

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Myerscough 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

Achievements and standards were satisfactory at the inspection last October. What evidence does the college have that they have improved, particularly level 3 retention in 2006/07?

- The college's revised retention strategy has been implemented across all courses and is closely monitored by managers. Attendance is monitored more closely and improved by 3% in 2006/07. Students who are at risk of leaving the college are given extra support. A new head of student support has improved the liaison and work between pastoral and academic staff in supporting students. Curriculum staff have reviewed the entry requirements and courses offered in each area to better meet the needs of students. In most cases this has involved restructuring the delivery of diploma and certificate qualifications as well as implementing a range of alternative additional qualifications to meet the needs of the industry.
- College data for 2006/07 show a further increase in retention rates across all levels. Retention on level 1 and level 2 courses is now above the national average and are over 90% for both adults and students aged 16 to 18. On level 3 courses retention for adult students improved to 90% in 2006/07 and increased by 9% to 79% for students aged 16 to 18, which is still below the national average. Managers monitor students' performance in module results and college data indicate a good improvement in pass rates and the proportion of higher grades. Success rates of students who receive additional support are above the college average and retention is significantly better.

Have the good achievements in work-based learning (WBL) provision been maintained or improved?

- There is good improvement in success rates from 30% in 2004/05 to 54% in 2005/06 and college data indicates a further expected improvement in the current year. Timely completion though improved, is still poor at 19%. The E2E programme is new and as yet not operational. Train to Gain recruitment is on target for this year. In previous years the Employer Training Pilot (ETP) project achieved satisfactory results, with 72% in 2004/05 and 71% in 2005/06.

Quality of education and training

What strategies have been used by the college to further improve the quality of teaching and learning?

- A new staff development coordinator was appointed in March 2007 and recent events have been strongly focussed on improving teaching and learning. A range of training sessions including covering the use of ILT and classroom management have been held, with over 70% attendance. The internal observation process is more robust, covering almost all teachers and including some external moderation of grades. The college's profile, showing 78% of theory lessons judged to be good or better, indicates an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. A good range of on-line learning materials is available to supplement teaching and learning. The outcomes from lesson observations inform individual staff appraisals. However, there is insufficient linkage between the outcomes from observations, the self assessment report and the quality improvement plan. A teaching and learning committee has been established to disseminate good practice across the college.

How has the college improved the structure and quality of its tutorial provision, particularly the use of students' targets?

- Support provided by the tutorial system is satisfactory. In many cases the students' targets are insufficiently specific or measurable. Action planning paperwork is often used to record behavioural issues with insufficient specific actions for improvement. The information on learning styles is not collated or used to inform teaching. The process in WBL is better

with more specific targets being recorded, although some records are not dated.

How have the college improved the use of initial assessments across the college?

- The initial assessment process covers all full-time students. Quality procedures are in place to ensure timely assessment. Students are guided into either skills for life support or key skills support. Some part-time students, including the Train to Gain students have insufficient initial assessment to allow for timely support to be provided. The skills for life strategy has not been up-dated since November 2004. Data are insufficiently used to assess whether all students are taking up support and to evaluate its effectiveness.

What improvements have the college made to the careers advice and guidance for students?

- Guidance and student support services have been re-organised to allow for clearer access to advice and guidance. Communications have improved between careers staff and personal tutors. Good support is given to students applying to higher education. Improvements have been made to the library areas with a dedicated careers advice section now in place, with appropriate resources and a vacancy board. Links with Connexions are strong. Good use is made of the college's strong employer links and once a month Saturday morning open events are held.

The 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) outcome "being healthy" was judged unsatisfactory – how has this improved?

- A more coherent coverage of the ECM outcomes is planned from September 2007 with the introduction of a revised group tutorial programme. The college has made good progress in improving provision to promote the outcome "being healthy".
- All catering staff have completed additional training and are keen to develop better, more nutritional menus. Students' feedback is actively used to develop ideas for the restaurants. While vending machines still stock unhealthy options, when the contract expires the college intends to

bring in more healthy options. Services to support students across the college have been re-organised and are much easier to access. Good work is done by both the nurse and the chaplains through the tutorial system to ensure students' awareness of both physical and mental health issues. The college now has a clear no smoking policy and smoking cessation sessions are held by the nurse both in tutorials and in awareness-raising displays. While many changes have been made the college is still in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of pastoral support.

Leadership and management

How has the college further improved its self assessment and quality assurance procedures?

- During the visit staff at all levels commented on the college's change in strategy, driven by the new Principal, to place improving quality and standards as its key priority. A new Quality Director was appointed September 2006 and a revised schedule of quality assurance activities is clearly planned and communicated. The implementation is well supported by a series of staff development events. Staff feel involved in the process and early implementation of this new coordinated quality assurance approach but it is too early to judge the impact. Action plans are more focussed and more frequently monitored with a clear emphasis on the impact of the activities undertaken. However, some aspects of the self assessment report are too descriptive and key aspects are not always followed through to the quality improvement plan. In addition, course reviews have been carried out on under-performing courses to consider how they can improve quickly or whether they should continue to be offered by the college.

Do college managers make better use of MIS data to self assess and make management decisions?

- A new data system has been introduced, trials have been carried out in the summer term and the on-line system will be available to all staff from September 2007. The data are analysed regularly using a range of key performance indicators, these are compared to the targets set across the college at different levels and a traffic light system is used to identify

underperforming areas. The system is very user friendly and staff at all levels have access to the data. Senior managers recognise that if the new system is to be effective in supporting management decisions and monitoring of performance then an effective and realistic target setting process is a critical element.

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

- In WBL some good changes have been made to the curriculum to embed key skills into the overall programme rather than leaving key skills until the end, although in WBL there is over-reliance on the use of workbooks in teaching key skills. Some good on-line learning materials are available to supplement teaching and learning. The on-line system for tracking and monitoring of learner progress in WBL is good. All assessors have remote access to the system so can keep progress records up to date easily. Managers make good use of the system to identify issues of concern and take appropriate actions. Good use is made of a traffic light system to identify students at risk of not achieving.