ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Liverpool Community 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

Has the college maintained the previously recorded good and outstanding levels of achievement? What strategies have been developed to maintain or further develop learner success rates and improve those areas under-performing?

- The college has maintained its previous levels of learner achievement and used effective strategies to improve retention across the whole provision, thereby also addressing the identified under-performing curriculum areas.

- Achievement and standards were graded as good in the most recent SAR. This also identified the key focus of future college development on improving retention rates. Many and various strategies have been developed to improve attendance, punctuality and retention and are reported in more detail later in this report. The college recognises that the main challenge in improving success rates is to raise the levels of retention of learners, particularly those aged 16-18. Long qualifications for 16-18 and 19+ learners, with the exception of long level X for 19+, improved in 2005-06 by 2 per cent.

- The success rates of learners aged 16-18 on L3 long qualifications, a particular area of focus, improved by 3 per cent (retention 2 per cent and achievement 3 per cent) in 2005-06. The non-validated data for 2006-7 indicates a stable picture for retention on level 1 and 2 programmes and improving by 4 per cent at level 3, leading to an overall improvement of 2 per cent.

- The latest attendance report indicates 81 per cent attendance which is 1 per cent over target and a 3 per cent improvement on last year.

Individual curriculum areas that have been specifically targeted for actions are at or are exceeding last year's performance.

What actions have been taken to improve the success rates on work-based learning programmes? How successful have these been?

- A number of initiatives have been introduced to improve success rates in work-based learning. The communication processes and sharing of best practice are now more effective. An increased number of assessors and reviewers provide effective support to work-based learners in their workplace. Liaison between tutors and assessors has been improved, and staff training has taken place across the college to raise awareness and understanding of work-based learning. Induction arrangements have been improved and assessments and reviews are now more focused.

- Employer involvement has been emphasised and a new management information system has been purchased to better monitor performance. Combined, these factors are having a positive impact on success rates. The trend is one of improving success rates year on year, and the latest predicted figures indicate overall success rates at around 70% across all curriculum areas for 2006-07.

- The management information system is not yet fully established and used to generate meaningful reports. Not all staff are well informed and know how to use the Provider Performance Report data, and work-based learning is not yet fully co-ordinated across the college.

Quality of education and training

What are the outcomes of the last year's observation of teaching? What actions are being taken to raise the quality of all teaching?

- A rigorous system is in place to improve teaching and learning across the college. The profile of grades is continually improving. A strategy targeting specific categories has been introduced to further develop the observations of teaching and learning. For example, underperforming courses, new staff, part-time staff and those staff previously observed and graded 3 or 4 receive greater focus. Effective use is made of advanced lecturers to not only raise the profile of teaching and learning,

but also to support other teaching staff. A database of staff teaching and learning skills has been produced. This enables the appropriate use of these skills for mentoring purposes and sharing good practice.

- There are good links between teaching and support staff to enhance learning. Group learning assistants (GLA's) are used effectively to support teaching staff to manage behaviour in the classroom. An evaluation is currently being undertaken to establish the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) on teaching and learning. A much greater proportion of teaching staff have recognised qualified teacher status. Three years ago the number of staff without a teaching qualification was 200; this has been reduced to seven. The use of peer reviews and internal inspections, incorporating joint observations and standardisation events, has also helped to raise the quality of teaching across the college.

What strategy has been developed to improve the retention of 16-18 year old learners and the punctuality and attendance in identified curriculum areas? What impact has this had?

- Good use is made of a number of strategies to improve retention, punctuality and attendance of 16-18 year old students

- The college places an increased focus on guidance and support in the self-assessment process. A retention and achievement strategy is reviewed annually. A system of rewards and incentives for learners is effective and complements educational maintenance awards (EMA) payment systems. Good use is made of accurate college information system (CIS) data.

