

University of Cumbria

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

The University of Cumbria was established in August 2007 as a result of a reorganisation of the provision offered at St Martin's College Lancaster, Cumbria Institute of the Arts in Carlisle and selected aspects of the provision offered by the University of Central Lancashire at the Newton Rigg campus in Penrith. The university offers further education (FE) provision in 10 of the 15 sector subject areas; the majority of enrolments are in land-based provision and the arts.

The most recent inspection report was published in March 2009. The university's FE provision was graded inadequate in overall effectiveness, achievement and standards and leadership and management. Capacity to improve, quality of provision and equality of opportunity were graded satisfactory. Of the six subject areas inspected, agriculture and horticulture was judged to be good; sport and outdoor education, and literacy and numeracy were satisfactory; animal and equine care, performing arts and media, and visual arts were graded as inadequate. This report focuses on the following themes that were explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made to improve the consistency of the implementation of the quality assurance framework? **Reasonable progress**

The previous inspection identified that quality assurance arrangements were not implemented consistently across subject areas. Since then managers have developed procedures for course review and self-assessment that are being used consistently across all FE provision. Course leaders now receive good support to help to ensure that the judgements made through course self-assessment are accurate. Additional work is taking place to moderate quality improvement plans so that they include measurable targets. Procedures for senior managers to regularly monitor progress in implementing course action plans have also been developed. These are designed to help them identify underperforming courses much earlier. Arrangements for validating the self-assessment report have been strengthened to include external peer review. Staff have been consulted fully over all developments and are clear about their roles and responsibilities.

Outcomes for learners

What do data for 2008/09 show about the progress made in improving success rates and poor progression from GCE AS to A2 courses? **Insufficient progress**

The overall success rate for 2008/09 is broadly similar to that for 2007/08. The rate improved for students aged 16 to 18 but declined for those aged 19 and over. The

overall success rate at level 1 has improved; at level 2 it declined and at level 3 the rate improved for students aged 16 to 18 but declined for those aged 19 and over. However, success and retention rates remain low on too many courses. The success rates on some courses that were previously performing well have declined. Progression rates from GCE AS to A2 courses remain low.

The overall framework success rate for apprentices is above the comparable national rate but the timely success rate, although improving, is low. The framework success rate for advanced apprentices is below the comparable national rate and the timely success rate is low. The success rate on Train to Gain programmes is satisfactory.

The university has identified the weaknesses and a number of improvement strategies have been put in place. These include the development of target setting and progress reviews for students, and changes to the tutorial programme. More specific developments related to individual areas, such as course changes and the timing of assessments, are also being implemented. In addition a quality review of GCE A-level provision is to be carried out to inform future developments. Most of the initiatives have been recently introduced and it is too early to see their impact.

Quality of provision

What impact has there been of actions taken to improve teaching and learning, which were judged inadequate at the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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A great deal of work has been carried out to improve teaching and learning. The observation programme has been extended so that work-based learning is now covered and there is a revised system for tutorials. However, workshop sessions in visual and performing arts and media are not included. New types of observation, including peer assessment and self-grading, have been introduced. A moderation stage is now included in the process to standardise judgements and grades awarded. Useful training has been provided for staff implementing the new arrangements. A wide range of appropriate support strategies has been developed to work in conjunction with action plans to support teachers whose observation grade is less than good.

In the summer term a variety of training to improve teaching and learning was provided with high levels of uptake from teachers. The format for lesson planning has been revised in consultation with staff and is being implemented this term. This is helping to ensure greater consistency of approach. A much stronger focus on learning can be seen in support materials for teachers. Support from consultants has been effective in developing new systems and plans are in place to develop links with other providers to share good practice. Although information and learning technology is being used effectively to enhance teaching and learning in some areas, its use is not consistent across all subjects.

Staff are very positive about the changes taking place and some impact can be seen; for example, in improvements in the practice of teachers who received support in the summer term. However, many developments have been very recently introduced so it is too early to see their full impact.

How much progress has been made in improving target setting and monitoring of students' progress?

Reasonable progress

A much more rigorous system has been developed to monitor students' progress. Student reviews are now planned to be carried out five times a year. Staff have a clearer idea of how to set targets for students and monitor their progress. The tutorial system has been developed to support the new arrangements. Students are generally positive about tutorials and the support they receive in helping them to understand their targets.

Initial and diagnostic assessments have been refined for this year to improve their timeliness so that priority support can be put in place quickly. All subjects now have an early assignment to inform the students' first review and to help with target setting and monitoring. Student and course reviews are timed to work together to identify students at risk of not achieving so that intervention strategies can be put in place earlier. There is still some work to do to formalise interim targets and milestones for staff so that the effectiveness of the new arrangements can be evaluated. Very early signs are positive but the system has been too recently introduced to measure the full impact on student outcomes.

Leadership and management

Have actions taken improved the access to and use of management information?

