

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Barnsley

Date of visit: 7 November 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

Has there been an improvement in the retention rate for adults on long level 1 and 2 courses in 2005/06?

- Yes. The overall retention rate on courses for adults at level 1 has risen from 70% in 2004/05 to 73% in 2005/06. This is still 6% below average but there has been an upward trend for the last three years. The overall retention rate on courses for adults at level 2 has gone up from 66% in 2004/05 to 75% in 2005/06. This is close to the national average.

Have AS and A-level success rates improved in 2006? Do the 2005/06 value-added data show an improvement? (Especially the overall college score from ALIS)

- The overall success rate on A2 courses has improved by 4% and the overall success rate on AS courses has risen by 3%. The college no longer subscribes to ALIS but is still part of the ALPs value added system and the data indicate an improvement overall.

Overall framework success rates on work-based learning programmes continue to improve but not as quickly as national rates. Have improvements been made at the end of 2005/06?

- Further improvements were made in 2005/06. The overall success rate on apprenticeships improved from 21% in 2004/05 to 47% in 2005/06 but this is still 6% below the national rate. The overall success rate on advanced apprenticeship courses improved slightly from 21% in 2004/05 to 27% in 2005/06 but this is 17% below the national rate. Many work-based learners are making slow progress; only 8% of apprentices and 12% of advanced apprentices achieved their qualifications by the planned date.

The number of learners and enrolments declined in 2004/05 compared with 2003/04. Has the decline continued in 2005/06? Did the college meet its recruitment targets in 2005/06?

- Changes to funding for adult learners have made direct comparisons between successive years pointless. The number of full-time 16-18 year olds is continuing to increase; there were 2858 in 2003/04 rising to 3024 in 2005/06. This year, there are 3175 full-time 16 to 18 year olds against a target of 3111. In 2005/06, the college met its overall recruitment target. The number of 16-18 FTEs was slightly under target but the number of adult FTEs was over target.

Have there been any changes in the curriculum offer to reflect local need?

- The college is responding well to local need. New programmes are appropriately aimed at re-engagement and there is a wider curriculum on offer at the lower levels to meet the needs of learners. A new entry level programme, tailored to meet the needs of the NEET group, has started well. The college is addressing all employer needs through its Business Solutions Centre and is introducing new courses in response to demand, for example, training in glazing, which is being offered by the college for the first time.

The standard of students' practical was good at the last inspection. Has this been maintained? Are students continuing to be successful at competitions?

- The standard of learners' practical work is good and learners take great pride in their work. The college continues to enter learners in competitions and many have won awards. Learners on bricklaying courses have won regional competitions and one learner represented the UK in an international competition in Helsinki. Learners from other areas including media, catering, sports, dance, music and public services have also won awards.

Quality of education and training

Have the wide differences in the quality of teaching between levels and subjects been addressed?

- Much is being done to address the wide variation in the quality of teaching across the college but the college's lesson observation grade profile shows that some marked differences remain. In science and mathematics, for example, 93% of lessons were graded good or better but in computing and engineering the proportion was only 39%. There is a wide difference in the quality of teaching between the different course levels. At level 3, 69% of

lessons observed were good or better but at entry level the proportion was only 47%.

Does the lesson observation schedule now focus on the areas of most concern? What support and training have been given to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the weaker areas such as media, Skills for Life, computing and engineering?

- There is a much more comprehensive and focused programme of support now available than there was at the last AAV. Staff training is being targeted at the weaker areas such as Skills for Life, media and engineering. The scheduling of observations prioritises the areas of concern and mechanisms are in place to share good practice. Staff are also encouraged to attend external development events and bespoke training is also being provided in college. Above all, valuable one-to-one mentoring is being provided by the advanced teachers, the curriculum and quality leaders and the subject coaches. The college has developed its database of lesson observation grades and is monitoring any differences in the quality of teaching and learning by level and subject.

Improvements were made to the key skills provision in 2005/06. Have they been effective?

- It is too early to say if the improvements made in 2005/06 have been effective. The college improved access to assessment last year by enabling learners to take tests on-line but a consequence was that they lost their direct claims status. Key skills achievement will not be finalised until the external verifiers visit in December. The overall success rate for 2005/06 stands at 15.5% but could rise to a maximum of 35%.

Changes were made to the college enrichment programme in 2005/06. Have they been successful?

- Responsibility for enrichment has been devolved to the subject areas. There is plenty of evidence to show that the extensive programme of trips, residential visits, participation in competitions and the involvement of visiting speakers is thriving. However, with the exception of sports, there is little evidence to show that the cross-college activities offered on a Wednesday afternoon are publicised effectively or well supported. The college was unable to provide information about participation in enrichment activities or an evaluation of the enrichment programme.

Leadership and management

At the last AAV improvements were being made to quality assurance. Have the changes been effective? Evidence?

- The quality assurance procedures are embedded and all staff are aware of them. Self assessment is understood and staff are very familiar with the quality cycle. Targets are set for every course and staff and managers have a good understanding of the actions required to bring about improvements. Access to data is good and staff make effective use of the information to monitor progress against targets. Learners' views are now being collected electronically and learners feel that their contribution is valued. However, there are no formal systems to inform learners of improvements made in response to their feedback.

The college carried out a management restructure in 2004/05. Is this fully embedded? How have learners benefited?

- The new management structure is fully embedded and is working well. Communication across the college is good and the management style is open and participative. The new mission statement was developed by staff in consultation with learners; senior managers and governors have made few amendments to it. Staff welcome the focus on teaching and learning and the curriculum quality leaders (middle managers) have a clear remit to improve quality and the learners' experience. They meet regularly with cross-college and service managers and the meetings focus strongly on learners and improving quality. Learners have benefited from improvements to resources / accommodation and improvements in teaching.

What are middle and course managers doing to improve retention and achievement rates? Is it effective?

- Retention officers have been appointed to help improve attendance and to work with learners at risk of dropping out of college. Retention rates are improving. Managers are also focusing on under-performing courses and in some cases the courses have been replaced with alternative programmes that have led to improved performance. Managers are working with the weaker teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Managers are also monitoring the proportion of learners receiving learning support after being identified as needing it. The proportion has increased to 87%.

Do staff have a good understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity issues? Are they effectively promoting equality and diversity? How is the effectiveness monitored? Are students aware?

- Most staff have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity but many have not had any recent training and they have a narrow focus. In some programme areas, learners' understanding of equality and diversity is developed as part of the course. In other areas, there is less evidence of learners' understanding and awareness being developed. The majority of learners are White British, reflecting the local population, and it is not clear how the learners are developing an appreciation and understanding of other cultures. Lecturers are trying to address any gender imbalances within their courses and have introduced a number of initiatives. There are effective arrangements in place to deal with bullying and harassment and learners say that there are no discriminatory practices in college.