

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Portland College
Date of visit: 10 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

Did Residential Training Unit (RTU) funded learners achieve good positive destination outcomes for 2005/06, and what are the projected figures for 2006/07?

- The college's own challenging performance target of 55% of RTU learners gaining employment will not be met in 2006/07. However, the 51% projected percentage for the year is good benchmarked against other comparable colleges. This has improved slightly since 2005/06 when 49% of completers were successful in finding employment.

What were the achievement rates on courses leading to a qualification in 2005/06? Have they improved since the last inspection?

- Learners' achievement rates are good in a range of courses leading to qualifications. More skills for life qualifications have been introduced and learners achieve these where appropriate in relation to their medium and long term learning objectives. More appropriate emphasis has been placed on learners achieving more trade specific qualifications, aligned to learners' future employment prospects. Comparison with previous years' achievement rates is therefore inappropriate.

What are the retention rates for learners? How well do learners progress onto appropriate future placements?

- Destination outcomes are good with 66% of learners progressing on to further education and training and 18% gaining employment in 2005/06. The retention rate for Learning and Skills learners is in line with sector average at 91% for 2005/06. However, this figure includes the few

learners who leave earlier than expected due to appropriate placements becoming available before the end of their programmes.

Quality of education and training

Are learning targets set well enough to demonstrate progress made in all curriculum activities and the distance travelled by learners over time?

- Target setting has improved since the last annual assessment visit. Initial assessment of learners needs includes the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) process, which involves learners fully in identifying and prioritising areas of development in relation to individual learner's independence skills. The results of the assessment conducted using this system are taken into account by tutors when devising long and medium term targets for learners to achieve. Short term targets are clearly identified and linked effectively to medium and long term goals. These are closely monitored for progress across all curriculum activities. Progress reviews contain lists of when short and medium targets are achieved, and when units towards qualifications are gained. However, these are not sufficiently collated in summary form, to clearly establish the distance travelled by a learner towards their long term goals.

Do learners have sufficient say in the evaluation of college provision?

- Learners are very active in the life of the college through the learners' council. They feel that this has had some impact on improving their educational experience through improved resources and facilities. All learners complete questionnaires about the quality of their learning experiences.

Have the curriculum activities improved for Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded learners since the last inspection? Have changes to the student cohort had an impact on the type of activities and courses on offer?

- The range of learners' complex needs has increased over recent years and provision has improved to include more practically based courses for LSC funded learners. These include performing arts and music, animal

care on the small farm park on campus, and retail. Independent living skills training is more appropriately practised within student flats and residences.

Leadership and management

Are programme tutors fully involved in self-assessment and action planning through the evaluation of their curriculum areas?

- Programme tutors and leaders are fully involved in the self-assessment process. Programme team leaders have been provided with useful guidance on self-assessment ready for the completion of the 2006/07 self-assessment report. The self-assessment process is clearly described with examples of judgements aligned to the common inspection framework. The guidance is less clear about the type of substantive robust evidence used to inform these judgements.

Do quality assurance processes provide sufficient robust evidence to base the college's own self-assessment of provision?

- Quality assurance processes are improving to ensure robust evidence is more effectively gathered to inform the completion of the 2006/07 self-assessment report. The college is implementing the extensive auditing of its residential provision to ensure compliance with care standards. This involves residential and support staff in evaluating the services and support they provide. The college is participating in a peer referencing project with other regional independent specialist colleges to effectively evaluate the quality of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). The college has extensive data to provide evidence in relation to some key aspects of college performance and the quality improvement and planning cycle clearly identifies the tasks, meetings and activities involved in the self-assessment process. However, quality assurance processes do not sufficiently include the regular and timely monitoring and evaluation of all key teaching and learning processes to provide robust evidence to substantiate judgements about, for example, the quality of target setting or initial assessment processes.

How well are equality and diversity issues being monitored and promoted within the college? Is the college up to date with current equalities legislation and safeguarding?

- The college has comprehensive equality, diversity and inclusion policies and procedures in place. Targets are set for their implementation and they are reviewed annually. There is a comprehensive equality, diversity and inclusion action plan, which is effectively monitored. The college takes a lead in organising events and in disseminating best practice in relation to disabilities and works with local public services to improve the environment and services for people with disabilities. There are comprehensive safeguarding systems to ensure staff have the correct police checks in place. However, the central record does not contain all the information required, in line with current safeguarding guidelines.

What has been done to improve links with other education providers, local employers and other organisations to provide more options and choices for individual learners and to improve progression outcomes?

- The local general FE college is accessed by a few learners on an individual day basis, where appropriate, and provides progression routes for some when they leave Portland. A small number of learners access external work placements with local employers and voluntary organisations. The majority access internal work placements on the college campus. Work experience for learners is matched successfully to individual learners' needs. The college has useful links with public services and voluntary organisations such as the fire service and St John's ambulance, to extend curriculum activities and learning opportunities for learners. It has plans to establish further links with employers to improve work experience and vocational pathways. There are also plans to improve working arrangements with other providers, for example in organising a link programme with the local general FE college to improve the coping skills of learners accessing mainstream provision.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

How effectively are skills for life being embedded across the curriculum?

- Skills for life are identified within schemes for work and within lesson planning. However, there was insufficient time to observe how effectively skills for life are being implemented and how well their integration within lessons is being evaluated through the lesson observation scheme.

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

- The college has a strong focus on providing a safe and secure learning environment for learners and risk assessment and health and safety policies and procedures are rigorously implemented.