Insufficient progress

Some progress has been made to resolve significant information technology network and infrastructure problems that existed at the previous inspection. However, there is still much to do to ensure that staff at all levels have the basic management information they need to promote improvement. Teachers are now able to access course lists and student details using recently introduced software. An electronic register system developed in-house is in use across the provision. However, this only provides details of attendance at individual student and session level. Managers are not able to analyse and evaluate attendance at higher levels of aggregation electronically.

Managers and teachers do not have sufficient access to kitemarked software to analyse and report on success, retention and pass rates. Software is available on only two machines. Staff have been trained in its use but for too many the training took place some time ago. These issues are hindering the implementation of target

setting procedures at course and subject area level. Managers do not have on-line access to the reports they need to monitor progress against improvement plans.

How much progress has been made to resolve weaknesses in the management of the FE provision overall and some areas the curriculum? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, arrangements to monitor the performance of the university's FE provision have been strengthened. An FE board of governors, a sub-group of the university board, has been established and has met for the first time. The FE board is chaired by, and has members with, appropriate experience to monitor the performance of the provision. Internal committees have been set up that are focused on improving the experience provided for FE students. Senior managers have a clear vision for FE and the contribution it can make to the social and economic regeneration of the region. Collaborative working with local colleges over the development of higher education and FE provision has improved.

At the previous inspection some management roles and responsibilities were fragmented. Since then significant reorganisation of subject areas and management restructuring have taken place. A School of FE was established at the start of September 2009 and an overall manager for the provision on all campuses has been appointed. Communications have improved; staff feel well informed and are strongly committed to improvement strategies. Recent management restructuring has created FE specialist subject teams and has aligned support services for student guidance, management information and professional human resource advice. Key management tools have been developed and are being implemented. Teachers report that the new structure and guidance materials are providing clarity about the roles and responsibilities of managers and they now know who they should go to for advice. Plans are in place to provide training for newly appointed managers.

The high quality resources reported on at the last inspection have been enhanced in a number of areas. However, students and staff are extremely concerned about the poor consultation over the relocation of the library on the Brampton Road Site to the Fusehill Street campus in Carlisle. They feel that this will have a negative impact on the experience provided for students.

Subject areas

What progress has been made to improve the inadequate provision in animal care and equine? **Reasonable progress**

Effective improvement initiatives have been developed and are being implemented. The animal care and equine provision has merged with land-based courses to create a new FE division and a new divisional leader has been appointed. Staff have moved to a single staff room which is improving communication and the sharing of good

practice. Staff feel much better informed about the developments that are taking place across the university's FE provision.

Staff understanding and use of quality assurance arrangements are much improved. They have been consulted over new initiatives such as 'monitoring our targets' and 'stop the tracks' that have been designed to improve the planning of courses. Students and staff report the benefit of the changes being implemented. For example, the revised duty rota and the timetabling of assessment support are helping students to make progress.

The university is improving teaching by increasing the focus on students' learning. Effective changes have been made to the curriculum for advanced animal care management, which was an issue at the last inspection, to help to improve success rates.

What progress has been made to improve the inadequate provision in visual arts?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection success rates were low on most courses and there were weakness in teaching and the management of the curriculum. Since then staff have carried out a rigorous review of the provision and have implemented changes that are improving outcomes for students, particularly on the foundation studies diploma in art and design. New leaders for the subject area and the foundation course have been appointed. Schemes of work have been changed to provide increased emphasis on developing students' drawing skills and providing extra support in workshops. Procedures for monitoring students' progress and attendance on the foundation diploma have been strengthened. Following an enhanced diagnostic induction programme, students will be guided onto either the national certificate or diploma. The university has decided to cease offering the first diploma in art and design and the future of GCE AS and A2 provision is under review.

The success rate on the foundation diploma in art and design improved in 2008/09 and is good. The rate on the national award is good but it is low on the certificate. At GCE AS level the success rate fell in 2008/09 and is low. On GCE A2 courses the rate improved and is satisfactory. University data show that progression from the first to the second year of courses improved in 2008/09. Attendance was satisfactory during 2008/09.

What progress has been made to improve the inadequate provision in performing arts and media?

Reasonable progress

The university has taken effective action to improve success rates in performing arts and media. The national certificate in media production, identified as an underperforming course at the last inspection, is no longer offered. In 2008/09 success rates improved on most GCE AS and A2 subjects. Although success rates on

the national diplomas in performing arts and music fell in 2008/09, progression from the first to the second year has improved.

Teachers appreciate the new standardised formats for schemes of learning and session plans and the new opportunities for staff development. However, some of the issues relating to the quality of teaching and learning, identified at the last inspection, remain; for example, overly directed teaching with insufficient emphasis on experiential learning and poor use of questioning and coaching skills. Strategies to help stretch more able students and successfully support those who need extra help are not always planned well.

Students report improvements in the forward planning of their courses. They now have dates for assessments and assignment deadlines and know when assessed work will be returned. However, their experiences of tutorial arrangements are inconsistent, leaving some students unclear about their progress and achievement.

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