The Royal National College for the Blind

# ANNUAL REPORT 2008-2009

### **UNRIVALLED:**

Our Student Experience

The UK's leading college of Further Education and Training for People with Sight Loss & other Disabilities.

DESCRIBED BY OFSTED AS

"OUTSTANDING"

A celebration of the successes, achievements and events for the academic year 2003-2009 and calendar year 2009

STUDENT ARTWORK
INSPIRES SCULPTURE





#### **CONTENTS**

#### **Fundamental:**

the College's Mission and Core Values

#### Messages:

from the Principal and Chairman

#### Successful:

the year that was 2008-2009

#### **Unrivalled:**

our student experience

#### **Talented:**

our staff

#### **Pioneering:**

our partnerships

#### **Promising:**

fundraising appeal forges ahead to build brighter futures

#### **Inspiring:**

fundraising efforts help boost funds

#### **Exciting:**

our future



#### **FUNDAMENTAL:**

## THE COLLEGE'S MISSION AND CORE VALUES

Leading the way in education, training and services for people with a visual impairment and other disabilities.

The Royal National College for the Blind (RNC) is a specialist independent provider of further education and training for people experiencing sight loss and other disabilities.

RNC has provided services to people with a visual impairment for over 130 years and today, more people choose RNC than any other college of its type in Great Britain.

The College has a wide and varied customer base and not only provides training for individual students but also the organisations and businesses that may come into contact with those students.

We take our role very seriously and endeavour to ensure the experiences and services we provide to all, are of the highest possible standard.



## THE RNC MISSION IS SIMPLY...

"To lead, innovate, develop, promote and deliver world class learning, products and services, driving standards for excellence."

#### **CORE VALUES**

#### At The Royal National College for the Blind we:

- believe the individual is at the centre of all we do
- · recognise, value and include everyone
- lead, promote and share specialisms
- collaborate with the wider community to develop opportunities
- promote continuous improvement and the highest quality in all we do.

#### MESSAGE: From The Principal

Thank you for taking the time to read this summary of the last eighteen months at the College. When we look back over the past months packed full of new developments and activities, we have to find things to leave out rather than search for things to include. We hope this report gives you an understanding of what we are all about, the essence of the College.

This year we have spent some time looking at our core values, the things that are at the heart of all we do. When times are tough, a review of 2008/9 has to mention the credit crunch and the difficult decisions that have had to be made. It is our core values that help us decide where we should be concentrating our time and resources. The individual student, staff member or customer has been at the centre of our planning for the future, ensuring we continue to offer our specialist services to those who need our support most.

Mention has been made in this annual summary of our hard working and dedicated staff. Much has changed through the year but the one constant feature is the dedication staff throughout the College give to ensuring the student journey is enjoyable and ultimately successful whether the goal is independent living, a move to Higher Education or most importantly a job.

Our work with the community at large, another core value, has been a central part of the changing face of RNC. Our wonderful new facilities are used for instance by individuals perhaps as members of **thePoint4** gym, by groups of school children enjoying the expanse of the sports hall and football field, by community groups and employers meeting in the conference centre and couples choosing Gardner Hall for the most important day of their lives, their wedding. The forthcoming 2010 IBSA World Blind Football Championship is not just an event for the College, as proud of this as we are, but an opportunity for the whole of Hereford to enjoy and celebrate the world class facilities we now have at RNC.

As vital as the community and our customers are for these new facilities, the main reason for their existence is to give real work experience and work placement opportunities for our students; enabling them to engage with the

community and sample the true satisfaction that comes from a job well

done.

My interim year at the College is drawing to a close and I would like to use this opportunity to thank all those who have supported me through a year of change. I may have been a catalyst for change but the real work has been undertaken by staff and governors who share a common love for the College and have a real daily desire to ensure students receive the very best training and education possible. RNC...I will miss you.

Interim Chief Executive & Principal

January - November 2009



#### MESSAGE: From The Chairman

As you will see from what follows in this report the past year has been one in which many of our plans have finally come to fruition. Our campus has blossomed as ambitious new projects have been completed:

- Orchard Hall which offers modern and spacious accommodation for our students;
- thePoint4 which provides state of the art sports and conference facilities which are the best for miles
  around and provide a wonderful learning environment for our students plus a chance to integrate with the
  local community via the gyms and other facilities;
- Gardner Hall which has hotel standard accommodation for prospective students and their families visiting RNC as well as sports teams using the Point 4.

