

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Strathmore
Date of visit: 23 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

Does the evidence from achievement records support the college judgement that learner achievement continues to be good?

- Systems to track overall learner progress and achievement are under-developed. There are examples of learners making good progress in developing both their vocational skills and independent living skills. For example, in 2005/06 seven learners achieved units towards NVQ1 in Distributive Operations and four learners achieved the basic food hygiene certificate. As learners' confidence and levels of skill develop, the college appropriately reduces the level of support in order to help them acquire independence in the workplace. However, not all achievements are well documented.

Quality of education and training

What progress has taken place to broaden vocational training and work placement opportunities?

- The college is aware of the need to develop a broader range of vocational training and work placement opportunities, particularly for the more able learners. Some progress has been made; for example students are on work placements in a local supermarket and cinema. The college continues to offer vocational training through its retail outlet, which includes a café and florist shop. An external organisation is being used in addition to the college's own facilities to increase the opportunity for learners to work in a realistic catering environment. The college has introduced a creative media option within its curriculum; this is currently being piloted and it is too early to evaluate outcomes for the learners.

Do observations of teaching and learning include the impact of learner support staff and key workers?

- Observations have taken place to evaluate the impact of key workers on learner progress but there have not been any observations to determine the effectiveness of learning support. The judgements on some teaching and learning observations are insufficiently rigorous.

Following review of individual learning plans, how well are revised targets shared with all staff?

- There are regular reviews of learner progress against targets set and this information is shared across staff working with the learner. However, there is a need for further staff training to ensure targets are sufficiently coherent across the learner programme and that reviews better document the progress learners have made since they started at the college. Much of the review documentation focuses on progress against the objectives in the Essential Skills award and opportunities are missed to record the acquisition of wider skills.

What progress has been made in developing staff skills in behaviour management and communication strategies?

- The college has increased its staffing resource and expertise and carried out training in behaviour management skills. All learners have an individual support plan. A speech and language therapist works with the college for one day a week, there has been some staff training in non-verbal methods of communication and further work is planned. However, the college recognises that the amount of expertise available to support communication strategies is too limited, especially in view of the more complex needs of some of its learners.

What progress has been made to improve ICT resources?

- Improvement of Information Communication Technology (ICT) resources has been limited. There has been some investment in new equipment but this has yet to have sufficient impact on the learner experience. The college's ICT strategy is currently being reviewed.

Leadership and management

How robust are strategic planning arrangements?

- There are regular meetings between the college principal and the regional director of the parent company. This enables discussion to take place on strategic issues, such as changing learner needs and accommodation requirements. The regional director provides a link between the college and the board of the parent company. However, it has been recognised that the current arrangements need strengthening in terms of the educational expertise within the company to monitor the work of the college, and plans are in place to address this.

What progress has been made in developing quality assurance arrangements and how are the views of learners taken into account?

- Developments have taken place to standardise quality assurance procedures, for example there is now a regular audit of individual learner programme (ILP) files to ensure all staff are complying with requirements. There is some use of external benchmarking but this has been limited and the college recognises the need to carry out further work to keep up to date with best practice in the sector. Learner feedback is gathered but there is scope to extend this. There is insufficient analysis of data to inform the quality assurance cycle.

How effective is communication within the college and with external partners?

- Communication within the college is satisfactory and is improving with external partners.

Is the college up to date with equality of opportunity and safeguarding requirements?

- The college has in place suitable arrangements to comply with requirements for the safeguarding of learners. Appropriate work is taking place to plan for the introduction of a Disability Equality Scheme.