

RE-INSPECTION MONITORING OF STEPHENSON COLLEGE

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Outcome of Re-Inspection Monitoring

The overall provision in construction is now satisfactory.

The overall provision in work-based learning in construction is now good.

The overall provision in general engineering is now satisfactory.

The overall provision in work-based learning in general engineering is now good.

The overall provision in work-based learning in motor vehicle engineering is now satisfactory.

The overall provision in work-based learning in childcare is now satisfactory.

The overall provision in health and social care is now satisfactory.

The overall provision in work-based learning in care is now satisfactory.

Background

Stephenson College was inspected in May 2002. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory in all areas inspected, except in the curriculum areas of construction, general engineering and health and social care, and the work-based learning areas of construction, general engineering, motor vehicle engineering, childcare and care, all of which were found to be unsatisfactory.

Ofsted and the ALI have particular duties in relation to colleges where their inspection report indicates that individual curriculum and/or work-based learning (WBL) areas are unsatisfactory or very weak or that leadership and management are unsatisfactory or very weak. Where a college has been judged to have less than satisfactory provision in any curriculum or WBL area, or less than satisfactory leadership and management, Ofsted or the ALI will visit the college to carry out monitoring inspections of the unsatisfactory areas. As a result of the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors may judge that the curriculum or WBL areas, or leadership and management are satisfactory and that no further visits are required. Where leadership and management are satisfactory, all unsatisfactory provision will be re-inspected normally during one week.

If, after approximately 24 months, the college has not made sufficient progress to justify a judgement that the curriculum or WBL area or leadership and management are satisfactory, the original grade

for the area that continues to be unsatisfactory will remain on the college's record until the next full inspection within the cycle. Ofsted will inform the local LSC that provision remains unsatisfactory and the reasons why.

Date of the Re-Inspection Monitoring Visits

In accordance with the above procedures, re-inspection monitoring visits took place on 26/27 November 2002, 4/5 March 2003, 21/22 May 2003, and 4/5 December 2003.

Construction, including work-based learning in construction

In the May 2002 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory, with work-based learning in construction also judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates on most courses
- good teaching in most practical lessons
- good learning in the workplace
- effective links with employers.

Weaknesses

- poor retention and pass rates for work-based learners
- slow progress towards achievement in carpentry and joinery
- unsatisfactory theory teaching
- poor assessment practice in plumbing
- poor course management of NVQ level 2 plumbing.

Following the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors judged that progress had been made in addressing the above weaknesses and that overall provision in this area is now satisfactory (grade 3) and the contributory grade for work-based learning is good (grade 2).

Retention rates for foundation and advanced modern apprentices have improved significantly during the last year. Since inspection, 79% of foundation modern apprentices and 69% of advanced modern apprentices have achieved their NVQ. Framework achievement, which was 10% at inspection, has improved dramatically. Post-inspection, completion of foundation modern apprenticeships is 65% against the national floor target of 35%. For advanced modern apprenticeships, framework completion is 55% against the floor target of 35%. In carpentry and joinery, where progress was judged to be slow and framework completion was just 6%, framework completion has improved in the post-inspection period to 77%.

Effective strategies to improve the teaching of theory have been implemented. Staff development has focused strongly on raising teaching standards. Internal lesson observations provide constructive feedback which helps teachers to change and improve and leads to appropriate individual action plans. New teachers have designated mentors who work closely with them. All teachers now use schemes of work and lesson plans. Lessons, in the main, are characterised by clear objectives, good planning, and a variety of activities which cater for different abilities and learning styles. Good use is made of specialist computer software. Teachers use targeted questioning to make regular checks on learning and make good links between theory and practice, including reference to students' work experience. Most lessons observed during monitoring visits were judged to be good or better.

There is strong emphasis on the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in the classroom and in workshops. Students and teachers use ILT effectively to enhance the learning. A new computer room with an interactive whiteboard is used for maths lessons, following the necessary staff development. Students make regular use of interactive web sites for practice exercises and graph drawing and of specialist software directly relevant to their vocational studies. Learning material has started to be produced for the virtual learning environment (VLE). All teachers have been issued with laptop computers, portable colour printers and digital cameras, which are used effectively to record students' progress.

The approach to entry onto GCSE mathematics is now more discerning, with students with less than grade D taking key skills application of number at levels 1 or 2 instead. Key skills' attainment is diagnosed on entry to identify the most appropriate starting level.

