

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Calderdale 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

What is the college doing to improve success rates for learners aged 16-18 particularly those on level 1 and level 3 courses?

- College wide strategies to improve success rates include projects such as "leading for learner success", a strong focus on teaching and active learning, improved use of data to enable closer monitoring of learners' progress and regular 'traffic light' meetings to identify learners at risk of underachieving. The impact of these strategies is seen in improving success rates in most areas in 2005/06.
- The college has identified that the decline in success rates for learners aged 16-18 is closely related to their low prior attainment in literacy. The college is addressing this by further embedding skills for life within vocational areas and recruiting and training high quality staff to deliver vocationally relevant key skills. Assessment and internal verification processes have been strengthened to ensure greater rigour. The impact of this strategy is notable in construction where current achievement targets are being met.
- At level 3 there has been substantial modification of the curriculum. The college is withdrawing its GCE A-level provision and concentrating on vocational options which are more suited to the needs of their students.
- College analysis has identified underachievement at level 3 amongst some minority ethnic learners. Ethnic minority students achievement grant (EMSAG) funding has been used to provide extra support for Asian heritage learners.

What actions is the college taking to address weaknesses in retention? Do college data for 2006/07 indicate improvements?

- Improvements in the provision for information advice and guidance for learners are built into a revised induction process. There is close and

frequent monitoring of student progress. Regular meetings, to identify learners at risk of withdrawing, result in prompt actions being taken. Course teams have taken effective steps to engage parents more fully in helping their son or daughter to succeed. Current in-year retention is 92% overall

What is being done to improve framework success rates in 2006/07?

- The management of work based learning (WBL) has been restructured to provide greater clarity of roles and responsibilities and better co-ordination between curriculum teams and training officers. The progress of learners is now more closely tracked and monitored regularly at team meetings. This is resulting in a higher proportion of learners completing within their planned timescale. Overall framework success rates on apprenticeships rose from a low base in 2003/04 to 58% in 2005/06. The college is on target to achieve a 65% framework success rate in the current year.

How well integrated are key skills?

- There have been significant improvements in the management of key skills. Key skills delivery has been further embedded into curriculum areas. In line with the colleges' strategy, students are encouraged to complete portfolios earlier in the year. The key skills manager closely monitors students' attendance and achievement, and takes prompt action to address any issues. The college expects key skills success rates to rise from 34% to over 50% in 2006/07.

What are the key skills success rates for WBL?

- College data indicate that key skills success rates for work based learners will be 58% in the current year.

How effective is the liaison with employers in ensuring apprentices make progress with their course?

- The college has appointed vocationally competent training officers in each area of learning. They have developed good relationships with employers and are working to raise employers' awareness of the technical certificate and key skills elements of the programme. The college now pays more attention to the range of work offered by an employer when considering their suitability to provide apprenticeships.

Quality of education and training

How does the college reconcile their judgement that teaching is good with success rates at level 1 which have declined to national average and success rates at level 3 which are below benchmark?

- The college's process for the observation of teaching and learning is robust and validated by internal and external monitoring. The current teaching and learning profile indicates 79% good or better teaching. There is a well-thought-out strategy to improve teaching and learning. Staff understand the strategy and are well-supported by a teaching and learning group comprising advanced practitioners and subject coaches. The strategy includes the development of teaching methods which take greater account of individuals learning needs and promotes greater engagement of learners in the lesson. Success rates have begun to improve, but the college recognises that further improvement depends not only on improving the quality of teaching and learning, but on other factors such as addressing the low levels of literacy and numeracy skills and changes in the curriculum to better meet the needs of learners.

How is the college progressing in developing its 14-16 programmes? What are success rates like? How many students are intending to stay on in further education beyond the age of 16?

- The college continues to develop its provision for learners aged 14-16 through active participation in Campus Calderdale; for example through the successful development of the construction academy for Valley Campus. Approximately 89% of learners aged 16 who were on college courses have applied courses at Calderdale and other local further education colleges.

What progress is being made to improve the access and use of e-learning strategies?

- Use of e-learning is progressing well, both in the classroom and through the virtual learning environment (VLE). Students appreciate the easy access to learning materials available on the VLE.

What action has been taken to address the issues of insufficient challenge for level 3 learners and missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace? These were identified as areas for improvement in hairdressing.

- The college has increased the number of training officers in this area and improved the management of the on-site assessment.

Leadership and management

How effective is the college's recruitment strategy and how well do learners progress between levels?

- The college has made a strategic decision to focus on vocational courses. Provision at entry level and level 1 has been expanded, whilst academic provision at level 3 has been significantly reduced. Initiatives to provide courses in hard-to-reach areas of the borough, such as North Halifax, have been successful in recruiting learners of all ages and widening participation.
- Average class sizes in the college have increased. There are high levels of progression to the college from 14-16 provision. Progression between levels has improved but remains low.

At the last inspection there was little use of data to target underrepresented groups or plan strategy to improve the achievement of underperforming groups. What has been done to address this weakness, and what results have been achieved?

- The accuracy and availability of data has improved. Course leaders have good access to data about learners and are using it routinely to monitor their performance.

What action has been taken to strengthen quality assurance and improvement processes, particularly course review and self assessment?

- More easily accessible data from management information systems (MIS) supports the course review process. Course review and self assessment is becoming more established; staff make better use of data and are more familiar with the use of benchmarks and standards to measure their performance. There have been improvements in the procedures for monitoring teaching and learning. Regular 'traffic light' meetings with senior management provide opportunities for middle managers to identify causes for concern and to take appropriate action. The 2005/06 self

assessment report (SAR) uses a range of evidence to support judgements. However, the college's judgement that achievement and standards are good appears generous; most success rates have improved, some markedly, and are at or around benchmark.

How is health and safety managed in construction, which was an area for improvement from the re-inspection?

- This issue was dealt with by the college Health and Safety officer immediately after the inspection.

What progress have curriculum areas made in identifying their contribution to Every Child Matters (ECM)? How does the college view its overall provision in this area?

- Good progress has been made to map ECM themes to tutorial schemes of work. Curriculum areas are gathering evidence which will contribute to the 2006/07 self assessment of ECM for the whole college.

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

- Not able to explore how effective the planned management changes have been in supporting the delivery for Train to Gain learners.

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

- Much better use of data to monitor the progress of individual students and the performance of courses and programme areas.
- Greater accountability through the clarification of roles and responsibilities at all levels.