

Ofsted

North Devon College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

Published
December 2006

Provider reference
130646

Contents

Basic information about the college	3
Background of the organisation	4
Scope of the inspection	4
<hr/>	
Summary of grades awarded	5
<hr/>	
Overall judgement	6
Main findings	9

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	North Devon
Type of college:	Tertiary
Principal:	David Dodd
Address of college:	Old Sticklepath Hill, Barnstaple, North Devon EX31 2BQ
Telephone number:	01271 345291
Fax number:	01271 338121
Chair of governors:	Paula Stein
Unique reference number:	130646
Name of lead inspector:	Peter Green, HMI
Dates of inspection:	9-13 October 2006

Background of the organisation

1. North Devon College is a medium-sized tertiary college with its main site in Barnstaple, serving a large rural and dispersed local community. The college is the sixth form centre for all the 11-16 schools in the area. The college operates off-site provision in Barnstaple, Bideford, Bude and Holsworthy. The college is developing Higher Education work, particularly in Foundation degrees, and it also attracts international learners.
2. The population in and around Barnstaple is around 33,000 and is predominantly white. Unemployment in North Devon is slightly higher than for the rest of the South West; but in the immediate area in and around Barnstaple, it is close to the average for the county. The figure for those with no qualifications (9%) is high. Many businesses in the area are small to medium sized enterprises. Average earnings in the area are below the national average.
3. The college is the main provider in the area and the second largest employer. Its vision, as expressed in its mission statement, is 'to drive forward educational, economic and cultural success by continually raising the aspirations, knowledge and skills of individuals, communities and businesses'. In 2004/05, it had 2,223 16-18 year old full-time equivalent learners and 1,922 full-time equivalent adult learners. In addition, there were 329 Higher Education learners and 3,868 enrolments on Recreational, Adult and Community Learning, Employer Training Pilot and Learn Direct Courses/programmes. The college offers provision in 14 of the 15 sector subject categories from pre-entry to level 4. The majority of learners are studying on level 3 courses.
4. Overall enrolments have increased since the last inspection in 2002. A new principal was appointed in January 2005 and several building projects have been completed. In 2004, the college gained Beacon and Investors in People status. It also received LSC excellence status in 2004 and has Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status in engineering and manufacturing and construction crafts.

Scope of the inspection

5. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Outstanding: grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: grade 1

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

6. This is an outstanding college. Learners at all levels achieve success rates above national averages. The achievements of work-based learners have improved significantly since the last inspection and are just above the national average. The attendance and progress of learners are good.
7. The overall quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good and are supported by a systematic and rigorous lesson observation process that is effective in improving teaching and learning. The college has invested heavily in developing information learning technology (ILT) which is widespread across the college and enhances learning. Learners' work is appropriately assessed with supportive assessment practices. The college has recognised the need to develop further the use of ILT and some aspects of assessment.
8. Educational and social inclusion is outstanding. A wide range of courses has been developed to meet the needs of young people from partner schools. Engagement with employers is effective and the college's response to the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college has a strong and tested reputation for working within the community to widen participation and support disadvantaged learners. Commitment to, and the promotion of, equality and diversity are strong.
9. Learners receive excellent guidance and support. The needs of learners are identified early and support is provided promptly. Tutorial support is effective for both learners aged 16-18 and adults. The impact of additional learning support is monitored closely with clear evidence that it is being targeted and used effectively.
10. Leadership and management are outstanding. Governors and managers at all levels have supported successfully the achievement of high standards and improvements to provision. The college is aware of the very few courses with poorer success rates and has taken appropriate action. It has done much to improve its poor accommodation. However, the site presents significant challenges to further development. The college's self-assessment report identified accurately its key strengths and weaknesses. The college's information system, and how it is used, is a particular strength. Overall, the college provides outstanding value for money.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

11. Inspectors agreed with the college that its capacity to improve is outstanding. The strategic direction and mission are very clear and supported by the staff. Curriculum management, particularly involvement in the self-assessment process, is very strong. The regular panel review meetings have further strengthened the college's quality assurance processes and its capacity to carry through its improvement plans. The lesson observation scheme is rigorous and staff development is good. Effective actions are taken in response to issues raised by learners. Access to data and its use to promote improvements are very good. The college has gained external awards recognising the quality of its provision including Beacon status, two CoVEs and Learning and Skills Council excellence status.
12. The self-assessment process is thorough, comprehensive and well established across the college. It is effective in identifying areas for improvement. Target setting is good and the resulting action plans have improved standards.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