The post of section head for plumbing has eventually been filled and two new plumbing teachers and three workshop supervisors have recently been appointed. There are now an adequate number of assessors in the plumbing section. Some of them have gained their TDLB D32, D33 and D43 awards and others, including newly appointed teachers, are working towards achieving the Employment National Training Organisation (ENTO) A1, A2 and V1 awards. Assessment is fair, at the appropriate level and follows awarding body requirements. However, internal verification is not sufficiently rigorous and is inconsistent across construction courses.

The strategy of creating occupationally competent trainers to deliver all aspects of work-based learning programmes has proved highly effective. They spend two days per week teaching within the college, a further two days per week in the work place, and one day per week on administration. They monitor, formally review and assess learners on-site and also work with employers to help select trainees. They provide an important contact between the college and employers. All trainers are provided with a laptop computer, printer and digital camera. This equipment is used to maintain learner records and record images of their on-site work. Each trainer is responsible for monitoring the progress of a number of learners. Learners' progress is a standing item at fortnightly SMT meetings. The performance of trainers in relation to their targets is also monitored closely. The college makes good use of management information software to monitor and track the performance

of learners.

Several employers are now active members of the 'Construction Industry Steering Committee'. They value the opportunity to have a direct impact on curriculum decisions which affect the service the college provides to them. Employers have been made much more aware of the requirements of the NVQ and the modern apprenticeship frameworks. Employers are now involved in the review process of their trainees. Work placements are generally of high quality and provide learners with opportunities to demonstrate the range of competences required.

Course management of the NVQ level 2 in plumbing is now satisfactory. There are good programme files, good course review and evaluation reports and regular, minuted team meetings. The plumbing workshop, although somewhat cramped, has been reorganised. The resource room attached to the workshop contains several PCs, printers and specialist computer software. Current students speak highly of the course and the teachers. Students receive good support in building their portfolios. Portfolios contain a good variety of evidence to meet the performance criteria for the award.

General engineering, including work-based learning in engineering

In the May 2002 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory, with work-based learning in general engineering also judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- good teaching in welding and computer-aided design
- good learning facilities.

Weaknesses

- poor achievement on most programmes
- lack of learner and employer awareness about the structure of modern apprenticeships
- delayed start to NVQ level 3 for some work-based learners
- poor management of key skills delivery
- poor target setting in work-based learner reviews.

Following the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors judged that progress had been made in addressing the above weaknesses and that overall provision in this area is now satisfactory (grade 3) and the contributory grade for work-based learning is good (grade 2).

Retention rates are now good on some courses and in line with national averages on the rest. Validated data for 2001/02 and college data for 2002/03 indicate that pass rates are also now good. The pass rate on the national certificate in engineering course is substantially above the national average. In work-based learning, both NVQ pass rates and full framework completion rates have improved significantly. Since inspection, the retention rate for advanced modern apprentices is 89%, the NVQ pass rate is 100%, and the framework completion rate is 87%. For foundation modern apprentices, the retention rate is 100%, the NVQ pass rate is 100%, and the framework completion rate is 87%. Some learners on the AMA programme are achieving their NVQ qualification well in advance of their expected completion date.

Advanced modern apprentices now start work on the NVQ level 3 as soon as level two is completed. Workplace assessment visits are frequent, generally every three weeks. Learners are also given trainers' telephone numbers and are able to contact them, whenever assessment opportunities occur. Learners confirm that this often happens and that trainers are generally able to respond. In one company visited, the training officer is also a qualified assessor and assists in identifying assessment opportunities and carrying out assessment. Review and assessment practices now provide a model of good practice.

Key skills are now emphasised as being of prime importance to completion of the modern apprenticeship. Progress is checked as part of each review, and monitored by the delivery and the management team. Key skills' development and assessment start at the same time as study for the technical certificate. Subject-based assignments have been developed which integrate the key skills effectively. Additional in-college support is provided at the end of the college day to assist with key skills and NVQ portfolio building. Pre-test lessons are provided for students who need to pass the external tests.

The range of college-based provision is narrow. The main full-time and part time day engineering provision consists of the national diploma, national certificate and NVQ level 2 in performing engineering operations. No suitable course is available for full-time students at levels 1 or 2, and part-time students only have the option of a technician course at level 3 when a craft-based course may be more appropriate to meet employer needs.

