

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: ESPA
 Date of visit: 20 September 2007

Context

ESPA College is part of European Services for People with Autism (ESPA). It provides day and/or residential education for 96 LSC funded learners, the majority of whom have an autistic spectrum disorder. Learners come from within the region and nationally. Many learners attend courses at general FE colleges. Currently 60% of the learners attend on a day basis.

Achievement and standards

What progress has taken place since the last AAV to improve the learners' outcomes?	Significant progress
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Accredited programmes have shown consistently high achievement rates in recent years. Fourteen out of 18 learners who left ESPA in summer 2007 took up places in general FE colleges; another gained a place at Liverpool University. Learners continue to achieve well on a range of national awards. The range of these awards has been appropriately reviewed since the last AAV. Achievements in the area of accredited and non-accredited learning are well monitored through the quality manager. Overall, a combined pass rate of 86% for 2006/07 for both national awards and non accredited learning represents a significant improvement over time. Learners' files/reviews indicate improvements in social skills in the college, the residences and in the community. Of note is the overall reduction in individual behavioural incidents. Increased opportunities have been created for learners to contribute and take further control of their own learning.

Quality of provision

How well has the college reduced the complexity and increased the coherence of assessment and monitoring procedures?	Reasonable progress
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Assessment processes have been audited and rigorously reviewed since January 2007. Systems are more streamlined and consistent approaches have been adopted throughout the college sites. Recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning (RARPA) is being well developed and, although many developments are recent, initial indications are that the processes are becoming well embedded.

All learners now have a ROAD file (Record of Achievement & Development) which clearly identifies progress and a range of achievements, and is intended to capture distance travelled. Individual student profiling, using a range of multi-media methods, is a recent addition to the RARPA processes and is valued by the learners.

What progress has been made to strengthen the co-ordination of Skills for Life provision across college?	Reasonable progress
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The co-ordination of Skills for Life provision across college sites is now more coherent. There are designated coordinators at each site and Skills for Life targets are incorporated into lesson planning. Assessment procedures have been strengthened, learners' needs are more clearly identified and recording processes are more consistent. In 2005/06 76% of entrants passed the Skills for Life literacy award and in 2006/07 83% of entrants passed. It was not possible to compare the outcomes for numeracy as much smaller numbers were entered but outcomes were lower than for literacy. All staff have expected to achieve at least a Level 2 in literacy and numeracy. The majority of the literacy/ numeracy tutors have completed, or are working towards, a Level 4 qualification. The college is keen to accelerate the rate of improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes and has set more challenging targets for 2007/08. The curriculum review committee scrutinizes all new and existing courses.

Leadership and management

What changes have been made to increase the rigour of health and safety procedures across the college?	Significant progress
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There is now a much more rigorous approach to the monitoring and promotion of health and safety issues. The 'Safe Learner Concept' is being well developed. There is a more comprehensive work experience policy and procedure, which indicates that all placements are risk assessed. Nominated Trustees oversee issues and decisions in relation to health and safety. The safety committee meets regularly and has been integral to the continued improvement of health and safety within ESPA services. This process has been positively supported by attendance and contributions from the trustees, the Chief and Deputy Chief Executive and staff. The service level contract with general FE colleges includes a health and safety agreement. Learners now have improved representation within college committees such as health and safety and equality and diversity.

What progress has been made in developing a more rigorous approach to quality assurance procedures including self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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Since January 2007 the college has implemented a much more rigorous approach to assuring the quality of the learners' experience. Improvements have also taken place with regard to self assessment procedures. Quality reporting procedures are clearer. A more self critical culture is beginning to bring about improvements but the new quality cycle has not yet been in operation for a full year so it is not possible to accurately judge its overall effectiveness. However, indications for its success are promising. The cycle now appropriately identifies performance indicators as a benchmark from which to begin effective and measurable quality improvement. The sharing of good practice across college sites and with other providers has significantly improved. A revised observation of teaching and learning policy has been established. However, scrutiny of some of the records of lesson observations indicates insufficient rigour in some judgements. The college is well aware of this area for improvement and further training is planned. Trustees receive quarterly quality improvement reports. The outcome of college observations for 2006/07 was 65% good or outstanding lessons which represents an improvement on the previous year. A target has been set for 2007/08 for 70% good or outstanding teaching and learning. The college is aware that the management information systems are in need of proper development and some areas of the college are still in need of refurbishment.

How well has the college responded to its legislative requirements with regard to equality and diversity legislation?	Reasonable progress
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The college has responded well to its legislative requirements with regard to equality and diversity legislation. However the policies are recent and impact assessments have yet to be fully implemented. Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and a single central vetting and recruitment record is in place.

What new recent management structures have been introduced to strengthen the college's capacity to improve?	Reasonable progress
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The college has a revised management structure from spring 2007 which includes a new acting part-time principal (two days per week). A new mission statement has been developed to reflect the revision of the five colleges into one main college. The new quality system has recently been introduced which clearly identifies quality indicators. Early signs are positive in terms of the information gained and impact made. A more rigorous approach to self assessment is supporting quality improvement at most levels. However, the college has yet to develop clear plans for succession given that the existing acting principal's contract expires at the end of the spring term 2008.