13. The college has made outstanding progress in addressing the key weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Accommodation and learning resources have been improved significantly. Support for learners has been strengthened and is now outstanding. Arrangements for covering lessons when staff are absent are now effective and work with employers has been developed effectively. Success rates have risen to above national averages since the last inspection. The college has developed a highly effective and well integrated information and data system to monitor performance. The promotion of equality and diversity is good.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- high success rates
- outstanding leadership and management
- effective and wide partnerships
- broad and inclusive curriculum with good progression routes
- excellent academic and pastoral support
- rigorous and effective quality assurance
- effective and well used college information system.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- further developing the use of information and learning technology (ILT) and assessment strategies
- raising the aspirations and achievements of all its learners further.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Outstanding: grade 1

14. Learners achieve excellent results and make very good progress, particularly on advanced level courses. On these courses, success rates have improved each year since the last inspection in 2002. The overall success rate for 2006 was 97% and 24 courses achieved a 100% pass rate including English, geography, history and graphic design. However, the numbers of learners achieving the higher grades of A and B are not as high as the college would like and an appropriate development strategy has been put in place that identifies high achieving learners and provides suitable extension work.
15. The overall success rate for 2005 was 72% which is higher than the average for similar colleges and is an improvement of about 10 percentage points over three years. The success rate for 16-18 year old learners was 77% in 2005 compared to the national average of 65% and the success rates for adult learners were above the national average. Overall retention rates have been consistently higher than the national averages at all levels for the last three years.
16. The college has recruited many more learners onto level 2 courses while retaining the high pass rates on these courses. The unsatisfactory performance in English and mathematics GCSE has been addressed successfully through improved recruitment procedures.
17. Good use is made of value added information for learners on level 3 programmes and first diplomas to motivate them and set improvement targets. The data also suggest that learners on many courses make better progress than might be expected from their qualifications when they enter college.
18. The college is working with a significant number of 14-16 year old learners on link courses and the Increased Flexibility Programme. These learners make good progress and the vast majority go on to further education or training at the college with improved confidence and motivation.
19. Key skills pass rates are 43% which is a significant rise over the last two years. They are particularly well integrated in some apprenticeship programmes, and the college is focusing on improving timely success rates to ensure the learners achieve appropriate and meaningful qualifications.
20. Framework achievements have risen over the last three years and in 2005 were 56%. College data are indicating that success rates for 2006 are likely to be between 57% and 61%. The biggest area of its work-based learning is construction and in this area framework completions were significantly above the national average in 2005.

21. Attendance at 89% is good. Monitoring of attendance and punctuality through the on-line system of registration is thorough and follow-up is immediate.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

22. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Most lessons are well planned and teachers follow the standardised format for schemes of work and lesson plans. The use of pen portraits of learners is effective in planning lessons to match their needs. Learners enjoy their lessons and working relationships between staff and learners are good.
23. Teachers use interactive whiteboards and other resources competently to engage learners with good checks on progress and learning. ILT is well used across the college with strong promotion of the college's virtual learning environment (VLE). The college is keen to develop further the range, techniques and expertise of staff when using ILT in teaching and learning.
24. A wide range of assessment methods is used and assessment of practical work is good. Learners' progress is tracked thoroughly on vocational courses, though progress is not monitored as closely on academic courses and target-setting is not uniformly consistent. The marking of assignments, though encouraging, does not always include sufficient detailed written feedback to learners on how to improve their work. The college is focussing on making assessment more effective.
25. The college has a strong commitment to improving teaching and learning. In 2005/06, the internal observation process was implemented more rigorously to include part-time staff. Another recent initiative has been the opening of a new continuous professional development centre for all staff and this is proving to be a good vehicle for spreading good practice. Peer observation is used effectively for spreading good practice. Advanced practitioners are also being used effectively in this process. Learning mentors have been successful in supporting new staff to develop productive teaching and learning strategies.
26. Arrangements for initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills are timely and appropriate. Additional learning support needs are identified effectively and good arrangements for support are in place. The majority of learners who receive additional learning support make good progress.
27. The college has a clear commitment to effective key skills provision. Many vocational courses have successfully integrated key skills into the learning programme. However, the college has identified the need to further develop key skills provision in some areas.
28. The teaching accommodation and resources have been improved since the previous inspection but, due to site restrictions, not all accommodation is fully fit for purpose.

29. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The curriculum offer is very broad and inclusive, with clear progression routes. School leavers have a good choice of full-time courses and work-based training. The needs of adults are met through a wide range of vocational and recreational courses. Provision for disaffected learners and those with learning difficulties and disabilities is very good. The college's academic academy provides good support for high achieving learners to progress to higher education.
30. Links with employers are very good and productive. Staff provide outstanding support for employees on work-based training. The two CoVEs respond effectively to employers' requirements. The expansion of work-based learning has been significant, particularly the employer training pilot. The appointment of a business development manager is improving co-ordination of employer liaison.
31. Partnership working with schools and community groups is very effective, especially links with the partner schools. The taster days are well attended and provide 14-16 year old learners with valuable experience of vocational courses. A high proportion of these learners progress to the college. Development of outreach and satellite centres has also been good, including work on several innovative projects with a wide range of community organisations. The college is very successful in facilitating the transition to education and employment of many individuals who are coping with multiple disadvantages.
32. A wide and imaginative range of enrichment activities complements the learners' programmes, which include a learner environmental group and peer group sexual health training in schools. Opportunities and participation in work experience and overseas visits are good.
33. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. The college has increased the number of youth workers and they give learners very appropriate support. Though the college counsellors are dealing with an increasing number of learners, the data show very high retention rates for all learners receiving support. The mental health team is particularly effective in helping learners with, or in recovery from, mental health problems, and from drug or alcohol dependence. The college is very proactive in supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual learners.
34. Tutorial support is very effective and appropriate to learners' needs. Learners receive timely support arising from a thorough initial assessment. Greater consistency in tutorial support is now maintained by a team of senior tutors. Tutorials are observed as part of the lesson observation programme and learners' attendance and progress are monitored closely.
35. Learners have good access to information, advice and guidance at all stages of their course. Connexions provides impartial advice and learners are well informed about progression pathways. The analysis of learner destinations is thorough.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

36. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal, senior managers and governors set a very clear strategic direction for the college, through the 'Journey to Outstanding' initiative, which is supported by staff throughout the college. Restructuring of the management of work-based learning has been effective in raising standards. Work-based programmes are now integrated into the curriculum areas and framework managers ensure regular progress of learners.
37. The college has a comprehensive and rigorous quality assurance and monitoring process, well supported by an excellent college information system. Timely and accurate data are well used by teachers and managers to monitor performance at learner, course and section level. A robust process of internal inspection effectively monitors the performance of each section on a 3-year cycle.
38. The college sets realistic and challenging performance targets. Underperformance is identified quickly and underperforming courses are given additional support and monitoring.
39. Data from the college information system are well used by programme and section managers to complete self-assessment reports and action plans on-line. Termly reviews of progress ensure actions happen. Judgements about performance are accurate but in some action plans, targets are not yet sufficiently precise and measurable. A robust system of internal lesson observations provides reliable information about teaching and learning and areas for improvement. Findings inform staff appraisal and identify development needs, both for individual teachers and at course or section level.
40. The college meets statutory requirements under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Special Needs and Disability Act 2002 and the Children Act 2004. Procedures for the protection of young people and vulnerable adults are robust. Appropriate measures have been taken to ensure physical access for learners with restricted mobility.
41. The college has raised effectively awareness of issues relating to equality of opportunities and diversity, through the appointment of a college co-ordinator and by providing training for all staff. The college evaluates the impact of this work through learner surveys and termly reports to the governing body.
43. Resources are good. The college has greatly improved its accommodation since the last inspection. Learning resources are good, with increased ILT facilities and updated library resources. Staff are highly motivated and committed. Almost all full-time and the great majority of part-time teachers have a teaching qualification or are undertaking training.

