

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Arden College
Date of visit: 10 May 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

How well has the target setting process been developed? Have the principles of Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) been effectively implemented, especially in Independent Living Skills (ILS)?

- The college has made significant progress in this area; RARPA is becoming well established across the college and progress is clear and specific. The setting of programme aims, assessment processes and challenging targets indicate good progress. Within independent living skills (ILS) the development of task cards and assessment sheets has further enabled staff to record achievements and monitor progress. The scrutiny of a sample of ILS portfolios indicates that they are comprehensive. An analysis of learner achievements is underway and resultant targets will be used to set whole college improvements. The ILS co-ordinator and Head of Education rigorously monitor RARPA evidence on a termly basis. Actions taken include timetables that have been reviewed to differentiate year groups, an ILS pack which includes clear monitoring of learner achievements and dedicated training for all staff has taken place.
- Time has been appropriately allocated to facilitate termly meetings between Home managers and tutors. Whilst this process is at an early stage of development and has yet to be fully embedded it is beginning to lead to improved liaison and the setting and prioritising of targets for learners in both residential and educational settings.

What strategies has the college put into place to analyse punctuality to lessons and bring about further improvements?

- Clear actions have been taken to address this weakness. These include the production of termly analysis of attendance and punctuality data which is forwarded to personal tutors who then use the outcomes to set and review targets as necessary. Scrutiny of this data indicates some improvement but this process is at an early stage of development.

Quality of education and training

How well has the management and deployment of learning support staff improved?

- The college has provided better induction and training for both tutors and learning support staff (LSA) to develop their confidence and understanding of this role and to improve the deployment of such staff. Other actions which have brought about improvements include well publicised guidelines in all teaching areas on the expectations and responsibilities of the learning support role; a booklet has also been developed with further guidance. A recent audit of LSA skills has led to LSAs being more effectively deployed and involved in teaching activities; they are now allocated according to their strengths' and interests and are able to make a more effective contribution to supporting learning. The review of support staff structure to identify areas of inconsistent practice is on-going. By the end of this term the college hopes to create a new post of responsibility for a senior classroom support assistant who will develop an induction pack and mentor staff. Plans are also in place for the senior classroom support to complete observation training.

What improvements have been made to widen the range of vocational opportunities for learners?

- Links with local FE colleges have been strengthened and a local college has demonstrated high levels of commitment to work with Arden staff to develop programmes which will meet the specific needs of the learners. There are improved opportunities for learners to access a greater range of activities; these include European Computer Driving Licence, British Sign Language, Duke of Edinburgh Awards and improved access to GCSE subjects. Another learner is accessing a classroom assistant's award at a GFE college. There has also been an increase in the number of students involved with NVQ programmes. Work with the local authority 14 – 19 strategy is also helping to develop vocational opportunities but this is at an early stage of development. Arden is part of a local bid for a pilot foundation tier.

Leadership and management

How well has the parent company addressed weaknesses in accommodation, finance and strategic oversight of Arden College?

Strategic oversight

- Strategic oversight by Craegmoor Healthcare is improved; there is increased focus on developing high quality provision. The recently appointed Divisional

Managing Director meets the Principal formally on a monthly basis to ensure that strategic developments of the college are rigorously monitored. Informal contact is frequent and this approach is supportive of staff efforts and commitment to bring about the necessary improvements. However, Craegmoor Healthcare Directors are well aware of the need for improved educational scrutiny of their colleges and so an area manager with educational expertise is to be recruited for the coming academic year.

Accommodation

- Accommodation has increased with the college is leasing premises from a local church. This has enabled activities such as drama, music, yoga, sports, Duke of Edinburgh Awards to take place in less cramped conditions. There will soon be three ICT rooms available for learners, two of which are in the residences. In addition the number of day learners has been reduced to mirror the available teaching accommodation.

Finance

- There is now a more open exchange of information. The recent Learning Skills Council (LSC) financial audit in February 2007 judged Arden to be satisfactory. A system of devolved budgets has been established for college managers, for example, head of education, IT and residential services. The college is aware of the need to develop this process further.

How well has the annual quality improvement cycle been developed and is it having a significant impact for improvement?

- Initial observations during this visit indicate that the recently introduced academic board has led to an improved service to learners across the provision. The middle management team have a clearer role in monitoring specific aspects of performance. The consequence of this devolved responsibility is that action planning processes are better embedded and more effectively monitored. Home Managers take responsibility for quality improvements in their own area. The College has a well established teaching and learning observation team that are effective in coaching and mentoring both new members of staff and those are underperforming.

How well has the college addressed the requirements of recent equalities legislation?

- The majority of staff have now received training in the Race Relations Amendment Act and SENDA. The college is aware of its responsibilities to the Disability Discrimination Act and a DES and action plan is in place and developing. A disability audit is taking place this term and the parent company

are committed to commencing building work so that the college will be fully accessible to all learners by 1 September 2007.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

none

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

The college has in place comprehensive single staff recruitment and vetting record.