Target- setting in the work-based learner reviews observed on monitoring visits has been good. In carrying out reviews, trainers demonstrate current vocational expertise, excellent understanding of the programme requirements and good awareness of individual learners' progress at work and in college. Specific tasks, clearly promoting progress towards completion, are set and realistic target dates are agreed for their completion.

An employer induction process has been introduced by the recruitment team to increase employer awareness of the structure of work-based programmes. On recruiting a trainee, the recruiting officer provides a clear explanation of the contract, the employer obligations, the framework requirements and the proposed methods of delivery and assessment. This pre-contract visit is fully documented and the employer retains a copy listing terms and conditions applicable to the modern apprenticeship. This is followed by a visit from the vocational trainer responsible for the apprentice, to check the understanding by the employer and sign the formal contract. An employment liaison co-ordinator also makes and maintains contact through a range of awareness- raising events and questionnaires.

Motor vehicle engineering

In the May 2002 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be good, but work-based learning in motor vehicle engineering was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following

strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- good pass rates on most course
- effective use of a wide variety of teaching methods
- effective use of well-resourced workshops
- effective staff development programme.

Weaknesses

- poor achievement on modern apprenticeship programmes
- ineffective teaching of some work-based learners
- poor target setting in progress reviews for work-based learners.

Following the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors judged that progress had been made in addressing the above weaknesses and that work-based learning provision in this area is now satisfactory (grade 3).

There has been a comprehensive restructuring of how work-based learning is delivered, resulting in the development of the role of trainers who take full responsibility for caseloads of work-based learners. This has had a positive impact on the achievement of the framework by advanced modern apprentices. Six of the eight advanced modern apprentices still in learning at the time of the inspection have now achieved the full framework. Most learners expected to achieve an NVQ qualification since inspection have done so. However, framework completions by foundation modern apprentices remain low. Of the twelve learners in learning at the time of inspection, only four have achieved the full framework.

New teachers have been appointed and lessons are taught in a practical environment, with underpinning knowledge developed through well-presented, task-based learning activities. For example, in one lesson on carburettor fuel systems, students worked with interest and enthusiasm to dismantle carburettor components and investigate their operation. Following the task, they were able to speak with confidence about the function and purpose of each component.

The introduction of detailed assessment and learning plans (ALPs) has enabled progress reviews to

be carried out much more rigorously. Progress towards achievement of the NVQ is clearly mapped out in each learner's ALP, with realistic monthly targets for the achievement of NVQ units. Progress is thoroughly reviewed against the ALP and appropriate action plans are agreed to address any under performance. Workplace supervisors are present at reviews and provide appropriate support. Learners are clear about the progress they have made and what they need to do to progress further. Key skills are not included in individual learning plans and learners do not, therefore, have any interim targets for their achievement. While key skills are discussed at reviews, there is no thorough review of progress in key skills to date.

Work-based learning in childcare

In the May 2002 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be satisfactory, but work-based learning in childcare was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- extensive outreach provision
- much good teaching
- good quality learning resources
- effective links with employers.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on full-time courses
- no foundation level provision
- poor achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- ineffective teaching in some practical lessons.

Following the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors judged that progress had been made in addressing the above weaknesses and that work-based provision in this area is now satisfactory

(grade 3).

Work-based learning programmes are now supported by comprehensive documentation and robust systems. The unified role of the trainer has simplified communications, which are now effective between the key parties: the college, the employer and the learner.

Assessments and reviews are effective, with feedback addressing key issues such as health and safety and equality of opportunity. Learners receive good levels of support and encouragement from trainers, particularly when they lack confidence.

These improvements have had a clear and positive impact on achievements. Learners from previous years who were out of time were dealt with on a one-to-one basis and all but one achieved at least their NVQ. Retention rates for the current cohorts of foundation and advanced modern apprentices show improvement over previous years, and are now 81% and 64% respectively, which is close to or above the national average of 70%. Framework achievements since the inspection are above the LSC floor targets and the national averages for both foundation and advanced modern apprentices. For learners on NVQ programmes, achievement post-inspection is 100%. Levels of attainment are good, with some learners completing ahead of time.

