

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: New College Durham
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 retention rate for students aged 16- 18 at level 3 improved?
Have the level 2 pass rates for students aged 16 – 18 improved?
Have the high success rates for adult learners been sustained?
Have the improvements in work based learning achievements been sustained?

- Retention for students aged 16-18 on level 3 courses have improved. In 2003/04 the retention rate was 75%. This increased to 77% the following year and for 2005/06 the rate is 86%.
- Level 2 pass rates for students aged 16-18 were 78% in 2003/04. However in 2004/05 they dropped to 70%. In 2005/06 retention for this group rose again and is above the national average.
- High success rates for adult learners have been sustained. The rate has improved from 79% in 2003/04, to 82% for 2004/05 and 84% for 2005/06 although the number of starts fell from 12,198 to 9241 in the last two years as predicted.
- Overall success in 2004/05 for advanced apprentices was 30% increased to 56% in 2005/06. For apprentices, the overall success was 43% in 2004/05 and increased to 48% in 2005/06.
- For 2006/07 the current success for advanced apprentices is 42% and for apprentices 51% with a predicted figure of 68% and 71% respectively by the year end in July 2007. Portfolio evidence confirms that good progress is being made by current students. This represents a continuing improvement in overall success rates.

Quality of education and training

To what extent is recent work on new learning resources addressing the full range of students' needs and programme requirements and what impact have they had?

- Accommodation and resources were a significant strength at the last inspection and remain so. Planning is effective. For example, additional accommodation in construction has been developed to meet estimated needs and resources provide a real work environment. There is good sharing of resources on the intranet between curriculum areas optimising the resources available to tutors and learners.
- Planning to increase the use and effectiveness of electronic learning has been effective. A team of e-learning staff have provided support and intensive training for colleagues. The use of intranet curriculum sites and discussion boards has increased. Tutors leave notes and points of interest for learners on the intranet. Students value this resource and it both in and out of college for independent study. There is good management and monitoring of the information learning technology (ILT) initiative with monthly reports on progress in developing resources and extending the skills of staff. Usage is also carefully monitored and measured.

Have the recent improvements to the provision of literacy and numeracy support for students been maintained since the last annual assessment visit?

- Many of the initiatives introduced prior to the last AAV visit are now well established and effective. Well considered intervention strategies identify and support learners needing literacy or numeracy support. These include self declaration, formal assessment and specialist testing. The number of learners identified as needing support increased from 275 in 2004/05 to 408 in 2006/07, of which 81% have attended additional support sessions.
- Key skills achievement rates have improved from 66% in 2004/05 to 84% in 2005/06. The progress of learners not attending additional support is monitored effectively within curriculum areas. Additional specialist tutors have been recruited and staff are supported through extensive staff development. Approximately 78% of staff have either literacy or numeracy level 2 equivalent qualifications meeting college targets. Learners wanting to join the college in September 2007 who

have not yet achieved the levels of literacy and numeracy required for their planned programmes are already attending the college for literacy and numeracy support. These support sessions will continue throughout the summer.

How well are the partnerships that the college is forming helping students to progress into further study or employment?

- Good links with local employers and regional higher education establishments provide learners with wide progression choices either within the college, on foundation degrees, or at local and regional universities. The college has well established collaborative programmes with thirteen schools, two of which are special schools. Effective measures are in place to ease the transition from school to college for all students. Students with disabilities are well supported and are able to attend the college instead of travelling out of the area.
- Employer forums are active in curriculum areas and a good range of placement opportunities are available. The college is working to capture all employer placement details on a central database to enable all curriculum areas to share employer placements where appropriate.
- In collaboration with local schools the college has good programmes to engage students who are at risk of leaving education or training. Approximately 85% of this group have progressed into education or employment and of these, 40% have enrolled at New College Durham.
- The business development unit has successfully engaged employers in identifying their training needs and providing training for their workforce as part of the Train to Gain programme. To further develop this work, designated staff in curriculum areas are receiving training in business skills. This was identified as an improvement objective in the 2005/06 self assessment improvement plans but is not yet fully implemented.

Leadership and management

Every Child Matters (ECM): What is the college doing to ensure that the five outcomes for children and young people are being met?

- The college has made good and wide ranging plans at strategic and curriculum level to ensure that the outcomes for children and young people are met. Extensive mapping of the five outcomes has taken place. Central activities take place with displays and exhibitions in the main college mall. Student surveys are audited and action plans compiled and acted upon. For example, staff have produced and share cross referenced lesson plans for tutorials. Students on sports and recreation programmes can work with catering students to learn about cooking healthy food. Activities are planned around themes and some are better developed than others. For example, 'being healthy' and 'staying safe' are well developed and the college has good links with outside agencies such as the local police. Students produce their own work around ECM themes as part of course work.

How effective is the college in monitoring and improving curriculum areas that were satisfactory at the last inspection? What impact have measures taken had?

- Measures to address areas for improvement have been effective in all the curriculum areas that were graded satisfactory at the last inspection. The college has effective and overarching quality improvement processes and procedures which are timely, regular and inclusive of all levels of staff. Monitoring at operational level is highly effective and interventions are well planned. All staff have access to and use data well at the appropriate level. New strategies have been implemented with good effect. In work-based learning for example, this has included reorganised management responsibilities, improved tracking, clearer target setting, more observations and monitoring of processes involving learners, improvements in the quality of student reviews, more employer involvement and new, improved admission and interview procedures. There are improvements in overall retention and success rates in workbased learning as mentioned in KQ1.

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