independent learning sessions. Students spoke positively about their use of ILT across a wide range of courses and levels. Video cameras are also being used to record lesson observations

to improve practical teaching skills and promote the dissemination of good practice. Surveys and other data indicate that 98% of staff use ILT in teaching and learning and have an effective understanding of it. A strong professional development programme has enhanced the growth of staff skills and their application of ILT in teaching and learning.

How effectively is the college engaging with employers to meet local and regional workforce development needs?	Significant Progress
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The college has made significant progress in engaging with employers. The workforce development unit has recently been relocated to the main college campus to promote more actively its college-wide profile. A much greater emphasis is now evident in many curriculum areas on developing employer related programmes. Staff awareness of employer needs is much clearer. The unit have recruited a dedicated 'sales' team with the requisite specialist skills. Productive collaboration has been developed with Business Link, the main local Train to Gain broker. Employer engagement champions have been identified in each curriculum school to promote programmes and respond to employer queries and requests. Data indicates much higher numbers of learner enrolments on programmes this year, for example workplace Skills for Life numbers have increased from 28 to 213; and Train to Gain from 28 to 426. Currently the college is managing an extensive skills course for local taxi drivers. One learner, echoing the experience of others, enthusiastically described the transforming affect not only on his own literacy and numeracy skills but on those of his family. Good arrangements are in place to meet the training needs of workers facing redundancy. The college maintains an active involvement in a consortium involving the North West Training Council and other providers, delivering Train to Gain and Skillworks provision. The number of subject sector areas delivering work-based learning apprenticeship programmes has doubled. There is good collaboration with employers in delivering young apprentice schemes. Hugh Baird is the first college in Greater Merseyside to achieve the Training Quality Standard (TQS) for Excellence in Hospitality and Catering, within the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Sport and the Workforce Development Unit.

How has the college promoted and developed 14 to 19 links and programmes.	Significant Progress
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Since the previous inspection the college has re-focused its approach to the promotion and development of 14 to 19 links. Commitment to 14 to 19 partnerships is a central priority for the college. The Principal and members of the senior management team play key roles in 14 to 19 area-wide groups. The college has astutely and sensitively positioned itself as a key partner in the development of local strategies and partnerships groups. Links with schools have been improved significantly with, for example, an impressive increase in the numbers taking the increased flexibility programmes for pupils aged 14 to 16. These courses achieve

good success and progression rates. The college works closely with over 29 schools across Sefton and North Liverpool including a number of primary schools. In particular the college has engaged in exemplary work to tackle the cohort of young people for whom the choice of college remains daunting and remote. A wide range of programmes are offered in such areas as hairdressing, construction, motor vehicle, health and social care, electrical installation and engineering. Progression rates from this group are high and reflect the quality of the programmes and degree of co-operation between college, school and work-based learning providers as well as other local partners.

The college places a strong focus on the quality and relevance of basic skills and Skills for Life courses. Innovative and successful projects were reviewed in hairdressing and beauty during the monitoring visit. The college has played a leading role in the planning and development of new diploma courses within Sefton working in effective collaboration with schools, work-based learning providers, employers, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and local authorities. Central to the college commitment has been the focus on responding to the needs, interests and enthusiasms of young people and in contributing to the planning of coherent learning experiences through the new diploma curriculum and experience.

Leadership and management

Has the college maintained its outstanding approach to equality, diversity and social inclusion?	Reasonable progress
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The college has maintained an outstanding approach to equality, diversity and social inclusion. A single equality scheme addresses all current legislative requirements. An active equality and diversity committee monitors the implementation of action plans and schedules. A well-attended student forum provides valuable feedback and suggestions and these are responded to in a timely manner. The college has a wide range of equality and diversity impact measures (EDIMs) in place and staff monitor these in an effective manner, with a detailed focus on identifying the underpinning causes of any underperformance. Staff interrogate and drill down into data to identify the intricacies of issues. Detailed analysis takes place on the performance of a wide range of learner groups. The college makes good use of tutorial systems and provision to support the development of an inclusive culture. The college is developing a good range of initiatives with external partners such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and local special educational needs (SEN) schools. The rolling programme of compulsory staff training in equality and diversity has been maintained.

How effective is the use of data to inform performance improvement?	Significant Progress
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The college has made significant progress in using data to inform performance analysis and to drive improvement strategies. Managers at all levels in the college use a wide range of software to provide accurate and detailed information. Data is made available to staff who use it well to monitor learner performance and to inform appropriate teaching and learning strategies. The college has also developed an in-house 'Green Card' value-added target-setting system to monitor the progress of learners not included in the GCE A-level value-added systems. Information is used effectively to identify and support underperforming programmes and inform on professional development needs. Managers carry out a detailed analysis of course performance as part of the quality assurance system. Good data analysis and evaluation informs both college and individual curriculum area self-assessments. A detailed interrogation at course programme level takes place and data is used to support and inform the teaching and learning observation system. Learner evaluations take place three times each year and are used to inform heads of schools and senior managers on learner perceptions. Managers identify strong performance and use this to promote and share best practice between staff and curriculum schools. Tutorial staff use attendance data to monitor and promote improvements in attendance. A focused and smart use of data has supported the development of a self-critical culture.