

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Carlisle
Date of visit: 30 January 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

The self-assessment report (SAR) judges achievement and standards to be satisfactory and the data support this.

What do the data for 2006 show?

- Long course success rates improved from 59% in 2005 to 62% in 2006, which is similar to the 2005 national average of 62.4% for colleges of general FE. Around two thirds of enrolments on long courses are for adult learners and the success rate for adults improved between 2005 and 2006, from 59% to 63%, which is slightly above the most recently available national average. This improvement is attributable to a small rise in retention rate and a bigger rise in pass rate. Success rates rose at all levels for adults.
- Success rates for long courses for learners aged 16-18 rose slightly in 2006 to 59%, but this is much lower than the 2005 national average of 65%. Success rates remained stable at levels 1 and 2 and are similar to national averages for those levels. The weakness lies at level 3, which accounts for about one fifth of the relevant enrolments. Although the success rate rose by 2%, it is still very low, at 54%. This is well below the 2005 national average of 68%.
- Short course success rates were around the average for courses of over 5 weeks, but were low for very short courses.
- The college self assessment report identifies several curriculum areas with low long course success rates including basic skills, computing, leisure and tourism, and retail.

What arrangements are in place to monitor the performance of work-based learners in different areas, and identify and spread good practice? Are there any issues relating to new measures of success in work-based learning?

- Performance of work-based learners in different areas of the college is closely monitored by the work-based learning manager and faculty heads. Examples of good practice, and any common issues, are identified at monthly "scheme leaders' meetings". Current LSC data for work-based

learning in the college shows overall success rates have risen in the three years up to 2006, particularly in apprenticeships (as compared to advanced apprenticeships). However, success rates, for the college as a whole, are still below national averages and are unsatisfactory. Data shows that the number of learners in training beyond their expected end date is falling, but this group is still large and accounts for 10% of all learners.

Quality of education and training

What action has been taken to improve teaching and learning?

- Teaching and learning remain satisfactory. The college now has a full complement of teaching staff. Progress is being made in ensuring that all teachers work towards appropriate teaching qualifications. Those appointed without qualifications undertake training through the college teacher training unit, and courses are offered both in September and January, which helps to reduce any delay in training commencing. A more intensive induction is offered to new teachers without previous experience. As well as observing experienced teachers, they do some joint teaching before taking sole responsibility for lessons. Some part time teachers whose performance gave cause for concern are no longer employed. The staff conference in November 2006 focused on teaching and learning. The Cumbria colleges collaboration has been involved in staff development in teaching and learning. Progress with the planned teaching resource centre has been slow, and insufficient attention is given to local vocationally relevant specific strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning in some areas.
- The college observation system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning has shown some improvements in the quality of lessons. In the autumn term 2006, observers focused on teachers where lessons were no better than satisfactory in the previous year. Over 60% of these teachers had improved and delivered good lessons. In a minority of cases lessons were judged unsatisfactory, and intensive mentoring support is being provided to help those teachers develop their skills. The teacher training unit is beginning to have more influence across the college and the involvement of an experienced teacher trainer is valuable in supporting the mentors. More use is being made of DfES Standards Unit materials in some areas, with improved dissemination amongst teams. The outcomes for learners aged 16-18, however, show that weaknesses in the teaching of this group remain, especially at level 3.

What progress has been made in improving the issues relating to key skills identified in the current SAR?

- College data shows improved achievement of key skills, with the overall achievement rate rising from around 16% in 2005, to 35% in 2006. The college recognises, however, that this is still unsatisfactory and they have introduced further strategies to improve achievement rates. These include: a pilot scheme in construction where learners are grouped according to the level of key skills they are completing; an increase in the duration of key skills lessons (but no increase in the total time allocated); and more rigorous on-line monitoring of learner progress by the head of essential skills. Managers have no evidence, as yet, that these recently introduced strategies are working. Attendance at key skills sessions is monitored as a college performance indicator, and data shows that although improving, it is significantly lower than for other lessons. Managers have identified errors in registration, as a factor, but recognise that other more strategic issues need addressing if the problem is to be resolved.

What progress has been made in improving the consistency of group tutorials for full-time learners?