- Some innovative developments include the implementation of a swipe card process. This is being rolled out in all centres by September 2007. The software for this has been developed in-house by CIS. Swipe card access to main sites and individual classrooms enable electronic tracking of both attendance and learner punctuality. This enables tutors to deal with punctuality issues more effectively. Tutors can still update and correct electronic records manually while on-line.

- Internal college inspections focus across the whole college on 'at risk' areas with an increased attention to attendance, retention and

achievement. A more methodical and objective approach is taken to review these areas. Specific groups of 'at risk' learners have been identified, for example from local authority care, young mums and learners enrolled who could be 'at risk' because of histories of poor attendance. Good use is made of a breakfast club to impact on both every child matters (ECM) criteria regarding health and well-being and to improve attendance and punctuality.

- The college maintains good links with Connexions Services which has personal advisors on site. Good use is made of tutorial support officers to follow up on poor attendance. Staff have been trained by the college counsellor team in a 'Solution Focus' system to challenge lateness. This is effective in challenging the prevailing culture of some learners. Development of the Entry to Employment (E2E) and other Level 1 and Entry programmes into a College First programme, consisting of a core element of Skills for Life and vocational content is designed to improve these basic skills and raise learner aspirations. Increased analysis of initial assessment scripts are used to identify support needs and the appropriate course level. The college has recently achieved 'Dyslexia Friendly' status from the British Dyslexia Association and the process has had a positive impact on teaching and learning styles by raising the levels of staff awareness.

How does the college identify and measure the impact of increased use of information and learning technology (ILT)?

- Systems to identify, analyse and measure the impact of increased use of ILT are not yet fully developed but much activity is taking place in the area to improve the use of ILT to support teaching and learning. The college has also migrated to a MOODLE virtual learning environment (VLE) and all new build environments have much improved ILT capabilities. Quality assurance systems and professional development (CPD) are better co-ordinated resulting in the development of a staff member portfolio which provides useful evidence of actions to address CPD needs.

- An audit of staff skills identified information technology basic use development needs and these have been addressed by providing staff with training such as European computer driving license (ECDL) and computer literacy and information technology CLAIT programmes. Increased use of advanced lecturers has resulted in a greater focus on

the sharing of best practice in planning and using ILT in lessons. The college requires schemes of work and session plans to explicitly record ILT potential use. Growing use is made of materials stored on the college intranet.

How effective is employer engagement in identifying and developing programmes to meet local needs better?

- Effective actions have been initiated over the past year to raise the college's level of responsiveness to employers. The Business Centre is taking a more holistic approach, and liaising effectively with the faculty contacts. Additional business centre staff have been appointed to generate increased business and enhance employer engagement. Partnership working with employers is proactive and evident through the Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) developments, foundation degrees and the delivery of Train 2 Gain and Skill Works contracts. Customised training for small businesses and other organisations have also been developed.

- Several curriculum changes have been introduced to meet the needs of employers. In health and social care, additional assessors have been recruited who are professionally current and experienced, to support learners in the workplace. An employers' website has been developed, and software has been purchased as a tool to better manage employers and clients. The Business Centre is gradually building its credibility and brand image, and working hard to secure accreditation for the New Standard in relation to the CoVEs.

Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to improve efficiencies in course costs? Have these reduced staff costs? Has value for money improved as a result?

- Course costings exercises using 'Forecast' software have been effective in comparing potential income against course costs. Two break even points have been identified to measure teacher costs and all costs. Reports are produced illustrating these measures and are regularly tabled at a range of staff meetings. Individual targets are set for heads of departments.

Staff utilisation procedures are being used to raise the average contact hours of staff from 730 to 780 per annum. Actual contract target is for 832 contact hours. Course reviews now place greater emphasis on allocation of teaching time and explore the rationale for allocating more or less hours to courses.

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

- The college has played an active role and involvement in a local self regulation cluster group with three other local colleges.

- The ALP's report is used alongside ALIS to monitor the value added performance of learners. The AS and A2 overall report places the college 54th out of 160 colleges and schools in the NW region.