ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Doncaster College for the Deaf
Date of visit: 14 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

How well are learners' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills being developed?

- College data indicates a decrease in pass rates in literacy at entry level and level 1. However, the college achievement data is presented in the form of pass rates and does not include data on success rates.   Pass rates in numeracy indicate a slight increase overall. Opportunities to increase learners' information and communication technology (ICT) skills have been developed well particularly for those learners not studying information technology as their main programme. In the current year, 10 of these learners have achieved entry level 3 certificates in using information and communication technologies and 26 learners are enrolled on a range of national information technology awards. The college has introduced a learning package to promote the development of communication skills through the use of mobile phone text messaging, email and computer messenger systems. A new recording and assessment of progress and achievement (RARPA) framework was introduced in December 2006 to monitor and record achievement for non-accredited learning. It is too early to judge the overall effectiveness of this system.

How well did learners' achieve in 2005/06? Have high pass rates and progression been maintained? What actions have been taken to improve retention?

- College data indicates that overall pass rates remain high and that clear progression opportunities are available. For example in ICT programmes, records show where learners have progressed from level 1 to level 2 and in some instances to level 3. College data indicates

that retention declined slightly in 2005/06. The college is aware of the range of factors involved in retention and has focused interventions on individual learners where they feel these will have most impact.

Is there clear analysis of achievement by age, gender and ethnicity and is this effectively informing performance and planning?

- The college now monitors the achievements of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds and no specific trends are apparent.

Quality of education and training

What progress has been made on integrating Skills for Life since the last AAV?

- The college continues to develop its Skills for Life framework. Skills for Life champions have been identified in vocational areas to work with members of the Skills for Life team. Their aim is to embed literacy and numeracy across the college, including within the extended curriculum. Some sample learning materials in sports and catering showed clearly where opportunities to develop literacy or numeracy had been integrated well. However, the college is aware that this area needs further development across vocational areas and in the residences. An additional literacy tutor was employed in September 2006 and a fulltime educational support worker for literacy and numeracy has been appointed to work in the learning resources centre from September 2007.

The self assessment report (SAR) highlights staff expertise in the use of ILT to promote learning as an area for improvement. What action has been taken?

- Twenty-one additional interactive boards have been fitted in classrooms across the college and training has been provided to support their use. The college now estimates that 80% of teaching rooms have an interactive board installed. There are more computers in the learning resource centre and older models have been upgraded.

How effective is the monitoring of the quality of key learner documentation?

- All learners' files are now standardised with clear contents pages that can be used for monitoring and checking. Each file records the whole learning journey of an individual. Samples of learners' files are regularly audited to ensure they meet college quality standards. Some information is also held online so that all staff are able to access it and use it to support learners. At present, staff in some programme areas are piloting an essential skills individual learning plan. This pilot work will be evaluated and, if deemed appropriate, will be implemented across the college.

What action has been taken to improve arrangements for referred professional counselling for learners who require it?

- The college has developed a wider range of external links to improve learner access to professional counselling. This includes access to local psychiatric and counselling services, as well as establishing a video link with a specialist mental health team to discuss individual learner needs and ensure faster referrals. Fifteen college staff have had basic counselling training to help them identify learners who need counselling. One member of staff is currently completing a level 2 certificate in counselling skills; while two staff are on the level 3 course.

Leadership and management

The SAR identifies as an area for improvement, the need for development of the management information system (MIS) to meet internal and external demands. What actions have been taken?

- A working group was set up in November 2006, comprising a governor, the College Information System (CIS) manager and the quality manager, to identify how to develop the management information system to meet college and external needs. This group has thoroughly analysed what the specific demands on a future system will be and the current capacity within the college. The current system is a good source of information about learners but does not provide college wide information and analysis as quickly and easily as required for strategic management purposes. The working group has had presentations on commercially available systems and visited other

colleges to look at their systems. They will be making recommendations to the principal later this month.

How well has the college addressed the requirements of recent equalities legislation?

- The college has a detailed Disability Equality Scheme in place which covers a range of aspects. There is a thorough action plan with clear targets, the identified individuals responsible and timescales. The scheme was developed after widespread consultation with staff and learners. A diversity training programme has been piloted within the sports area and after a positive evaluation is to be delivered to all staff. Policies are being reviewed and revised and the first will be launched in the next academic year, after which their impact will be assessed.

- Following a strategic review there is now a clear accommodation strategy and action plan to address current issues. The accommodation is now much more accessible, particularly for learners with complex learning needs and physical disabilities. The new learning centre is a real benefit and helps more learners to have access to computers.

How effective is the observation of teaching and learning in improving standards?

- There are a number of strategies in place to support improvements in teaching and learning. Guidance materials and checklists have been produced to ensure greater consistency in lesson observations. All programme managers and a high proportion of programme leaders have been trained to carry out observations, and have regular refresher sessions to ensure consistency. Examples of good practice picked out from observations graded good or better, are shared with all staff to support the raising of standards. Where lessons are judged to be satisfactory or inadequate, an individual action plan is developed to help the member of staff to improve their performance. This plan is regularly monitored to track improvement and the member of staff is re-observed within a fixed period. Records of re-observations show clear improvements.

How effective are the safeguarding arrangements?

- The college places a high priority on safeguarding and has robust safeguarding arrangements in place. All staff who have contact with learners have undergone the required checks. There is an identified child protection officer and appropriate training is available.