

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Colchester Institute
Date of visit: 21 June 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 poor success rates on short courses:

The very low pass rates on courses operated through the college's franchise have depressed the overall success rate for short courses. When the results from the franchise are excluded from the data, the college's success rate for short courses is above the national average. The college has implemented a number of appropriate measures to remedy the situation. These are:

- A reduction in the number of courses and places available through the franchise.
- The provision of more appropriate courses in Colchester. The college now places learners who might have previously followed a franchised course onto more appropriate college courses, such as the Learn Direct programme, where success rates are high.
- Much improved initial advice and guidance at Clacton which now ensures that learners do not enrol for more courses than they are capable of succeeding in.
- The incorporation of the franchised courses into the college's quality assurance procedures. This now includes the observation of lessons.
- The formation of focus groups of learners to gain a more accurate guide to their perceptions of the franchised courses.
- Monthly meetings to monitor learner progress.

In September 2007 the franchised provision will have been significantly reduced, and will only operate from Clacton.

Quality of education and training

The use of information and learning technology (ILT) in lessons:

- The college has made good progress in improving the availability and accessibility of new technology to support teaching and learning. The stock of interactive whiteboards has increased fivefold since the previous annual assessment visit. The college has adopted a well-considered approach to the development of its virtual learning environment and is developing a platform which is very well suited to the needs of managers, teachers and learners.
- Immediately prior to the recent inspection the college had appointed two full-time IT trainers. These trainers are now providing valuable staff training in IT to groups and individuals across the college. A feature of the training is the very strong emphasis on the impact of the use of ILT to improve learning, rather than merely familiarisation with the new technology.
- Learners throughout the college report very good access to computers and inspectors saw good examples in hairdressing and beauty therapy and in construction where they were making very effective use of the new technology.
- The college is currently analysing the reports from some 320 lesson observations this year to identify courses and subjects where the increased use of ILT would be of benefit to learners.

Monitoring the take-up of enrichment activities:

- Since the inspection the college has extended its range of enrichment activities to include provision for organised sports on one afternoon each week. This new provision is being organised by the sports staff and will provide valuable additional opportunities for learners to practise healthy lifestyles. The college is considering ways in which monitoring the range and take-up of enrichment could be improved. It has introduced registers to collect information on attendance at enrichment activities but has yet to consider how this information can be best used to monitor take-up by learners.

The management of tutorial provision:

- The college has produced an appropriate action plan and made good progress in addressing this issue. It has recently introduced an improved

scheme of work for tutorials and is developing lesson plans and resource materials to accompany it. The college has also produced a calendar of tutorial activities which focuses on how the five outcomes of Every Child Matters are being met. Outside speakers are being sought to complement the delivery of the tutorial programme and to increase its credibility with learners. Already a theatre group has worked with engineering learners to investigate attitudes to bullying and harassment. The learners responded well to this approach.

Leadership and management

The promotion and reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality and diversity:

- The college has introduced a range of appropriate measures since the inspection. Teachers have identified activities that highlight equality of opportunity or celebrate diversity in their subjects. The teaching and learning observation scheme now includes a focus on the promotion of equality and diversity. The development of both a gender equality and disability equality scheme has been completed and teaching staff will shortly receive equality and diversity training. The college intends that the focus of this training will be twofold, firstly to raise awareness of the two schemes and secondly to evaluate course materials in relation to diversity.
- The college is developing more innovative approaches to promoting equality and diversity with learners. For example, in construction, a major event was organised in collaboration with the local authority and the Construction Industry Training Board to promote careers for women in construction. The event was attended by more than 200 female school pupils and enabled them to test out a range of construction trades. More than one in ten of the college's construction learners are female and the college hopes that the success of this event will increase the proportion still further. A repeat event is planned for February 2008.