44. The college's vision and strategy for the future, including the proposed relocation to a purpose built site in the town centre, have strong local support and enhance its position in the heart of the local community.
45. Governance is outstanding. Governors have a very wide range of expertise and are highly committed to the college. They are very knowledgeable about its work and monitor performance closely, through regular and appropriate reports; for example, on learner performance, finance and equality and diversity issues. Working relationships between governors and managers are excellent. Financial management is strong and the college provides outstanding value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	02/03	666	62.3	56.1	6.2	937	54.6	54.9	-0.3
	03/04	827	61.2	60.3	0.9	1143	59.9	59.1	0.8
	04/05	801	64	61	3	1255	64	63	1
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	34	70.6	59.7	10.9				
	03/04	56	76.8	65.1	11.7	1	100.0	52.3	47.7
	04/05	66	72.7	67.9	4.8	5	100.0	58.1	41.9
NVQs	02/03	123	59.3	55.6	3.7	114	71.9	56.3	15.6
	03/04	105	64.8	61.0	3.8	159	50.3	62.3	-12.0
	04/05	105	65.7	67.2	-1.5	136	80.9	66.9	14
Other	02/03	509	62.5	55.9	6.6	823	52.2	54.9	-2.7
	03/04	666	59.3	60.0	-0.7	983	61.4	59.0	2.4
	04/05	636	59.4	63.6	-4.2	1,114	61.7	61.4	0.3

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	02/03	980	57.4	51.6	5.8	1480	51.3	49.2	2.1
	03/04	980	63.1	56.3	6.8	2926	68.9	53.6	15.3
	04/05	906	67	61	6	1006	69	60	9
GCSEs	02/03	241	58.1	57.1	1.0	265	52.8	55.3	-2.5
	03/04	328	63.7	61.3	2.4	204	60.3	58.8	1.5
	04/05	319	69.0	64.1	4.9	162	59.3	62.3	-3.0
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	72	63.9	58.5	5.4	16	50.0	52.8	-2.8
	03/04	47	76.6	63.0	13.6	1	100.0	56.6	43.4
	04/05	46	67.4	66.8	0.6	13	69.2	70.4	-1.2
NVQs	02/03	159	40.9	41.9	-1.0	558	52.5	48.2	4.3
	03/04	133	67.7	51.9	15.8	427	46.4	53.5	-7.1
	04/05	131	73.3	57.0	16.3	370	79.5	59.6	19.9
Other	02/03	508	61.4	50.5	10.9	641	49.6	48.4	1.2
	03/04	472	60.0	54.1	5.9	2,294	73.8	52.7	21.1
	04/05	410	62.2	60.1	2.1	461	63.8	58.8	5.0

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	02/03	3926	74.8	61.6	13.2	1350	48.1	50.7	-2.6
	03/04	2468	79.8	64.1	15.7	947	53.3	53.5	-0.2
	04/05	3596	83	67	16	865	60	57	3
A/A2 Levels	02/03	921	90.4	81.8	8.6	73	50.7	63.0	-12.3
	03/04	952	91.9	83.8	8.1	39	61.5	65.5	-4.0
	04/05	879	93.1	85.6	7.4	55	61.8	69.1	-7.3
AS Levels	02/03	2,357	72.6	61.1	11.5	207	47.3	48.2	-0.9
	03/04	1,939	77.2	62.9	14.3	80	52.5	49.6	2.9
	04/05	2,162	81.2	65.5	15.7	116	59.5	52.2	7.3
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	356	71.3	49.8	21.5	69	66.7	44.9	21.8
	03/04	115	79.1	52.4	26.7	21	66.7	43.5	23.2
	04/05	59	86.4	60.2	26.2	18	50.0	52.9	-2.9
NVQs	02/03	34	32.4	50.2	-17.8	498	46.0	44.1	1.9
	03/04	12	58.3	53.7	4.6	287	43.9	47.0	-3.1
	04/05	13	53.8	62.4	-8.6	226	67.3	53.9	13.4
Other	02/03	258	49.6	55.4	-5.8	503	47.7	52.6	-4.9
	03/04	450	66.2	56.3	9.9	520	57.5	55.7	1.8
	04/05	483	74.3	60.0	14.3	450	56.7	58.3	-1.6