Health and social care, including work-based learning in care

In the May 2002 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory, with work-based learning in care also judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- good progression to HE and employment
- good teaching of practical skills
- good quality learning materials.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on NVQs in care
- poor retention and achievement of work-based learners
- poor assessment practices

- inadequate internal verification
- ineffective progress reviews

Following the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors judged that progress had been made in addressing the above weaknesses and that overall provision in this area is now satisfactory (grade 3) and the contributory grade for work-based learning is satisfactory (grade 3).

Retention rates on NVQ levels 2 and 3 in care continue to be low. This is largely the residual effect of a decision several years ago to place a large group of students inappropriately on a European-funded NVQ programme. Whilst actions have been taken to ensure that all students are appropriately inducted into NVQ training through first completing an 8-week care career pathway, and there is more systematic provision of initial assessment and learning support, it is too early to judge their full impact. However, the in-year retention rates have improved on NVQ levels 2 and 3 in care compared with the same point in the previous year. Retention rates for the current cohort of work-based learners, at 85% for foundation modern apprentices and 100% for advanced modern apprentices, show significant improvement over previous years and are above the national level.

More students are now completing and achieving their qualification aim within the expected time frame. Some are achieving ahead of target. At the time of the monitoring visit, 4 out of 5 NVQ care student groups had made more than the expected progress since starting the course. Work-based learners are achieving vocationally and are gaining employment. NVQ pass rates are now high, but full framework achievement remains low. This is due primarily to the difficulty learners experience in achieving all 6 key skills and the technical certificate. The college has sought to address this problem by re-designing the delivery model. However, further work remains to be done, particularly in respect of the integration of the technical certificate. This reflects a national issue of increased care framework requirements having a detrimental impact on learners' achievements.

Significant improvements have been made to work-based learning programmes. The unified role of the trainer, together with comprehensive documentation to support all processes, has improved the effectiveness of work-based programmes for learners and employers. Targets are in place at all levels, with the college management team having a significant role in monitoring them. Learners have SMART targets that are monitored during reviews. Progress reviews and workplace assessment are now much more effective. Learners receive good levels of support and encouragement from trainers.

All students and work-based learners now have an initial assessment to identify any learning support needs. Additional learning support is delivered in various ways including: support from vocational teachers and trainers who have had basic skills awareness training; in-class support from a learning assistant; one-to-one sessions conducted by the basic skills development unit; and student-specific advice from the unit to vocational tutors. For outreach students who do not attend college, basic skills support is offered at their place of work. Some outreach students are referred to another local college for a basic skills course.

Outreach students now have a named assessor and internal verifier from the outset. Regular assessment dates are pre-determined and shared with students, both for the assessment of underpinning knowledge and for assessment by observation. Direct observation, holistic in nature, takes place at least four times during the course for students at levels 2 and 3. Feedback following assessment provides encouragement and, usually, advice on further improvement. A dedicated database enables the frequency of assessment to be monitored and automatically issues reminders to assessors if an assessment has not taken place. The number of assessors has been significantly

increased, but some of them have too heavy a case load.

The standard of the assessment documentation to support NVQ students is excellent. For each element of each unit, the NVQ standards have been translated into simple English. It is clear to students what performance criteria they must provide evidence for. This is working well and students are able to prepare themselves thoroughly for assessment, using the guidance set out on the assessment request form.

There are now nine qualified internal assessors, compared with four at the time of inspection. Assessment standards are carefully monitored. The database identifies when internal verification is required and records its completion. The new system of interim internal verification has resulted in all students getting feedback from internal verifiers on some units as the course proceeds and in assessors getting more regular feedback on the adequacy of their assessment. Internal verifiers observe experienced assessors at work once a year and those less experienced twice a year. Assessors' training needs are identified and addressed. Lead internal verifiers hold regular meetings with assessors, which are now well attended. Those unable to attend are sent minutes and all update materials. Although assessment practices and internal verification have been much improved, the frequency both of interim internal verification and of observation of assessors at work is probably not yet sufficient to provide a wholly reliable quality check.

Progress reviews are carried out once a term for students on NVQ levels 2 and 3 in care and more frequently for full-time health and social care students on first and national diploma courses. The review process is comprehensive. Achievements to date, including those through learning support, are checked and discussed. Areas of concern or for further development are identified and future targets and actions are agreed. Students know how far they have progressed and how much remains to be accomplished. Employers receive a brief summary of the review conclusions.

There will be no further monitoring visits to the college because there are no remaining unsatisfactory areas.