

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: East Durham & Houghall Community College
Date of visit: 9 May 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

What are the current trends of the impact of actions to continue to improve learners' achievements to support the SAR grade 1? How have the effectiveness of these actions been measured?

- The impact of actions to improve learner achievements is a year on year improvement of success rates for the last three years. The current overall headline figure is 83% success rates. This places the college in the top 10 percentile nationally. In 2005/06, the success rates for long courses for 16-18 improved by 9% to 79% and short courses by 6% to 79%. Long course success rates for 19+ improved by 4% to 74% and short courses by 7% to 89%. Overall work based learning success rates improved to 59% and is better than the national average. Timely success rates are 39% and are better than the national average. The only area of low performance is 19+ in AS, A2 and A level courses. These courses have very small learner numbers, 24 but only seven of these were successful equating to 29%. The college is taking actions to remedy this.
- Attendance is good at 88% and exceeds the college target of 85%. Electronic registers effectively identify learners at risk by way of poor attendance and actions are taken swiftly to address issues.

Have improvements in achievement of apprenticeship frameworks continued?

- Numbers of learners on work-based learning programmes have increased from 49 in 2004/05 to 170 in the current year. The number of areas offering work-based learning has increased and now includes bricklaying, joinery and hair.
- Overall and timely success rates for apprentices are good and improving and have been above the national average for the last three years. In 2006/07, the college's overall success rate for apprentices is 71% against a national average of 55%. Success rates in new areas offering apprenticeships are good. For example, 79% of the first group

of hairdressing apprentices and 80% of the first group of bricklaying apprentices have achieved their framework, and all are timely completions.

- e2e progression is good. Out of 53 learners in the current year, 94% have made positive progressions into further education, apprenticeships and employment.
- Advanced apprenticeship success rates are historically poor but improving. Historically, none of the small numbers of learners who began advanced apprenticeships in construction, planning and the built environment, arts, media and publishing, health, public services and care, and retail and commercial enterprise has achieved their framework. Recently recruited advanced apprentices are making good progress.
- The management of work-based learning is much improved. There is now a dedicated work-based learning unit and the profile of work-based learning has been raised in the college and in the community. Progress against all aspects of framework completion is closely monitored through monthly meetings between assessors and the work-based learning manager. Review documentation clearly records learner's progress against individual units. Work-based learning is now offered to discrete groups and much effort is put into matching learners, employers and programmes.

What are the current rates of achievement of key skills qualifications?

- Success rates in key skills have improved slightly from the 2004/05 rates. The success rates for full time students in wider key skills are good in improving own learning and performance and working with others at 67% and 68% respectively. The success rates for problem solving are much lower at 41%. Overall, the success rates for communication are 51% and ICT is 30%. The success rates in application of number are much improved to 63% overall, 72% at level one and 56% at level two.

Quality of education and training

What is the college's current assessment of the proportion of good or better teaching? What are the current strategies to improve the quality of teaching?

- Recent college records show an increase of 4% of good or better teaching and learning. Twelve of the 121 staff observed improved from

good to outstanding. The amount of inadequate teaching is less than the national benchmark. Observers report outstanding teaching and learning in an increased number of sector skills areas.

- All staff are now observed annually and observations give a truer picture of the students' experience as staff preparation time is reduced.
- The college has a range of exciting strategies to improve teaching and learning. The 2006/07 teaching and learning strategy builds on the previous year's development work and introduces a focus on the use of peer observations and active learning strategies. All staff are positive about these strategies and report improvements in their teaching including the use of ILT.
- The college works well with other local colleges to validate and moderate teaching and learning grades. Occupational specialists from other colleges carry out observations to help the college ensure consistency against national benchmarks.
- The college is involved in a number of peer reference projects at a national, regional and local level.

How is the role of the advanced practitioner monitored?

- Observation of teaching and learning systems incorporate developmental feedback and this links effectively to the use of identified advanced practitioners. These provide a range of support systems including management of CPD activities, formal 1:1 support and informal 1:1 support and drop-in sessions. A range of evaluation mechanisms indicates this as having a positive impact. Advanced practitioners are used well to support and develop staff. Changes in observation grades after advanced practitioner support has been utilised are monitored, but staff supported by advanced practitioners are not asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the support.

What actions are being taken to improve the curriculum areas performing less well? How is best practice from good curriculum areas being shared?

- A range of processes is in place to support curriculum areas performing less well. These include both formal and informal systems. The college places a strong emphasis on sharing good practice effectively through-out the college. Peer observation, general learning from others and using other colleges in reviewing and observing practices contribute to this. The college is involved in a national peer reference group with 5-6 other colleges.
- Curriculum review meetings result in clear action plans being developed to improve performance. The Head of PDQ in conjunction

with an assistant principal oversees the implementation of these plans. Good use is made of Pro-Achieve to provide accurate data to inform judgments.

- An open door management styles encourage a greater sense of ownership by curriculum staff of their courses. Advice, guidance and support are non-threatening and staff welcome the guidance received in a positive manner.

Leadership and management

What procedures are now in place to evaluate the impact of additional support provided for learners?

- Since January 2007, a new system for the management of additional learning support (ALS) has been in place. The assistant principal responsible for teaching and learning now maintains overall control of the area. This is a logical decision. A new curriculum manager is in post. A review of all policies and procedures is completed. All of the human resources allocated to ALS will be managed by the curriculum manager. All staff have been involved in attending staff awareness training events to increase understanding of ALS.
- Service standards are in place and these will provide effective targets for the provision. Systems are now in place to remedy the problem of timely provision of identified support. ALS makes reports to the academic board and the most recent identified 82% success rates for learners receiving ALS on 1-year courses. The college recognises that the new systems require some time to embed into all curriculum areas.

How effective is the self-assessment process in driving standards up? How involved do staff feel in the process? Do they take full ownership of the judgments in the report?

- A self-assessment handbook supports the process for 2006/7. Good use is also made of individual course records and course monitoring records to support the evaluative process. Teams effectively use data to question course performance. All staff, including support staff, are involved in self-assessment. Managers encourage curriculum staff to take responsibility for the courses they deliver. Days are allocated to curriculum areas for standardisation activities and these are used to build the self-assessment knowledge base through the year.
- All courses evaluations utilise minimum levels of performance as a guide to performance. 'Critical friends' take an active role in moderating and reviewing evidence to support judgments. Peer

reference groups also contribute to this role. Curriculum self-assessments result in the development of curriculum quality improvement plans and these feed into the over-all college quality improvement plan.

What evidence does the college have to demonstrate positive developments as part of a good capacity to improve?

- The current college success rates, flexible approach to continuing professional development and the observation of teaching and learning system and the drive to match 'right learner' to 'right course' all provide evidence of the college's capacity to improve.

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

What actions has the college taken to improve the management of skills for life and literacy and numeracy across the college? Have these brought about better co-ordination and more consistency in good practice?

- Inspectors did not have sufficient time to explore this theme in detail.

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

- Work is about to start on a significant new-build project with planned access in January 2009. Managers express concern at the prospect of their next inspection occurring during the re-location process.