These brilliant new facilities have transformed the campus, which now oozes character and confidence; not only are they an asset to the College but also to people and organisations in the City and County of Herefordshire who have adopted them as their own and are already flocking to benefit from all they offer.

Success breeds success and the years ahead are exciting, with us now housing the permanent National BlindArt Collection and we move towards acting as host venue for the IBSA World Blind Football Championship next year and thereafter ease into our 2012 Paralympic role as a pre-games training centre.

Once again it falls to me to thank the whole team that have made such a transformation possible and in particular lan Pickford who took the helm in January 2009 and has lead us through this eventful year. The new facilities were launched on time and on budget with smooth efficiency and this bodes well for the future.



#### **SUCCESSFUL: THE YEAR THAT WAS 2008-2009**

#### Celebrating our past ... imagining our future

The start of a new academic year at RNC is always a vibrant and exciting time and as the College opened its doors to welcome students, both new and old, there were certainly plenty of forthcoming events and activities to focus on.



## CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME!

Late summer witnessed the start of an exciting new business venture for the College with the opening of the RNC Charity Shop in Hereford city centre.

The shop will raise funds to support the College's ongoing Building Brighter Futures appeal and provides realistic retail and customer service work experience opportunities for RNC students.

## HONOURING HEREFORDSHIRE'S PARALYMPIAN HEROES

November 2008 saw RNC host an evening of celebration in honour of Herefordshire's returning Paralympian heroes.

Fifteen athletes were officially welcomed back from the Beijing Games and congratulated on their inspirational and in some cases, medal winning performances.

Guests included medal winning swimmers Sascha Kindred and Nyree Lewis; rifle shooter James Bevis; Josie Pearson, who was the only female member of Great Britain's wheelchair rugby team; Anthony Kappes, who won two gold medals in cycling and is an ex-RNC student, along with the GB blind football team, whose home training ground is RNC.



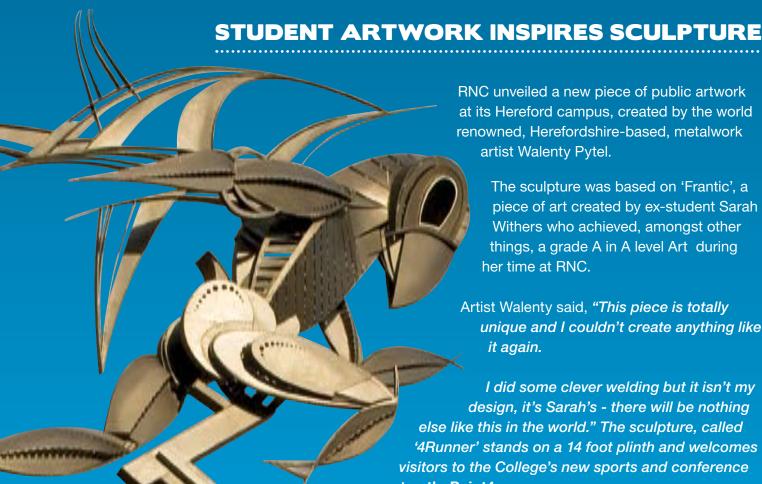
#### RNC students demonstrate a 'PASSION FOR FASHION'

The College staged its very first fashion show in the summer term with both students and staff taking to the catwalk to 'strut their stuff'.

The event, which was also a fundraising evening for The Teenage Cancer Trust, was a total success with many local retailers and suppliers pledging their support.

One of the students involved was Chloe McLean, she said: "I really enjoyed the event. It's sometimes really difficult to know what suits you when you're visually impaired and I feel more confident about going shopping now."





RNC unveiled a new piece of public artwork at its Hereford campus, created by the world renowned, Herefordshire-based, metalwork artist Walenty Pytel.

The sculpture was based on 'Frantic', a piece of art created by ex-student Sarah Withers who achieved, amongst other things, a grade A in A level Art during her time at RNC.

Artist Walenty said, "This piece is totally unique and I couldn't create anything like it again.

I did some clever welding but it isn't my design, it's Sarah's - there will be nothing else like this in the world." The sculpture, called '4Runner' stands on a 14 foot plinth and welcomes visitors to the College's new sports and conference centre, thePoint4.

#### **COLLEGE LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE**

Summer 2009 saw a complete redevelopment of the RNC website to reflect the growing remit of the College.

