

RE-INSPECTION OF NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME COLLEGE

Published July 2004

Outcome of Re-Inspection

The provision of work-based learning in engineering, business, and hairdressing and beauty therapy, and in the curriculum area of basic skills: literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), is now satisfactory.

Background

Newcastle-under-Lyme College was inspected in October 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 or better in all areas inspected, except in engineering work-based learning, business work-based learning, hairdressing and beauty therapy work-based learning, and basic skills: literacy, numeracy and ESOL, 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 Visits

In accordance with the above procedures, the first re-inspection monitoring visit of engineering work-based learning, business work-based learning, hairdressing and beauty therapy work-based learning and basic skills: literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages took place on 10 and 11 June 2003 and the re-inspection took place on 24-28 May 2004.

Engineering (work-based learning)

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

Strengths

- High retention and pass rates on most college-based courses
- Excellent teaching in electronics
- High standard of electrical and electronics resources
- Effective assessment and monitoring of students' progress
- Highly productive links with employers
- Good support for individual students.

Weaknesses

- Unsatisfactory teaching of theory in level 3 courses
- Low retention and pass rates on modern apprenticeship programmes
- Poor management of work-based training.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now good and work-based training is now satisfactory.

Retention on work-based learning programmes has improved since the inspection and is now good. The retention rate on the Foundation Modern Apprenticeship (FMA) programme at the time of the re-inspection was 100%. On the Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA) programme the retention averaged 80% over the three years 2001 2004. The average student attendance rate in the lessons observed was 86%. Framework completion remains slow. Since 1998, only two students have

achieved FMA frameworks and only one has achieved the AMA framework. While there is good integration of key skills with work-based learning, students' progress towards achieving key skills is slow. However, this year, they have produced comprehensive portfolios of a good standard.

Much of the teaching is good. None of the 11 lessons observed was unsatisfactory and in nine of them teaching was good or better. The profile of grades for the lessons observed compares well with the college's profile for internal observations carried out during 2003/04.

The comprehensive system of student reviews involves employers. During the reviews, students set targets to be achieved on a monthly basis. Effective student records and progress tracking documents result in consistent student reviews. College staff match prospective trainees with companies and their vacancies.

The management of work-based learning has improved considerably since the original inspection and is now good. Two assessors were appointed in September 2003. They undertake progress reviews and assessments in the workplace. Employers state that communications with the college have improved. Employer handbooks on modern apprenticeships are clear and comprehensive. The work-based learning team meets weekly and reviews students' progress, arranges the week's programme of assessments and discusses and agrees action on retention and achievement issues.

At the time of the inspection, it was too early to judge if the improvements in retention, teaching and the management of work-based learning have had a positive impact on achievement rates. However, inspectors judge that appropriate staff, processes and procedures have improved the quality of students' work and increased the rate of framework completion.

Business (work-based learning)

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

Strengths

- High pass rates on most full-time courses

- Effective teaching

- Good support for individual students

- Good progression routes for students on vocational programmes

- Effective curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- Low retention rates on intermediate GNVQ and AVCE business courses
- Declining pass rates on the AVCE business course
- Poor achievement and low retention rates on modern apprenticeship programmes
- Poor management of work-based learning.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now good and work-based learning is now satisfactory

Retention rates on work-based learning programmes this year are good. Of the 36 students who started a modern apprenticeship since August 2003, only one has left the programme. Students now make better progress towards achievement. However, achievements to date in administration are unsatisfactory. In 2003, only 24% of modern apprentices in administration successfully achieved the full framework. A further 26% are still in learning beyond their funding period. In 2001 and 2002, achievement of administration frameworks was 45% and 46% respectively. Students are well motivated, work effectively in groups and demonstrate confidence in answering questions. Accounting modern apprentices produce work of a good standard. Attendance and punctuality are good. The average attendance rate in the lessons observed was 87%.

Teaching was good or better in 7 of the 9 lessons observed. No lessons were graded unsatisfactory. Lessons are well structured and include an appropriate range of learning activities that fully engage the students. Teachers provide good individual support for students in lessons. They are also accessible by e-mail for information and support outside college time. Teachers design activities to meet the needs of all students. They systematically check learning. Work-based learning reviews are comprehensive, well documented and generally helpful to the students. Students' progress is reviewed, issues addressed and targets set for the next review. Additional support is provided where needed and is carefully monitored to ensure that students make progress in their learning.

