

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Blackpool & Fylde College

Date of visit: Wednesday 4 October 2006

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

Retention rates of learners aged 16-18 on level 2 and level 3 courses remained below national averages in 2004/05. Have the strategies implemented in September 2005 had an impact and improved retention?

- In 2005/06 retention across the college improved for all ages and all levels. On level 1 and level 3 courses the retention for learners aged 19 and over is well above the national average. Although retention of learners aged 16-18 on level 3 courses improved it was just below the national average in 2006.

In 2005, high grade GCSE passes improved to the national average for adult learners but they declined to 35% for learners aged 16-18 (10% below the national average). The iCPR indicates significant variations in the pass rates across subjects offered. Have the GCSE results improved in 2005/06?

- The A* - C pass rate on GCSE courses for learners aged 16 to 18 did not improve overall. There are significant variations in the high grade pass rate across different curriculum areas. The college has identified and introduced a range of strategies to improve both retention and pass rates; it is too early to judge the impact of these new initiatives. Around half the GCSE provision in English and mathematics for 16 to 18 year old students is delivered on a part-time basis in the evening. The college has yet to analyse the difference in the performance at GCSE between full-time and part-time students.

Improvements in the success rates on WBL in 2005/06 appear to be below the national rate of improvement

- The colleges' own data indicate that overall framework success rates and timely success rates continue to improve and are now at national average. LSC data confirms that success rates have improved. However, there are variations in success rates of apprentices in different curriculum areas.

Quality of education and training

Is there a consistent evaluation of the impact of the college's improving teaching and learning strategies across curriculum areas?

- The impact of staff development and the sharing of good practice is evaluated at all levels across the college and includes independent external input. Each course and school of study has identified its key strengths and areas for development; these are used to influence staff development opportunities as well as clear action plans resulting from the self-assessment process. Within each school a senior tutor is responsible for the development of teaching and learning, the sharing of good practice and the impact of new initiatives.

What steps have been taken to further improve the quality of WBL provision?

- The management of WBL continues to improve. Individual learner progress is now closely monitored and a traffic light system is used to monitor learners at risk of leaving or not achieving. The role of the training adviser has strengthened. Much work is being done to ensure consistency in the management of WBL between schools. However, learners' individual learning plans lack detail. They include learner information and the learning which will take place, but do not include target dates for achievement of units. Learner reviews are not routinely observed as a part of the quality assurance process. Targets for learner success rates are set at school level, but there is a lack of clarity in staff responsibilities and targets below head of department level. Learners are positive about the off-the-job training in the college and about their relationships with staff.

What impact has the skills for life strategy group had on key skills delivery and achievements?

- The key skills strategy group has been the driving force in ensuring the college makes good progress in completing the key skills quality improvement plan. The college has set challenging and realistic targets for learners' success rates in key skills and is making good progress in achieving these targets. However, there are still variations in success rates in different areas of learning. Much work has been done in identifying and sharing good practice and staff training. Key skills are now embedded into the teaching in most curriculum areas. The college has improved its IT infrastructure and online testing is available at all campuses.

Leadership and management

Have college managers evaluated the impact of strategies introduced in 2005?

- Evaluation of the college's strategies to raise standards is an integral feature of the robust and comprehensive self-assessment process. Course reviews and regular management meetings closely monitor progress against challenging yet realistic targets. Management information is used well but further analysis of different groups, for example, the difference in the performance of part-time and full-time learners, is not fully in place.

Are college managers clear about the priorities for further improvement?

- Managers at all levels are very focussed on raising standards. Senior leaders monitor the performance of courses "at risk" of not meeting their targets and programme leaders closely monitor individual learners. In 2005/06 improvements in success rates on courses looked at during this visit, for example, visual and performing arts and construction courses, have been significant. Managers are clear about the priority to improve success rates on GCSE and AS level provision.

Has the college revised its safeguarding children procedures in line with the new guidelines?

- The college reviews its child protection policy annually with governors. The college's arrangements for protecting and safeguarding children and vulnerable adults meet the statutory regulation and recent guidelines. All staff have received child protection training and procedures for vetting staff are in place.

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

- In 2005/06 the college's success rates improved for all ages and on all levels, including vocational courses for pupils aged 14 to 16.
- The college has recently revised its mission statement, which is now "leadership in learning, excellence at work".
- The college has been short listed for two Beacon Awards; in health, care and early years and beauty therapy.