- Tutorials for full-time learners are now delivered by course tutors from the vocational areas. A college scheme of work shows a programme of one-to-one tutorials, group tutorials and individual progress reviews. The scheme also includes an activity matrix showing what the rest of the class will be doing whilst one-to-one meetings take place. The activity matrix includes visits by external speakers. Managers believe that the external speaker programme has worked well, but that other aspects of the activity matrix need further development. Pastoral tutors are not based in faculties, as was planned, but give learners further support when specialist skills or additional time are required. Group tutorials are not routinely observed as part of the internal observation scheme, but they are audited, and this includes some informal observation of teaching and learning. Managers plan to more closely align the tutorial programme with additional qualifications offered to full-time learners. Managers have sought learners' views on the new tutorial programme and have received positive feedback. Feedback to inspectors, however, indicates that some learners have yet to benefit from the changes.

Leadership and management

- The improvement in long course success rates shows that leadership and management are beginning to have an impact on raising achievement, especially for adult learners. However, progress is slow in many areas, and leadership and management have not been successful in improving outcomes for learners aged 16-18 rapidly enough. The building programme at the college has created difficulties and has occupied considerable amounts of senior managers' time and energy.

How are leaders and managers tackling weaknesses in achievement and standards, especially for learners aged 16-18? Is there a good understanding at all levels of the issues which led to the 2006 results, and are there robust strategies in place to overcome these? How is the leadership of weaker curriculum areas being improved?

- Monitoring of course performance failed to identify the underachievement of younger learners, especially those on level 3 courses, at an early enough stage to rectify it in 2006. Senior staff have learned from this and there is now much closer attention at management level to monitoring key performance indicators including attendance and retention. The display of relevant data by curriculum area with a 'traffic light' system showing how figures compare with targets, is helping to raise awareness. Courses identified as being at risk are investigated by heads of faculty, and monitored particularly closely.
- There is not enough rigour in appraisal and performance management systems, so that teachers and managers are not held sufficiently to account for learner retention and achievement. Senior managers recognise this, and have recently revised job descriptions to ensure that responsibilities are clear. There are also plans to improve the performance management system to provide greater accountability. More training of middle managers is now being undertaken.
- Courses for learners aged 16-18 now require learners to attend for more hours, as additional qualifications are offered for enrichment purposes. Attendance has improved and learner satisfaction is reported to be good. Various strategies to raise achievement have been put in place in different curriculum areas. Heads of faculty are supporting section heads in implementing changes to raise achievement. In leisure and tourism more rigorous tracking systems are in place. The expertise of other colleges has been sought, and changes made to the way the practical and theory elements of some courses are delivered. Personal tutoring arrangements have been modified to ensure greater involvement of course tutors. In construction some staff changes have occurred. Mentoring of new staff

has been strengthened. The subject learning coach is helping to spread ideas, particularly about theory teaching, based on Standards Unit materials. Entry criteria for the foundation construction award have been changed to ensure that learners have the necessary literacy and numeracy skills. Additional support is provided early in the course. In computing and ICT changes have been made to the delivery of the GCE AS and A level applied ICT course so that learners focus on two units at a time, and major assessments are more spread out. Workshops provide more subject support for learners. Certificates are awarded for effort and attendance and these are helping to motivate learners. Where learners present problems parents are being involved at an early stage.

How is good practice in the more successful areas of the college being shared?

- The staff conference promoted teaching and learning as central to the college's mission and ethos. It included presentations from external speakers on aspects of successful teaching and learning, and workshops which provided opportunities to share good practice, for example in the use of the Standards Unit materials. These were well received and teachers were keen to find out about new ideas which they could use or adapt for their own lessons. Teachers are now required to undertake a minimum amount of professional development each year. Very good use is being made of expertise within the college's own teacher training unit. This is encouraging the spread of good practice, through support for mentors, its own courses and additional sessions. One example is the use of learner mini-whiteboards which has been modelled by trainers and more widely disseminated via workshops. More networking is being undertaken within the Cumbria collaboration, with high performing colleges and through the subject learning coach networks. These are all helping to generate new ideas. More rigorous tracking systems are now being developed in curriculum areas, based on some of the better practice available in college. This is helping course leaders and managers to be better informed about progress towards achievement targets.

How is the work-based learning SAR produced, who is involved and how is it moderated?

- Links between faculties and the central work based learning manager are effective in producing the work based learning self-assessment report. The report production follows normal college guidelines for moderation and validation. The SAR identifies good framework achievement as a key strength in most areas where work based learning is delivered. However, the data presented in the SAR, and used to support this judgement, does not include the new measures of success, or other forms of cohort

analysis. College staff and managers need to become more familiar with, and have better access to, the new measures of success data from the LSC.