

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Nelson and Colne
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

Has the college maintained, or further increased, student success rates at levels 2 and 3 during 2006?

- College data show improvement in success rates for all long qualifications at levels 2 and 3 in 2005/06. Success rates for all learners at these levels remain above national averages for similar colleges. Improvements in success rates for learners aged 16-18 places the college in the top 10 per cent nationally. The college is confident that success rates for all learners will be higher again in 2006/07. Changes to management structures, including the introduction of heads of study for adult learners, learners aged 16-18 on level 3 courses, and learners aged 14-18 on level 1 and 2 courses, have provided a clearer focus on monitoring and improving student performance.

Have the improvements in retention rates at levels 2 and 3 for 2005/06 been maintained during 2006/07?

- In 2005/06 long course retention rates for all learners remained above the national averages for similar colleges. Retention rates at levels 2 and 3 show year on year improvement between 2004/5 and 2006/07. College data indicate continued improvement in retention for all long qualifications except for adults on level 1 courses which remains at the 2005/06 rate of 85 per cent. Current retention data on level 2 courses show a significant increase for all learners. The retention rate for learners aged 16-18 in 2005/06 places the college in the top 10% of colleges nationally. Retention rates are monitored rigorously throughout the year with monthly reports to senior and middle management.

The 2006 self assessment report identifies declining level 1 success rates as an area for improvement. What actions have been taken to address these and is there any evidence of impact?

- Whilst remaining above national averages for similar colleges success rates for learners aged 16-18 decreased between 2004/05 and 2005/06. The college has developed appropriate strategies to tackle this issue. For example, there are actions designed to improve student motivation and behaviour and to raise their aspirations. The support available through individual tutors, support workers, and peer support has been strengthened. Whilst it is too early to judge the impact of the improvement strategies on success rates for 2006/07, college data for 2006/07 indicate an increase in retention rates. Data indicate that there were significant improvements in success rates for adults on level 1 courses in 2005/06 which were above national averages for similar colleges.

Has work based learning continued to show an improving trend in the rate of framework achievement?

- The college has implemented a range of appropriate actions to further improve framework achievement on work based learning apprenticeships. The business unit has been restructured providing greater integration within college. The processes for monitoring the progress of learners and identifying apprentices at risk of leaving or not successfully completing have been strengthened. Apprentices have benefited from the increased availability of additional support workshops. Issues with key skills completion have been addressed through integration of key skills with other aspects of the framework and the introduction of on line testing. Apprenticeships are promoted more effectively to school leavers. Initial assessment to ensure suitability for the apprenticeship programme has been further developed. College data for 2006/07 to date show a continued improvement in framework achievement and conservative predictions indicate a significant improvement on overall and timely achievement by the end of the academic year.

In the Ofsted subject survey in October 2006 an area for improvement was to “further develop the use of value added analysis to highlight aspects of student achievement relative to previous attainment”. Has further development taken place?

- The college has changed to using the A-level Performance System (ALPS) system for measuring value added. In 2006 at GCE AS level the college performance was rated as outstanding and for GCE A level it was rated as excellent. Over 80 per cent of GCE A level subjects had scores above the ALPS benchmark. The college has clear, frequently monitored, action plans for subjects falling below the benchmarks.

Quality of education and training

The 2005 inspection report and 2006 self assessment report identify much good and very good teaching as a key strength. Analysis of lesson observations in the 2006 SAR, however, show a decline in the percentage of good or better lessons in some subject sector areas between 2004/05 and 2005/06. How has this been addressed and do the results for 2006/07 show improvement?

- The college has used a range of initiatives to support improvements in teaching and learning and overall the percentage of good or better lessons has increased from 2005/06 to 2006/07. Most of the areas where there was a decline from 2004/05 to 2005/06 have improved in 2006/07, some markedly so. However in two areas the proportion of good or better lessons has decreased with an increase in the proportion of satisfactory lessons. The college has implemented support strategies to address the issues and these are beginning to have an impact. These strategies will be continued next year to allow for the full benefit to be felt.

Have the Every Child Matters (ECM) areas for improvement identified in the 2006 self assessment report been addressed and is there evidence of impact of actions taken?

- Staff have undertaken further analysis and research on the ECM themes. The tutorial programme has been adapted and developed so that each

ECM theme is covered during a dedicated session. In relation to health issues a recent survey of learners showed that they have a good understanding of a healthy diet. The uptake of different food options in the canteen is being monitored to look at future impact of healthy eating initiatives. There are numerous strategies in place to support learners in giving up smoking, including those targeted at specific groups. In relation to safety the college has recently achieved the Silver Award from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA). The further development of risk assessment procedures, particularly for trips and visits, has helped staff to formally sign post needs of individuals and make sure these are met. Staff have received training on supporting learners in developing their financial literacy and this will be part of the tutorial programme for next year.

Has the strategic priority for teaching staff to have benefited from at least 10 hours of staff development on teaching and learning including one to one training on information technology (IT) been achieved? Is there evidence of impact?

- Staff development has a very high priority in the college and staff greatly appreciate the opportunities they have for development and the sharing of good practice. IT training has been put in place for teaching and support staff, with both general and bespoke training available to make sure all needs are met. The impact of the IT training is measured by looking at information learning technology (ILT) use in lessons, schemes of work and learners' perceptions of its use and benefits. All measures show positive feedback with an increasing proportion of good or better lessons using ILT effectively and learners feeling the use of ILT improves their learning experience.

Leadership and management

Do college leaders have a clear view on how they will maintain the outstanding grade for leadership and management?

- Leaders and managers at all levels are committed to maintaining an outstanding college. Quality assurance activities are rigorous and clearly

focussed on improving student experience and outcomes. Staff feel there is a strong focus on teaching and learning, with individuals at all levels analysing the situation and then working together to develop strategies to improve. There is very good training for managers and staff, which supports them in performing successfully, including training on analysing and using data. All staff are involved in planning for the future, such as the development of the new building and the role out of ILT equipment. There is a positive ethos within the college, an open door policy and high expectations of staff and learners. This supports all staff in performing effectively and supporting learners in achieving good results.

In the 2005 inspection report links with industry were an area for improvement. How effectively is the college responding to increasing employer engagement?

- Employer engagement has a high profile in the college with an Employer and Skills committee set up by the board of corporation and a detailed Skills strategy for 2007-2010. The strengths seen in the last annual assessment visit have been further developed with a well thought out restructure taking place in October 2006. The key priorities of the area are to ensure an expansion in the growth and participation of provision and to make sure learners in the area access a quality product and achieve success. A database has been developed which covers all employer engagement activities and is being used successfully to expand provision, for example in the placement of apprentices for 2007/8. Across the college there are numerous examples of successful links with employers: learners on drama courses put on a production for the National Health Service; information communication and technology (ICT) learners can go on work placements which lead to level 3 apprenticeships.

The 2006 self assessment report identifies the need to sustain the colleges' financial recovery and improved financial performance as an area for improvement. Has this been achieved?

- The college successfully achieved its target for student numbers and funding for 2006/07 and has negotiated a further increase for 2007/08 based on internal and external growth. An operating surplus of 7 per cent was achieved in 2005/06 with a similar prediction for 2006/07.



Between 2004/05 and 2006/07 key financial indicators have shown year on year improvement. Costs have continued to be closely monitored with staffing costs maintained within strategic targets. In March 2006 the college was returned to financial category B.