The new site not only offers advice and guidance to potential students, their families and professionals supporting them, on everything they need to know about studying with us but also highlights the more commercial aspects of the College offering such as:

- Specialist products, services and training relating to visual impairment and disability
- Gardner Hall Pan-Disability Assessment Centre
- RNC's involvement in UK and EU projects
- Fundraising and supporting the College
- Vacancies
- Sporting, relaxation, conferencing and meeting facilities within thePoint4

Visit us at: www.rncb.ac.uk



#### **UNRIVALLED: OUR STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Something to shout about...

It has once again been a busy and eventful year with Ofsted visits and the usual rounds of exams, external verification visits and student successes.



#### **INSPECTORS' PRAISE**

RNC has received two Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) visits within the past 12 months and both were full of praise for the College's progress and continuous improvement in quality.

'Outstanding' was the word used across all areas during the residential and care standards inspection completed in November 2008 when the College was recognised for the 'substantial progress' made since its last inspection in 2006. RNC's provision was described as 'exceptionally high'.

#### **KEY STRENGTHS INCLUDED:**

- 'high emphasis' placed on safeguarding issues by the residential management team
- 'very high standard' of student accommodation
- 'very encouraging and supportive manner' in which staff worked.

Mark Fisher, Head of Residential Care, noted that: "The inspection outcome was testament to the dedicated team at RNC who work tremendously hard to ensure that all students can live and socialise in an environment which responds to their individual needs."

During a separate Annual Monitoring visit inspectors concluded that significant progress had been made to improve both Learner Attendance and the development of Equality and Diversity. They further reported that much progress had been made in the development of College facilities.

#### RNC CELEBRATES AN AFTERNOON OF INSPIRATION AND ACHIEVEMENT ...

The College's annual celebration of student achievement saw over 80 current students and recent leavers, from all over the UK, receive certificates for the qualifications they successfully achieved during their time at the College.

Mike Brace CBE was this year's guest speaker. Mike, who lost his sight following a firework accident at the age of ten, represented Britain in eight Paralympic Games and five Winter Paralympic Games, is Chief Executive of Vision 2020 UK, and a former Chairman of the British Paralympic Association.

He gave an entertaining and inspiring address and urged all those gathered to collect their awards to embrace the challenges that life presents to them, saying, "You are the epitome of ability. Your achievements here are only the beginning and it is up to you to inspire and challenge people's ideas about disability".



## >>> students aim high

#### RNC students have once again excelled in the past year:

- GCSE, AS and A2 examination results success continues with 83% obtaining Grades A – E, which included a 100% pass rate in English AS and A2 Media and Art, as well as an A\* in GCSE English
- Skills for Life pass rates in Numeracy and Literacy continue to improve and Braille pass rates remain excellent with a 100% success rate
- New programmes within Information Communication Technology (ICT) have proved successful with the overall pass rates for all ICT examinations at a very healthy 93%
- Vocational programmes achieved great successes and outcomes in Complementary Therapy, Sport and Recreation and Business and Office Skills
- Creative Industries (Art, Performing Arts and Music Technology and Media) programmes remain popular attracting students of all ages for both vocational and leisure opportunities.





#### TALENTED: OUR STAFF

#### **Dedicated to ensuring staff potential**

At RNC the individual is at the centre of everything the organisation does – whether that individual is a student or a member of staff, a volunteer or member of a partner organisation, or a customer accessing our services or facilities.

The College is deeply committed to ensuring the experience of each and every individual who comes through its doors is of the highest quality.



#### **INVESTING IN PEOPLE: DEVELOPING SUCCESS**

How RNC performs as an employer influences the performance of every employee, ultimately determining the extent of the organisation's success. The College was therefore delighted when for the tenth consecutive year, its Investors in People (IIP) status was confirmed.



The report noted that the organisational culture here at RNC is "one where people generally enjoy their work and take pride in the College" and where "people are respected and valued for their knowledge".













































#### PROMOTING PEOPLE POTENTIAL

All staff at RNC are actively encouraged to access training which allows them to progress within their job role. As part of this, all managers have now completed a one-year training programme accredited by the Institute for Leadership and Management (ILM).

The College has maintained and improved its excellent record of staff retention, with 89% of employees having been with the organisation for two years or more – ensuring that we keep hold of the knowledge and expertise that we invest in.

RNC also looks after its employees in the wider sense too, by running workplace wellbeing sessions to support their health and happiness and by providing discounted membership at the new sports and conference centre, thePoint4.