Management of work-based learning is good. The provision has been re-structured, including new appointments of specialist lecturer/assessors with responsibility for recruitment, reviews, workplace assessment and off-the-job learning in college. The administration post has not yet been filled. Administration work-based learning is now managed and delivered directly by the college. These actions are beginning to have a positive impact, and have led to significant improvement in retention and the progress made by current students. Although assessment arrangements in both accounting and administration work-based learning are satisfactory and meet awarding body requirements, no workplace assessments have taken place for accounting modern apprentices since September 2003, resulting in little workplace evidence in students' portfolios. A specialist workplace assessor for accounting has only recently been appointed and is not yet a qualified assessor. Work placements for foundation modern apprentices in administration are selected to ensure that they provide good opportunities for assessment in the workplace and assessors visit the workplace regularly to plan and conduct assessment. Effective tracking systems enable managers and staff to monitor students' progress closely. Employers find the information received from the college and the regular contact with assessors helpful.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy (work-based learning)

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

Strengths

- High pass rates on beauty therapy courses
- Good integration of key skills
- Effective monitoring of students' progress
- Well managed, college-based courses.

Weaknesses

- Low retention rates on hairdressing courses
- Poor retention and pass rates on the modern apprenticeship programme
- Narrow range of courses in beauty therapy
- Too few clients for students' practical work
- Poor management of work-based learning.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now satisfactory and work-based learning is now satisfactory.

In 2002/03, retention rates on the foundation modern apprenticeship (FMA) programme improved to 48% from 33% in the previous year. There is evidence of further improvement in the current year: retention rates in May were good at 85%. Achievement rates have not improved and are low,

particularly on the advanced modern apprenticeship (AMA) programme where there are only two students who have yet to complete their technical certificate.

Most teaching and learning on work-based programmes are good or better. First-year foundation modern apprentices have well developed practical skills. They work confidently and independently. Students on the second year of the FMA programme have insufficient clients for their college-based practical lessons and this has hindered their development of practical skills. Conversely, students work well in their hairdressing salons producing competent and relevant standards of commercial work. They show confidence when dealing with clients and are developing their interpersonal skills. Assessment is well planned, and there are good assessment opportunities in the work place. Students' reviews are well documented and students are set both long and short term targets which are revisited on a regular basis.

The management of work-based learning is now good. The work-based team in hairdressing meet weekly to agree the lecturer and assessor schedule for the week, progress towards targets is monitored at head of department and head of school level. The team maintains individual trainee and group tracking records. There is still a weakness in data management. The management information system tends to use different start and end dates from those held locally and this causes confusion when calculating retention and achievement rates. Quality assurance procedures include lesson observations carried out by the head of department. However, there are no observations of work-based activities to monitor the quality of assessment practice.

Basic Skills: literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages

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

Strengths

- High retention rates on separate special courses
- Good teaching of individuals and small groups.

Weaknesses

- Inadequate provision of literacy and numeracy support for full-time students
- Low take-up of learning support
- Unsatisfactory co-ordination of learning support.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now satisfactory

Students' achievements are satisfactory. Pass rates on the college's main ESOL and literacy

courses are above or at national averages. Students are making satisfactory progress in achieving the targets set in their individual learning plans. However, retention rates over the past three years on full year courses in ESOL and literacy have been falling and were significantly below national averages. The college has taken action to address this in literacy courses by changing them to short courses, and current college data indicate that this has been effective. A significant proportion of teaching is good or better. No lessons were judged unsatisfactory. The most effective lessons are planned well to meet the needs of individual students. In these lessons, there is an appropriate balance between opportunities to work individually and with others. Students develop good learning skills as well as their literacy, numeracy and language skills. In less effective lessons, teachers are too quick to help students to do their work and there is insufficient focus on skills development.

Good progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses identified in the original inspection. The results of initial and diagnostic assessments are used well to plan individual support programmes for students. The college has significantly increased the amount of additional support it offers and take-up rates are good. In 2002/03, following inspection, the college increased the number of students receiving literacy, numeracy and language support to a total of 208. In the current year, 313 students were identified through initial assessment as needing support. At the time of the inspection, 303 of these (92%) had taken up support. A range of approaches to providing learning support is now in use including in-class support in lessons on level 1 and 2 courses. Attendance at support lessons is good.

The new management structure put in place to improve communication between the different college teams is effective. In addition, learning support tutors have a more detailed knowledge of their students' main course. There is insufficient monitoring of the quality of literacy, numeracy and language support across the college. Though reports to the senior management team and governors have been introduced in the current year, they take the form of presentations on whether or not actions in the development plan have been implemented, with little reporting of their impact.

There will be no further re-inspection of the college because there are no remaining unsatisfactory areas.