

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Dilston
Date of visit: 5 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

Data analysis and management are developing.

- Clear actions are being taken to improve data collection on achievement, transition and destinations. The college routinely collects information about the achievement of learners' long term goals. Currently the college is following learners' destinations for up to four years after they have left the college. It is planned to use a telephone interview to improve the response rate and a new database has been developed to collect the data. Data are used to identify the skills required by learners for transition. Interview training has been introduced for learners in year three and their achievement is accredited through Edexcel Skills for Working Life (SFWL) as appropriate. Summaries of learners' achievements in accredited qualifications are now used to set targets for the next year.

Are students achieving qualifications on accredited courses in line with expectations?

- Achievements on accredited courses are increasing. The achievement rate on English Speaking Board courses increased from 66% in 2005 to 75% in 2006. In 2006, 58% of entry students achieved the full SFWL award, while 43% achieved units towards the award. This was the first year of accreditation. Over the past two years there has been increasing achievement on the Edexcel entry level literacy and numeracy awards. In 2006, two learners achieved national vocational qualifications (NVQ) level 1 in catering and hospitality. There are clear targets for future achievements.

What is the impact on learners of the revised arrangements for the monitoring of learning targets and individual learning plans?

- Individual learning plans (ILP) and targets are now monitored by line managers and sampled by the assistant principal. Overall ILPs and targets are clear and achievable.

How is recognising and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) being used?

- RARPA is in the process of development and it is too early to make an overall judgement on its effectiveness. New tracking sheets listing each learner's targets have been introduced that will be completed with either a numerical assessment or text-based comments after each lesson. These will be collated termly and monitored by line managers. A useful summary of individual learner's progress is updated annually to show progress over the last three years.

Quality of education and training

The college reports improved teaching grades in 2005/06. How has the college achieved this?

- There is a clear focus on improving teaching and learning through the training of observers, weekly sessions with staff on the processes of teaching and learning and discussions with individual teachers. The team carrying out the observations has been reduced to three to help improve consistency. The observation handbook clearly specifies the expected standards in teaching and learning. However, while there is some discussion of inspection grades, systematic moderation by the team is underdeveloped.

Does the college know its strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning?

- There is some awareness of the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning.

Baseline assessment and target setting processes were revised for the September 2006 intake. How effective have these new processes been?

- It is too early in the introduction of these processes to make an overall judgment on their effectiveness. Target-setting is monitored carefully by line managers and the assistant principal. Baseline assessment is developing, although there is some variation in the level of detail of the recorded information. For example, the paperwork and guidance on baseline assessment of independent living skills are detailed and provide good examples of how to complete the forms. Other areas have forms which do not allow for some skills to be broken down into smaller steps for more detailed assessment. Baseline assessments overall are satisfactory.

At the last AAV the new catering facilities were not completed. What has been the impact on learners of these new facilities?

- The new catering facilities are now complete and provide a very good learning environment for a wider range of learners. This initiative is supported by a very clear action plan for the use of the facilities.

How are vocational programmes developing and how is the college managing staff absence in this key area of development?

- The management of the development of vocational programmes is good. There has been a thorough review of the programmes and strategic planning of developments. Changes to the vocational curriculum have been supported by an increase in staff qualifications. For example, catering staff achieved NVQ level 2 in catering and hospitality and plan to achieve level 3. Work experience developed during 2005/06, including an increase in the number of employers used and an increase in the proportion taking up work experience from 48% to 71%. There has been further development of the transition process to integrate vocational choices from year one.

Leadership and management

How effective are quality assurance procedures in evaluating provision?

- Quality assurance procedures for evaluating provision are under development. The college has defined standards for most operational areas. These standards are compiled into a handbook that is used as a training tool for new staff. Quality checklists are used to monitor achievement of the standards and this information is fed into the self-assessment process. A calendar has also been produced to identify when quality monitoring activities need to take place. The self-assessment process is underdeveloped and not inclusive of all staff. The college recognises this and is planning to use a new framework for the 2005/06 report that requires all operational areas to contribute to the report. The use of the views of parents, carers and learners in the report is underdeveloped.

How is the college managing capacity building and ensuring all staff hold appropriate qualifications?

- Capacity building in the areas of hospitality, catering, literacy and numeracy is good. A comprehensive training programme has developed staff at levels 2, 3 and 4. The college now has five tutors with level 4 qualifications and 14 tutors have completed level 3 qualifications. Six learning support staff are completing level 2 qualifications.

What are the college's priorities for the improvement and development of provision?

- The college's priorities for the improvement and development of provision are agreed with the Learning and Skills Council through their three year

development plan. In particular the college is keen to establish a long term goal for each learner and to support them to achieve this. The college has a very clear focus on widening the vocational and supported employment opportunities for learners. The newly refurbished refectory with its industry standard kitchen is a good example of how the college is providing realistic working opportunities for learners. A laundry small business and car valeting facility will be available in the near future.

What policies and procedures are in place to ensure the student's health and welfare are safeguarded?

- The college has effective systems to monitor the criminal record bureau checks of new staff. At the time of the annual assessment visit eight new members of staff had been appointed. Of these, one had received full clearance and seven had been POVA cleared and were awaiting full clearance. The college has effective procedures to ensure that staff do not work unsupervised. Every Child Matters issues are reflected in the self- assessment report.

The college reports improved community and partnership links. How are these links and projects developing?

- The college has made some significant partnership and community links since the last annual assessment visit. The partnership with Tyneside virtual college is developing well. The principal sits on the executive committee of the virtual college. The partnership exists to develop resources and opportunities for learners to develop vocational skills. Currently three learners are working on national vocational qualifications in catering at the kitchens created at Hexham High school. A data base of potential work placements is also being created. The college has good links with MENCAP housing and support business unit and MENCAP employment services. Both of these services support effective transition from college to life in the community. A North East consortium of independent specialist colleges has also been established and is in the early stages of development. There are also links with community volunteers undertaking conservation work. Learners cook lunches for senior citizens through links with Hexham community centre and the Salvation Army.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

- Are learning support assistants used effectively?

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

- Speech and language therapy has become increasingly integrated into the curriculum. The college employs a speech and language therapist for four days each week and also a full-time assistant. There is a comprehensive initial assessment of learners' communication skills that informs the target setting in learners' individual learning plans. The speech and language team also provide training, resources and support for tutors to develop appropriate strategies in their teaching. The therapy team are now located in the Skills Base suite of classrooms and this has helped communication between tutors and given the team more opportunities to interact with learners and assess their abilities.

The college's estate and accommodation are well maintained and managed. Following a DDA Audit the college spent £650,000 increasing access to the grounds and buildings. Pedestrians and vehicles are now largely separated, one large car park has been resurfaced, and many external walkways have been created with handrails, seating, and lighting. Some improvements have been made to internal corridors and decoration is of a high standard.