

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Lakes College

Date of visit: 27 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 erratic success rates of learners aged 16-18

- The college has made progress in further improving retention rates which should lead to sustained improvements in success rates at levels 1 and 2 for learners aged 16-18. Overall retention rates for learners aged 16-18 at levels 1 and 2 have improved and at level 3 have been sustained. The College predicts improvements in retention rates of about 5% at levels 1 and 2 although at level 3 rates remain around 82%. If the same proportion of retained learners achieve in 2006-07 as in 2005-06 this should result in improved success rates of 4% to 73% at level 1 and of 7% at level 2. At level 3 success rates should remain at similar levels to those of 2005-06. Measures to identify and raise the success rates in particular courses where success rates were low appear to be successful. Success rates for adult learners remain high.
- The College has used a number of measures to improve the induction and support for learners aged 16-18. These include: the introduction in September 2006 of a two-week induction programme prior to the confirmation of a place designed to ensure that learners are on the right course at the correct level. Learners are interviewed before and after the induction and only then is their course place confirmed. This induction is more closely linked to vocational areas and includes practical tests and an initial assessment of the learners' basic and key skills. For example, in health and social care courses the provider has moved to a different awarding body requiring the production of a portfolio rather than an examination. Because of measures such as these learners are no longer entered for inappropriate qualifications. Tutorials focus more on progress and achievement and better use is made of learning support workers.

- Key skills success rates are continuing to improve for 19+ learners and learners aged 16-18 but they are still too low in some key skills and at some levels. Overall, key skills success rates improved in 2005-06. They are predicted to remain at the improved level for 2006-07. They are predicted to decline slightly at level 1, to rise by 5% at level 2 and by 8% at level 3 to a low overall rate of 24%. For learners aged 16-18 predicted success rates have improved by more than 5% in application of number (AON) level 2 and in Communications at level 3 but these rates are still low. For 19+ there are predicted improvements of 18% in AON at Level 2 and 9% at Communications at Level 2.
- A number of measures are in place to improve the profile of key skills. Two additional key skills practitioners have been appointed to act as mentors for vocational tutors. Specialist staff work alongside vocational teachers to support the integration of key skills into vocational courses. Subject teachers now take responsibility for key skills in their vocational area. The initial diagnosis of key skills needs during induction is more rigorous to ensure that learners are entered on the correct level of Key skills. All staff take on-line key skills tests in maths and English to improve their familiarity with key skills requirements and the college maintains a database of the key skills qualifications of staff. There are improved links between skills for life teachers and vocational course managers

Low success rates on short courses.

- The College has sustained improvements in short course qualifications but they are still low for 16-18 learners. It has reviewed the range of additional qualifications taken by full time learners. Students now only take additional qualifications that are relevant to their main programme. Predicted results for learners aged 16-18 show a small increase from 51% to 55% which is still well below the national rate of 69% for 2005-06. The predicted rate for 19+ learners is 88%, compared with 87% for 2005-06, which remains well above the national rate of 76% for 2005-06.

Quality of education and training

Insufficient challenge in teaching for some learners and insufficient use of information learning technology (ILT)

- There continues to be a strong focus on improving teaching and learning, with more detailed analysis of the overall grade profile and its significance for individual teachers and within curriculum teams. Subject learning coaches are being extended to all curriculum areas. Teaching and learning leaders work individually with tutors to develop good practice and innovative teaching methods. There is a wider range of opportunities for sharing good practice at curriculum level and across the college. The number of qualified teachers has continued to increase to 94% of full time and 88% of part-time teachers. The grade profile for teaching and learning has continued to improve with 15% of teaching now being graded as outstanding, 56% good 28% satisfactory and 1% inadequate.
- Since the previous inspection good progress has been made in developing the wider use of ILT particularly in areas such as construction and hairdressing. Tutors have received training and support in the use of the available equipment. A number of teaching rooms are better equipped with interactive whiteboards and technology to support learning. Additional support staff have been appointed to work closely with tutors on increasing their skills to ensure that more interactive teaching materials are developed.

The effective use of individual learning plans (ILPs) and individual targets

- Further staff development has taken place to improve the setting and use of targets for learners. Short term targets have been introduced for learners and are being used in some areas. Targets used to record learners' progress and achievement are reviewed and up dated on a weekly basis. A new electronic ILP has been piloted and will be introduced by the start of the new college year. The information from ILPs is now better shared by all tutors involved with different aspects and stages of the student's learning. Currently, priority is given to linking targets within the ILP to lesson content to enable teachers to plan effectively for the needs of individual learners.

The management of work based learning

- The college has made good progress in sustaining and further developing its good work based learning provision. Learner numbers have increased and are currently 171. Overall success rates in 2005/06 are around 55%, an increase from 33% in 2004/05. Success rates have improved in engineering and administration where they were low at the last inspection. There is expanded provision in engineering and construction.
- Employers are able to get access to training that suits the needs of both learners and employers. Train to Gain (TTG) provision has been developed recently and there are now 152 learners. Good partnership arrangements are in place with other colleges and private providers that enable TTG learners to be referred to the most appropriate provider. The college has a good knowledge of local employment needs and engages actively with many employers.
- The college has recognised the need to develop better support for learners unable to complete their qualifications in the predicted timescale. The plans include the use of more frequent progress reviews and more measurable short-term targets to address this.

Leadership and management

Consistency in the rigour of quality assurance

- The college has made some progress in increasing the consistent use of measures to improve the quality of provision. There are particularly effective arrangements to assure the quality of teaching and learning. Appropriate action is in place to strengthen quality assurance procedures to address aspects judged to be inconsistent at the last inspection. Management information is well used to monitor learner progress and achievement at all levels. Strategies to improve success rates for learners aged 16-18 appear to be successful at levels 1 and 2. The improved success rates at level 3 have been maintained. Measures to assure the quality of teaching and learning are good and have led to a gradual improvement in the college's graded profile for teaching and learning. Moderation practice is thorough and there is an appropriate emphasis on factors contributing to effective learning. The process of paired observations with other colleges has been further developed. The team of observers is well trained. There is more team teaching and a better

sharing of practice. There is an increase in the productive use of ILT to enrich the learner experience. Observers have concentrated their observations on areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The measures to improve key skills delivery and success rates are starting to have some effect. Through changes in the management structure the college has started to improve provision in literacy and numeracy and hospitality, leisure and tourism.

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 restructuring

- Teachers and managers are clearer about their roles and responsibilities and there is a sharper distinction between strategic and operational practice and decision making.

The College's external relations

- The College has reviewed its mission and established a focus for its activities that responds well to local, regional and national priorities and changes in funding. There are particularly effective links with local large employers, the confederation of local colleges and organisations involved in the development of Cumbria University.

The narrow range of provision in Hospitality, Leisure and travel

- The range of provision has improved with the introduction of level 1 courses in sport and leisure, a level 2 course in travel and tourism, a pre-NVQ catering course. A level 4 foundation degree is being developed.