#### STAFF CONTINUE TO SHINE AT STAR AWARDS

Each year RNC continues with its strong tradition of prestigious STAR Award nominations with eleven members of staff involved in 2008 and another two this year in 2009.

These annual Awards recognise and reward the unsung heroes of the further education system who have made a difference to the quality of learning that millions of people across England receive every day.

In 2008, Steve Ramsdale, Teacher in Charge of Business at RNC, Iris Corfield a retired member of staff with 37 years service and the Braille Team were all finalists at the glittering London ceremony.

This year, Lennox Adams, Manager of EU Projects, was nominated in the Innovation category and Jane Bigham, who has held a variety of significant roles at the College in her 21 years service, was nominated for a Lifetime Achievement award.





## **RECOGNISED**

The ICT Team at RNC were presented with the 'Accessibility Centres of Excellence' (ACE) award by the British Computer Society (BCS) at their Accessibility Achievement Day in London in October.

The award was in recognition for the dedicated and exciting work completed in relation to making the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) qualification and its training materials accessible for people with a visual impairment.

### **LONGEVITY OF SERVICE**

Four members of staff:

**Lennox Adams** 

Alan Rolfe

**Yvonne Hopson** 

**Glo Pugh** 

were recognised and thanked for achieving 30 years of service at RNC.

#### **PIONEERING: OUR PARTNERSHIPS**

#### A force for good in the visual impairment community

The College continues in its mission to develop partnerships and links with local, national and overseas partners to improve the opportunities for people with a visual impairment. The College's Projects Team, who looks at UK, EU and International Projects has been busy developing partnerships with organisations from all over the world.

Flying the flag for visual impairment across Europe.



#### YOU'RE HIRED!

The College is currently working alongside Herefordshire's main sport and leisure provider HALO to develop possible Apprenticeships in sport, recreation and leisure.

RNC is also working with the YMCA to develop work-based learning opportunities across the country and to promote issues surrounding visual impairment through their centres.

#### RNC - FURTHER AFIELD

Earlier in the year the College entered into a collaborative venture with one of the most respected and established providers of products and services for people with special educational needs in the United Arab Emirates.

Braille House Trading based in Dubai acts as RNC's representative in countries including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Oman with a view to recruiting students and identifying sales and training opportunities.



#### **LOOKING BACK...**

Four of RNC's EU and International Projects within the past twelve months have either completed or are nearing completion:

(Guidance, Advice and Training for Parents and Relatives of Visually Impaired Persons) has worked with and trained over 200 people who work with people with a visual impairment.

A project for visually impaired people over the age of 55 years wishing to upgrade their ICT skill, has been very successful in offering advice and training.

(Audio-haptics for Visually Impaired - Training at a Distance) has significantly increased accessibility of materials that use visual graphic data for people who are blind or visually impaired.

**Prime Minister's Initiative** – 2 (Professional Development for non-Native Teachers of English) involved the development of a new method of teaching English in Turkey that would be suitable for all learners, including those with a visual impairment. The project attracted four times as many trainees than expected.

#### THE PRESENT...

Two projects continue with their work:

Multi-sensory Information on Climate Change (**MUSICC**) tries to explain the patterns, processes and consequences of global warming and climate change in a simple but factual way, using talking tactile technology.

**VILSIP** (Violence linked to visually impaired persons) aims to raise awareness in exploring violence linked to sensory impaired people (especially women and children) whether self-inflicted or through other sources.

#### **LOOKING FORWARD...**

RNC is involved in four new and innovative EU Projects which will look at subjects such as: the development of learning materials using talking tactile technology, exploring the lives of people with disabilities, vocational English training for visually impaired people and the role that young people play in our environment.



#### NEW UNIVERSITY LEVEL PROGRAMME ON THE HORIZON

#### A first for RNC

Recent collaboration with St Joseph's Centre for the Visually Impaired in Dublin and the University of Worcester has successfully resulted in the validation of a new and exciting specialised Level 4 programme. The first group of students on the Certificate in Higher Education: Working with People with Visual Impairment programme starts in January 2010.

Mary Bennett, Head of Learning, said: "This is a first for RNC and we are delighted to be working with colleagues from two other institutions, one from another country! It is an ideal qualification for anyone wishing to gain a specialist qualification in working with people with a visual impairment."

