

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Grantham College
Date of visit: 29 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

Have overall college success rates improved?

- College data show a slight improvement in the headline success rate from 71% in the previous year to 72% in 2005/06. The overall success rate remains below the national average rate for general further education colleges. The overall headline success rate for learners aged 16 – 18 improved from 69% to 73% and this is above the national average. However, the overall success rate for adult students remained at 72% and continues to be below national levels. The overall success rate for long courses improved from 49% to 57% with improvements in success rates for both age groups. However, despite the improvement, the overall success rate for adult students on long courses remains below the national rate. In sector skills areas, overall long course success rates improved in 12 of the 14 areas where the college offer provision, although in 5 areas overall success rates remain below the national averages. The completion rate for apprenticeship frameworks continues to rise. Headline data show that both overall and timely completion rates improved during 2005/06 and these rates are now considerably above national levels.

Adult success rates for long courses at all levels were identified as a cause for concern. Have adult success rates improved?

- College data for 2005/06 show an improvement in adult success rates at all levels. Success rates at level 2 and 3 improved significantly. However, despite this improvement, success rates at all levels remain well below national averages and continue to be a cause for concern. The college has taken appropriate action to address courses that have persistently under-performed but has been slow to do so. The provision for adults has been appropriately rationalised in line with LSC priorities. Many courses, including franchised provision, which accounted for much of the under-performance, have now closed. Adult student enrolments and the proportion of guided learning hours for adults have reduced.

Have success rates improved on NVQ courses?

- The overall success rate on NVQ courses has improved from 24% in 2004/05 to 39% in 2005/06. Overall success rates improved at all levels and significantly so on level 1 and 2 courses. The overall success rate at level 1 is well above the national average. However, overall rates at level 2 and 3 remain below average and collectively, NVQ success rates are 21 percentage points below national levels.

Quality of education and training

How effective is the provision for key skills?

- The policy on key skills has been revised appropriately since the last annual assessment visit. Learners are now enrolled on a more appropriate range of courses and are able to develop the key skills required based on results of initial assessment and learner need. Full-time students who do not have a grade C or above at GCSE in English and mathematics are directed to a GCSE course, a key skill qualification at level 1 or 2, or to additional learning support where they are able to gain an adult literacy or numeracy award. Many full-time learners also work towards the ICT key skill at level 1, 2 or 3.
- Key skills are becoming more effectively integrated into curriculum areas. In some areas, staff work well with key skills specialists to integrate key skill assessment criteria into curriculum focused assignments. However, the college recognises that this is not consistent practice, and acknowledge the need to review its approach to the teaching and integration of key skills. Key skill success rates continue to improve year on year.

How effective is assessment planning and the monitoring of learner progress on NVQ courses?

- A working group has been established to improve the performance of NVQ courses. A range of new measures aimed at improving retention and success rates have been introduced. Employers are now provided with clearer information about their roles and responsibilities in assessment, planning and reviewing of learner progress. Tutors scrutinise closely learner attendance rates and monitor progress against targets. Standardised documentation for assessment and verification activities has been introduced across most NVQ programmes. The college is aware that

it needs to embed fully these new arrangements across all NVQ provision, including that for work-based learners on apprenticeship programmes.

What changes have been made to provision in ICT to improve overall performance in this area? What impact have these changes had?

- Between 2002 and 2004 a large number of adult learners were enrolled on level 2 courses and many left without achieving a qualification. In 2005/06 a more suitable entry level qualification has been introduced. A range of other developments have been introduced to help improve attendance and success rates on ICT programmes. The college has identified the following to be the most effective of these developments. For adults: the introduction of more individualised learning programmes; the improved initial advice and guidance to better match the learner to the most appropriate programme; the improved access for adults to specialist learning support staff and the close monitoring of attendance by course tutors. For learners aged 16 to 18, the college has introduced more robust pre-course interviewing; taster courses; a wider range of courses allowing access to ICT studies at all levels; an improved induction programme and more frequent progress reviews. In 2005/06, overall long course success rates improved by 14 percentage points to 45%, but this is still below the national average rate of 50%.

Leadership and management

Is teaching and learning effectively monitored and quality assured? What information is collected and what analysis takes place? Does monitoring and analysis lead to development and improvement?

- At the last inspection, the college was judged to have significant variations in the standards of teaching and learning and was seen to be over generous in the grades awarded to staff during observations. Since then, the college has introduced a range of new practices to better monitor teaching and learning and improve the performance of its staff. The newly established Quality Improvement Group ensures that all staff are observed throughout the year. The results of these observations now inform staff appraisal and staff development activities. The profile of lesson grades show that the quality of teaching and learning is improving. The proportion of observed teaching sessions that were graded good or better has improved from 57% in 2004/05 to 63% in 2005/06.

How robust is the cycle of quality assurance in monitoring curriculum area performance?

- Quality assurance activities have been strengthened significantly since the last annual assessment visit. Quality improvement has a high priority within the college. A newly constituted Quality Improvement Group meets on a weekly basis to monitor and review progress against improvement targets. The level and detail of monitoring has increased and information is shared more widely with staff. The college has significantly improved its use of data to inform planning, performance monitoring and quality improvement. However, there is insufficient analysis of learner progression data and information is not always presented in a consistent format that is easy to interpret.

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

- Due to time constraints, it was not possible to establish how compliant curriculum areas are with quality assurance procedures.

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

- None