

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Lancaster & Morecambe College

Date of visit: 30 November 2007

Context

Lancaster and Morecambe College is a medium sized FE college with around 1,670 full-time learners, 80% of whom are aged 16 to 18 and around 5,000 part-time students who are mostly adults.

The college is on the border of Lancaster and Morecambe and also serves the communities of south Cumbria and North Yorkshire. The college has a COVE in hospitality and catering. In 2005/06 approximately 37% of college enrolments were at level 1, 36% at level 2, 17% at level 3 and 10% other. This represents a large increase in the college's level 1 provision. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is very small, reflecting the local population. The area is highly competitive with six 11 to 18 schools within three miles of the main college campus, the majority of which also offer vocational qualifications. The rate of participation in Lancaster and Morecambe of students aged over 16 is above the national and Lancashire averages. There is a local authority (LA) funded adult college in Lancaster. The college offers apprenticeships, entry to employment, train to gain and bespoke industry courses to meet the needs of local employers. The college holds the OLASS contract for Lancashire.

The college's mission is "providing Lancaster and Morecambe and surrounding communities with an outstanding student experience fulfilling academic, personal and employment goals".

Lancaster and Morecambe College was last inspected in January 2005. At that inspection, leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. In curriculum areas, the college was awarded 9 grades; 5 good, 3 satisfactory and unsatisfactory in ICT. In work-based learning, the college received two grades; good in hairdressing and beauty therapy and unsatisfactory in construction. Guidance and support were judged to be good, and educational and social inclusion were judged to be satisfactory. At the re-inspection in January 2007 ICT and construction WBL provision were judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What progress have the college made in improving the success rates on long courses?	Reasonable Progress
---	---------------------

Success rates have improved at all levels except for adult learners on level 2 courses where the success rate fell in 2007 by 7 percentage points. At level 2 success rates in 2007 are below the national averages for 2006. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 are broadly in line with national averages. The college has significantly improved the success rates of adults on level 1 and level 3 courses and these are now well above national averages in 2007.

What progress have the college made in improving the success rates on short courses?	Insufficient Progress
--	-----------------------

Success rates on short courses improved slightly in 2007, however they remain below the national averages.

What progress have the college made in improving high grade pass rates on GCSE courses and the success rates on AS and A2 courses?	Insufficient Progress
--	-----------------------

In 2007 the high grade pass rate on GCSE mathematics and English fell from 47% to 42%, well below the national average. The success rate on AS courses fell in 2007 from 86% to 71%, well below the national average. On A2 courses the success rate improved slightly but remains below the national average. The drop out rate between As and A2 courses is high with two thirds of learners leaving the programme.

Quality of provision

What improvements have been made to improving the quality of provision in Information technology?	Significant Progress
---	----------------------

The new management structure and systems put in place and observed by inspectors at the re-inspection in January 2007 have had a significant positive impact on the quality of provision in Information technology.

In 2007 the success rates on all levels of courses and for all age groups improved substantially, many by over 30% and are all now well above national averages. The low success and pass rates identified as areas to improve at the inspection in January 2007 have been addressed.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of work based learning?	Reasonable Progress
--	---------------------

A range of actions and new systems have been established across the college's work based learning provision and these have been effective in securing annual increases in the overall success rates. The improvements in the apprenticeship programmes are good and success rates are above national averages. However on advanced apprentices the success rate has fluctuated and is not yet at the national average. The college recognises some poor success rates on train to gain courses and has developed strategies to improve this in 2007/08.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of key skills provision?	Reasonable Progress
---	---------------------

The college has improved its process of initial assessment and frequency of monitoring students' progress in key skills. Overall the success rate in key skills improved in 2007 by 13 percentage points to 55% with good improvements in level 1 and ICT at level 2. However level 2 communications success rates declined in 2007 and there are inconsistencies in the achievement of key skills across different curriculum areas.

Leadership and management

What progress have managers made in monitoring the college's actions to improve retention? (BB)	Reasonable Progress
---	---------------------

A wide range of strategies have been implemented and closely monitored by managers at all levels using accurate data. Retention is now broadly in line with national averages, except for retention on adult level 1 courses which is well above the national rate. Retention remains a key area for improvement at the college.

What actions have been taken to follow up on the outcomes from lesson observations to further improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable Progress
---	---------------------

No further lesson observations have been carried out since the last visit in January 2007. The next rounds of lesson observations and additional staff training are planned for January 2008. The paperwork and staff performance reviews has been revised to further support staff development and improve accountability of staff at all levels across the organisation. The outcomes from observations have been used well to inform whole college and individual staff development opportunities with a strong emphasis on improving the use of ILT to support learning. Staff teaching on AS and A2 courses often work in subject isolation and there are insufficient opportunities in the college for them to share good practice.

What actions have been taken to follow up on the variations in success rates between students aged 16 to 18 and adult learners, particularly in business and health, public services and care?	Reasonable Progress
--	---------------------

The success rate of students aged 16 to 18 improved considerably in health, public services and care and are now above the national average at all levels. In business, administration and law the success rates for 16 to 18 year olds on level 1 and level 3 courses in 2007 were broadly in line with national averages. The decline in 2007 on level 3 courses is a result of declining AS and A2 success rates. On level 2 courses the low success rates have been recognised as a consequence of low NVQ2 success rates and strategies such as revised entry criteria and improved individual learning plans (ILPs) have been introduced but it is too early to judge their impact.