

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Burnley College
Date of visit: 3 July 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

Although good, retention and success rates in level 3 programmes fell below college targets in 2005/06. Particular areas of concern identified in the self assessment report (SAR) are sport and leisure, and art and media. What strategies have been adopted to address this, and how effective have they been?

- Success rates are high with the headline rate for 2005/06 at 78% that is just below the 90th percentile. However, long level 3 courses are above national averages but still slightly below the college target of the 90th centile for all courses. The drive to achieve higher grades appears to be having success; advanced (A) and advanced subsidiary (AS) level course work has improved in some subjects and value added scores have improved on vocational programmes.
- Strategies to improve retention and success rates appear to be effective with an increase of 3% for new starts to May 2007 and significant improvements in sport and leisure. In addition to key support mechanisms for students, induction sessions are held to reinforce the college's emphasis on aspirations and achievement. All staff have been trained to challenge inappropriate behaviours. Attendance is high and poor attendance is closely followed up. Retention is high and from September resources for tutorial support will double for all students.

What actions have been taken to address the falls in timely and overall success rates in some areas of work base learning? Have they been successful?

- Work based learning overall success rates rose from 53% in 2005/06 to 65% in 2006/07. Success rates for 2006/07 currently stand at 64% with a number of learners still on target to complete this contract year. Overall advanced apprenticeship success rates declined in 2005/06 but remained above the national average.
- Timely success rates are low particularly in construction. Poor workshop facilities were addressed by the provision of a new facility; however the move caused significant disruption for learners. Timely success rates for construction apprentices fell to 5% in 2005/06 from 23 % in 2004/05 but retention has remained consistently high. The new construction unit is now fully operational with good, industry standard facilities. Full accreditation has been reinstated. Key skills are now embedded within vocational assignments and learners achieve key skills early in their programme.

Quality of education and training

What is the college doing to further improve the quality of teaching and learning?

- The percentage of unsatisfactory sessions is low at around 4%. The college performance management team are effective in identifying and addressing the issues affecting the quality of teaching and learning, considering achievement, attendance and using a supportive approach. Grades are improving and appropriate action is taken to deal with unsatisfactory grades. The college uses a range of good staff development opportunities for all teaching and support staff, including group peer observation of good practice and master classes.

How is the new joint centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) in textiles/fashion progressing- what impact has it had on provision? How are plans for WBL in arts and media progressing?

- The partnership arrangements to introduce new provision in textiles and fashion have been slow. The CoVE was re-instated in February 2007 from

its original interim status in June 2005. Consultation with local industry has resulted in the development of nine new courses planned for September 2007. There has been a positive impact in the development of the CoVE with productive links with schools and year 10 students developing assignments linked to fashion for their GCSE course work. There are plans to introduce work based learning in this area during the 2007/08 academic year.

KQ3 places importance on meeting the needs of employers, yet there is little mention in the SAR. How effective is employer engagement, and what strategies are in place to further meet the needs of employers?

- In line with national policies the college is reviewing its work with employers at a strategic level. A recently introduced employer engagement strategy document sets out to inform staff of the college's current position and key objectives and the need to link all aspects of its provision in a coherent manner which is employer focussed. Good links have already been established in many areas, for example in care with the support of the CoVE and in engineering. Specific funding has been secured for staff development to allow key staff to undertake professional development in advanced manufacturing. A priority area and goal for the college in 2007/08 is to increase engagement with employers and develop staff and systems to support this. The college is working towards an overall framework that brings together all employer engagement activities.

Key skills were a weakness in the last full inspection. Improvements were noted at the 2005 annual assessment visit. Has this improvement been maintained?

- Success rates in key skills rose in 2005/06 to around 50% and a further rise is predicted for 2006/07. Level 1 and 2 students now only take a minimum of one key skill. Key skills are embedded within the curriculum areas and supported by key skills specialists. Staff awareness and confidence in the delivery of key skills has improved with good support and training for staff. Students have access to support through a range of key skills resources. On-line testing has had a positive impact. There is good linkage to Skills for Life and the use of initial and diagnostic assessment.

Leadership and management

The college has approval for a new build. What strategies are in place to manage this?

- The college has a well structured management team for the new build that is mindful of the everyday business of the college. The project appears financially secure. There is good involvement of partners/stakeholders to ensure fitness for purpose of facilities. Staff are involved in an ongoing process of consultation and students through focus groups. The college has well developed plans to introduce new ways of working to be used in the new college. Examples being introduced in the existing premises include the use of devolved Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) to make better use of college resources including Virtual Learning Environments (VLE). The need to improve facilities for existing students has been well considered. For example, the improvement of facilities for construction and arts and a media centre to ensure good facilities for existing learners.

What impact have the planned actions to develop outcomes for Every Child Matters (ECM) had?

- ECM is now embedded as part of the SAR process with effective development plans, both at curriculum team and management levels. There are a significant number of examples of development in all 5 ECM outcomes. There are excellent examples of student involvement from strong student governor representation, to learner voice pilots. All college staff including support staff and governors (including student ambassadors) are CRB checked.

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's defined aim is to become outstanding, and to achieve success rates above the 90th percentile in all areas. The college management is focussed on developing a college culture that is aspirational and achievement orientated. Staff development activities are in place to support staff, for example excellence programmes and management development for lecturers aspiring to management roles.