### PROMISING: APPEAL FORGES AHEAD TO BUILD BRIGHTER FUTURES

**Building Brighter Futures Appeal continues to strengthen** 

Brighter

The College's Building Brighter Futures appeal continues to make progress as it works towards enhancing and expanding the facilities for living and learning on campus. The five year,  $\mathfrak L21.5$  million building project is the most ambitious in the College's history and demonstrates RNC's dedication to continuous improvement.

Dreams become reality as RNC's campus development takes shape.

The past year has been one of the busiest and most exciting in recent years for the College's Fundraising Team with three of its major building projects coming to fruition. Orchard Hall, **thePoint4**, and Gardner Hall have all been opened for business this year and fundraising for the fourth project – an Arts and Media Centre – is now underway.

Orchard Hall, a purpose-designed 56 bedroom hall of residence, opened in October 2008 and provides students with spacious, fully accessible rooms which are grouped into flats housing between one and eight people. The completion of this project creates a 'village' atmosphere at the College with all residential accommodation now linked with pathways and landscaped areas.

In April 2009, **thePoint4**, RNC's vision of a world class sports, spa, leisure and conference centre became a reality. The College proudly opened its doors to students, local residents, the business community and sporting groups from all over the UK.

Gardner Hall, an existing three storey building, was refurbished and converted into a dedicated pan-disability Assessment Centre and opened for business in September 2009. The nationally accredited Centre which offers advice, assessment, support and training to people with disabilities as well as professionals and employers, also offers on-site accessible hotel standard accommodation.

RNC's new state-of-the-art facilities, which offer the very best teaching, training and leisure opportunities for our students, would not have been possible without the generous support of many statutory bodies, partner organisations, charitable trusts, foundations, businesses and individuals.

We extend our sincere thanks to them all and especially our major supporters: Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Football Foundation, Advantage West Midlands, Sport England, The Garfield Weston Foundation, The Eveson Trust, The Clothworkers' Foundation, The Eranda Foundation, The Haberdashers' Company and The PF Charitable Trust.







#### **GET STRAIGHT TO THE POINT AT**

After years in the planning, RNC's multi-million pound, world class sport, spa and conference centre, **thePoint4**, opened in April. The centre holds exciting possibilities for the College and provides realistic work-based learning opportunities for many students in areas such as customer service, sport and leisure and complementary therapies.

One of Britain's best-known sports columnists, Des Kelly, former editor of the Daily Mirror, (replacing Piers Morgan) and currently a sports columnist for the Daily Mail and a pundit on BBC1's Inside Sport was the guest speaker at the event and welcomed over 500 visitors from near and far who attended the official opening celebrations.

The Centre provides a realistic working environment for our trainees preparing for careers in sport, recreation, customer service, massage and complementary therapies. **thePoint4** (already home to the England Blind Football Squad) is also the nominated venue for the IBSA World Blind Football Championship in August 2010.

thePoint4 ... sport ... spa ... seminar ... socialise



RNC was delighted to welcome the national BlindArt Collection in September. The stunning collection is the world's first permanent showcase of visual art accessible to people with a visual impairment and includes 30 exceptional works that appeal to a multitude of senses.

The Collection, which is housed in its own dedicated gallery within the College, encourages visitors (RNC students, local schools, tourists etc) to interact with the pieces and interpret according to their texture, sight, sound and smell.











#### **INSPIRING: FUNDRAISING EFFORTS HELP BOOST FUNDS**

Transforming the lives of people who are blind or partially sighted

From charitable organisations and prominent local businesses, to RNC staff members and some brave and generous volunteers, we have received a huge amount of public support for the Building Brighter Futures Appeal over the last year.

#### **APPEAL PATRONS LEND THEIR SUPPORT**

RNC has been lucky enough to secure high profile local and national support for the Appeal this year in the form of several new Appeal Patrons. Lady Darnley, the Lord Lieutenant of Herefordshire, and former post holder Sir Thomas Dunne KG KCVO have joined us, alongside the Rt Hon David Blunkett MP.

The England Blind Football Team and RNC's Football Academy are also delighted to have the support of BBC Sport presenters and journalists Mrs Gaby Logan and Mr Des Kelly as Patrons, particularly as momentum builds towards the 2010 World Blind Football Championships and beyond to the 2012 Paralympics.

Our Appeal Patrons, as well as our Hereford Appeal Committee, Governors and the College President have generously donated their time and energy for the benefit of RNC, and have already helped to 'spread the word' and bring in significant grants and donations.

