

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Carlisle College
 Date of visit: 19 September 2007

Context

This monitoring visit followed an inspection of Carlisle College in May 2006, and an annual assessment visit in January 2007. At the inspection the college was graded satisfactory for leadership and management, achievement and standards, quality of provision, and effectiveness of provision. Capacity to improve was judged to be good. All the curriculum areas grades were satisfactory, except for engineering and manufacturing technology, which was good. The key areas for improvement were attendance, the quality of teaching and learning, retention and pass rates at level 3, consistency of group tutorial support, promotion of diversity, differentiation, and literacy and numeracy support.

Achievement and standards

Have success rates improved since the last inspection?	Reasonable progress
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At the inspection in 2006, success rates were satisfactory overall, but there were a number of areas where student success rates were weak. At the annual assessment visit in January 2007, long course success rates had improved to the 2005 national average; while success rates for learners aged 16-18 had improved but were still below national average. At this visit inspectors took account of college data for the 2006/07 academic year. This indicates that retention has improved to 82% overall. On long courses retention improved slightly, from 74 to 76% overall, but retention of 16-18 year olds improved more, to 81%, against a national benchmark for 2005-06 of 72%. Attendance of 16-18 year olds has improved from 78% in 2005-06 to 86% in 2006/07. The college predicts significant improvements in success rates; for example overall 16-18 year old success rate is predicted to be 72% in 2006/07, up from 62% the previous year. For adults the prediction is a success rate of 76%, against 70% in 2005/06. Both the 2006/07 predicted figures are close to the 2005-06 national averages.

Quality of provision

How has the procedure for observation of teaching and learning improved since the last inspection, and is there any evidence of improvement?	Reasonable progress
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The college has developed its observation of teaching and learning (OTL) process to make it more robust and effective in bringing about improvements. In the spring of 2007 a team of external observers carried out a programme of observations. Teachers found the feedback helpful, particularly where observers were occupationally competent. College observers shadowed the external observers to improve their skills. Work to develop the consistency of judgments has also been well supported through collaborative work with other Cumbrian colleges. Joint observations and standardisation of grades has supported more robust judgments. The college recognises the need to further improve provision of constructive feedback to staff by college observers.

Results from the OTL process show a reduction in unsatisfactory teaching in the current year. Teachers receiving grade 3 or 4 for their lessons receive mentor support. As the volume of unsatisfactory teaching decreases, the college is placing a greater focus on improving the grade 3 provision as a key target.

Discussion with teachers demonstrated that the college is progressing well with the introduction of its virtual learning environment (VLE). Targets have been set for all teachers to populate the VLE with course materials, and use by staff and learners is being carefully monitored. However learners' awareness of the VLE varies considerably between departments.

Has there been any improvement in the management of literacy and numeracy support for mainstream learners?	Reasonable progress
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The essential skill faculty has been restructured and new staff employed to bring together key skills and additional learning support in a more coherent way. A recently developed strategy for additional learning support has been introduced this academic year. The strategy draws together key initial and diagnostic assessment activities to ensure that learners are on the correct level of course, and provided with the required support. Initial assessment is completed at an earlier stage, and the results for each course used to inform

the interview process and course allocation. Additional learning support is provided in each Level 1 course, and in other mainstream courses, where needed, from the start of the course. Staff awareness about the additional learning support available has been raised. So far this term, there have been 259 requests for additional learning support. The college has introduced three 'drop-in' support sessions each week for learners to work on particular areas of need.

New resources are available to support reading and spelling strategies. Additional hours enable a specialist tutor, now on a fractional contract, to provide more dyslexia support. The college places good emphasis on raising staff awareness about learners' support needs. Staff development in mental health, dyslexia and autism awareness took place during 2006. However, further staff training is recognised as an area for improvement.

Additional learner support in mainstream provision is effective in enabling learners to achieve their learning aims. College data for 2005-06 indicates that mainstream learners receiving additional learning support achieve at least as well as those who do not need it.

A revised individual learning plan is operational for non-accredited provision. It identifies targets for skill, cognitive and behavioural development. Some show learners' targets and record outcome visually. However, in the records seen on the visit, some targets were too broad. Progress against skills development, or activities completed, are recorded far more frequently than progress towards, and achievement of, cognitive and behavioural targets.

The college has obtained additional funding to develop workplace experience for learners with moderate learning difficulties as part of a countywide initiative. It is too soon to comment on the effectiveness of this.

What has been done to improve the consistency of group tutorials?	Significant progress
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The improvements in the consistency of group tutorials identified at the January 2007 annual assessment visit have become established. The cross college senior tutorial team supports the standardised curriculum of 14 core topics and 9 optional topics. Tutors share the resources they develop and those with specialist skills support others in the delivery of particular topics. Tutorials offer a good range and balance of activities. External speakers are a regular feature and the enrichment officer supports team-building

exercises. The delivery model has recently changed. Paired teaching allows one tutor to conduct 1-1 sessions with learners, whilst their colleague facilitates the group session. Tutorials are now included in the observation of teaching and learning process. All mainstream learners seen during the visit were clear about their individual targets and how they were monitored. However, some learners who receive learning support are not aware that they have targets.

College plans to introduce a new IT-based learner tracking system are well developed. This will link with the tutorial system and support the introduction of value added and distance travelled measures. Faculty Heads have been trained to use the system and tutor training is planned shortly.

Leadership and management

What action has been taken to improve key skills outcomes?	Reasonable progress
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Management of this area has been restructured following the appointment of a new faculty head and new head of section for Essential Skills. A new key skills strategy is in preparation, to reflect changes in the methods of delivery. Since the last inspection, managers have sought to improve the contextualisation and embedding of key skills. A successful pilot of this approach was carried out in the construction department, and this good practice will now be spread to other departments in the 2007/08 academic year. In all areas there have been improvements in embedding key skills into assignments. However, full embedding of key skills will not be in place until the 2008/09 academic year. Acceptance by learners of the relevance and importance of key skills has improved, as measured by responses to the college's perception of course questionnaire. There have also been improvements in the effectiveness of initial assessment in allocating learners to the correct level programme, which the college recognised as a weakness in previous years. There have been modest improvements in key skills outcomes, from 35% in 2005/06 to 40% predicted in 2006/07, which is in line with the very low national average rate.