

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Newcastle College  
Date of visit: 12 March 2007

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

#### Learners' achievements in 2005/06

- Overall learner achievement on long courses increased from 53% in 2003/04 to 71% in 2005/06. In 2005/06 success rates for adult learners were above 2004/05 national averages at levels 1, 2 and 3; significantly so at levels 2 and 3. Despite the slight decline at level 1 adult success rates were still above the 2004/05 national averages. Retention rates were all well above 2004/05 national averages and pass rates were at or above 2004/05 national rates.
- Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 improved at all levels for long courses in 2005/06 to well above the national rates for 2004/05 at levels 1 and 2. They were broadly in line with the 2004/05 national average at level 3. There was a significant improvement in success rates on advanced (A) level courses, but a slight decline on advanced subsidiary (AS) courses. Retention rates at levels 1 and 2 were above average, but at level 3 they were broadly average. Pass rates were above average at levels 1 and 2 and slightly below average at level 3.

At the last annual assessment visit the proportion of learners in work-based learning achieving the full framework was improving and a range of appropriate actions were being taken to continue the improvement. What are the current levels of full framework achievement?

- Overall success rates are improving. In 2004/05 full framework achievement was 28%. This increased to 56% in 2005/06. Targets to improve on these success rates have been set for 2006/07 and 2007/08. Tracking of individual learners has been improved and plans are in place to introduce a new management information system to measure more effectively individual learner progress. Additional

learning support is now more targeted and focussed on improving learner retention and success rates.

At the last annual assessment visit it was recognised that a comprehensive action plan to raise standards at GCE AS and A-level had been put in place at the start of the academic year. What impact has this had on success rates, particularly for those areas that were underperforming?

- A level success rates improved significantly in 2005/06, although they were still below the 2004/05 national average. AS success rates declined slightly and were well below the 2004/05 national average. Value added improved significantly for advanced level courses overall. The reasons for the decline of AS success rates have been thoroughly analysed and appropriate actions put in place. The actions have focused on raising staff performance, improving pastoral support and developing enrolment processes to ensure learners are on the course that best meets their needs. These strategies have already had a positive impact on retention figures for this academic year to date.

High retention rates for adults and for students aged 16 to 18 are cited as key strengths in the 2005/06 self assessment report (SAR). What strategies are in place to support high levels of retention and how is their effectiveness assessed?

- There are very detailed monitoring procedures in place that highlight areas of high retention and where there is room for improvement. Good use is being made of initial assessment to develop realistic individual learning plans (ILPs) that are shared well with course teams. There is a strong emphasis on meeting individual learning needs through both additional learning support and a focus on stretching and challenging the most able learners. Learning mentors and additional learning support are used well to identify and support learners at risk of withdrawing from their programme of learning. Information learning technology (ILT) is being used particularly well to provide access to learning for those who are absent from sessions.

## Quality of education and training

The college is now in Phase 2 of the implementation of the ILT Strategy 2005-2008, as stated in the 2005/06 SAR. What developments have taken place in this area and what has been their impact on the learner experience?

- The college has invested over £1 million in ILT in the last year, equipping all teaching rooms and areas with electronic whiteboards. All staff have had training in the use of whiteboards and the college is committed to continuing this training. Staff are now able to identify specific ILT development needs and book on-line for planned and individualised training. This training has also placed an increased emphasis on staff use of the college's in-house virtual learning environment and the encouragement of learners in its use.
- ILT is used very effectively to provide differentiated activities in the classroom and to enable increased learner participation in teaching. Observations of teaching and learning by both the college observation team and outside consultants have identified significant improvement in the use of ILT in teaching. Currently use of an electronic ILP is being trialled with plans to roll this out across the college in 2006/07. This ILP will provide all staff with ongoing up to date information on learner progress, attendance and punctuality. It will also highlight areas of concern.

Within the 2006/07 development plan the college has 'Continue to improve the standard of teaching and learning judged to be less than good.' What progress has been made in this area?

- The college places a very strong emphasis on improving teaching and learning. All new staff are provided with a comprehensive induction to teaching supported by electronic materials. On-going training is provided to all staff in improving their own teaching and learning, in particular through sessions on observations of teaching and learning. All staff that are either graded satisfactory or less than satisfactory are given targeted additional training and individual support from the teaching and learning manager. Additional lesson observations are carried out on these staff. Outcomes of teaching and learning observations are reviewed at quarterly quality meetings and actions are identified to support staff who are a cause for concern.

Within the 2006/07 development plan the college has 'Develop a learner involvement strategy to ensure appropriate responses to the learner voice.' What progress has been made in this area?

- The college continues to use a wide range of strategies to collect information from learners regarding their experiences, such as questionnaires and forums. This information feeds into regular reviews and informs planning. Staff also feedback to learners on their input and the changes it has led to. Learners value this cycle and can see the impact of their views.
- The college has also strongly supported the development of the student union, and interest in the union is growing. Learners are involved in a wide range of activities from charity fund raising to promoting the awareness of relevant issues across the college.

At the last annual assessment visit the college was in the pilot phase of implementing an electronic system for setting targets for achievement and monitoring individual learners' progress. What progress has been made in this area and what is its impact on the learner experience?

- There are a number of pilot initiatives looking at ways of using ILT to set and monitor targets for learners, from analysis of A level module results and re-sits to the development of on-line individual learning plans. Best practice from all areas is shared and systems refined to best support learner needs. Learners value the information these systems give them and feel it supports them in achieving their goals.

The quality of student support was judged outstanding in the last inspection and in the 2005/06 SAR. What actions are being taken to ensure it remains at this level and how has the college monitored performance in this area?

- Student services have developed their provision in a number of areas and carry out a regular cycle of audits to ensure the quality of their work. The whole department is involved in development of the SAR and the college achieved Matrix re-accreditation in December 2006.

Learning mentors and Connexions advisers are now based in learning zones and data analysis by the college shows this development has increased the use of their services. When additional learning support is provided for learners their success rates are tracked to monitor the impact of the intervention. A centralised enrolment process is currently being developed to ensure a consistently high quality of service. It is too early to see major impact from this initiative, but early signs are positive.

## Leadership and management

All curriculum areas in the 2005/06 SAR are graded as good or outstanding. What strategies are being employed in supporting this high grade profile?

- There are robust quality assurance processes and procedures with regular performance monitoring meetings to keep track of developments within areas. There is a high level of confidence in information produced by management information systems and the quality area. This enables staff to focus effectively on analysis of performance and highlight areas of good practice, as well as identifying areas for improvement. Staff are able to drill down from high level data to particular aspects and pinpoint where a problem is. This supports the production of well targeted action plans. There are quality managers in each school to support directors in achieving quality improvement and a traffic light system is used for quick identification of levels of performance.

The last annual assessment visit stated that there had been substantial investment in accommodation and resources to support learning and that the next phase of the accommodation strategy was under construction. What progress has been made in this area and what is the impact on the learner experience?

- Purpose built accommodation for sports, hair and beauty, aviation and catering has been opened in a new lifestyle centre. This accommodation provides learners with industry standard equipment and training. These very modern resources give learners outstanding opportunities to participate in a range of additional work related activities and experiences such as laser treatment, advanced nail

techniques and high quality catering events and activities. It is also providing learners with very good experience for both work placements and employment.