#### **EVENTS PUT THE 'FUN' INTO FUNDRAISING**

Several events organised this year by the Fundraising team were more successful than ever, with the annual RNC Charity Golf Tournament raising an impressive £7500, the sell-

out Rod Mason Jazz Concert raising £1600 and

October's Hereford Police Male Choir Concert, featuring former-RNC Governor and internationally acclaimed soprano Denise Leigh, bringing in £2500.



'Wear Bright for Sight' saw hundreds of people dress up in their most garish garb to celebrate World Sight Day in October, and raise funds towards the Appeal. Local schools and businesses took part raising over £700, with several others aiming to hold their own 'Bright for Sight' days over the coming year.

The team has also launched a Grand Raffle this year, the first prize being a Triumph Speed Triple motorbike, generously donated by Adrian Bloor of Bloor Homes. The draw will take place on May 14th 2010.

TheRoyal National ollege for the Blind

RICHIE



With the launch this year of a Building Brighter Futures Events Pack, RNC's Fundraising team has been able to encourage and support many individuals to take up sponsored challenges or hold their own events.

out of planes
at 10,000 feet
to running the
London Marathon
and even the
Snowdonia Marathon,
brave staff and volunteers
have raised over £3000.

#### WHERE THERE'S A WILL THERE'S A WAY

The College has been the grateful recipient of donations though legacies since its early existence. Money bequeathed to RNC can make a huge difference and over the years has helped to upgrade equipment, finance new activities or facilities for students, provide bursaries for those who would not otherwise have received funding and has helped the College to plan for the future.

In order to raise awareness of the value of legacies to RNC and encourage more people to safeguard their wishes after their lifetime, a new legacy marketing campaign was developed and launched this year – for more information please visit the Fundraising section of the College's website: www.rncb.ac.uk



## **EXCITING: OUR FUTURE**

As always when one year finishes RNC looks forward to another year starting with eager anticipation and excitement. The forthcoming year holds many new opportunities for the College and its staff.



#### **RNC** welcomes new Principal

RNC is delighted to announce the appointment of Mr Geoff
Draper as its new Principal and Chief Executive. Geoff recently
left the Army after nearly 30 years service where he held a range
of appointments, and was involved in managing education and training
throughout his career.

Geoff is a passionate educationalist and thrives on maximising the capability of individuals and enabling them to reach their full potential.

As such, he is very much looking forward to working with all connected with The Royal National College for the Blind, building upon the excellent work and reputation that the College enjoys.

#### NEW INITIATIVES AIM TO INCREASE WORK OPPORTUNITIES

RNC is currently involved in a number of initiatives to increase the potential for work-based learning opportunities.

In conjunction with Herefordshire College of Arts RNC is to launch a YouTube TV studio soon and the Level 3 NVQ in Instructing Physical Activity CYQ qualification, will provide progression pathways from its Level 2 programme.









## WORLD BLIND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS COME TO HEREFORD

August 2010 marks an exciting and momentous moment in the history of RNC when, after years of championing disability sport, the College will host the 2010 IBSA World Blind Football Championships (14 - 22 August, 2010).

Ten nations will come to the UK for the first time in the Championships' history and compete for the most coveted prize in the sport.

We hope you'll be able to visit next summer to see our national team going for gold!

## PIONEERING FOOTBALL ACADEMY LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

RNC's Football Academy celebrates its first full year with considerable successes. The Academy, the first of its kind in the world, was launched in August 2008 with great excitement as it offered students the opportunity to build 16 hours of football training into their chosen vocational or academic path of study.

One of the first students to join the Academy, Craig Lundberg, a Lance Corporal within the British Army, was blinded when he was hit by two rocket-propelled grenades during an operation he was leading in Iraq two years ago.

Within six months training at RNC's Football Academy he achieved a lifetime goal and was selected to play football for his country and has since gone on to play for the England/GB Blind Football Squad at the European Championships in France.

Craig continues to train with the Academy working towards his next goals of competing in the World Blind Football Championships to be held at RNC in August 2010, followed by the 2012 Paralympics in London.

John Lynch, who oversees RNC's Football Academy, said: "We have seen such a variety of successes and achievements within the Academy's first year. Some, like Craig's, are awe-inspiring, others are smaller much more personal and individual successes but nonetheless just as significant."







#### The Royal National College for the Blind

College Road Hereford HR1 1EB

**Enquiry Line:** 01432 376621 **Main Switchboard:** 01432 265725

Email: info@rncb.ac.uk

Web: www.rncb.ac.uk

Company Limited by Guarantee: No. 2367626

Registered Charity: No. 1000388













