York College

Inspection report

Provider reference   130504

Published date   March 2008

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:
• *grade 1 – outstanding*
• *grade 2 – good*
• *grade 3 – satisfactory*
• *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. York College was created in April 1999 following the merger of York College of Further and Higher Education with York Sixth Form College. The college's mission is 'to achieve excellence as the leading provider of education and training in the City of York and surrounding area'. In September 2007, the college moved to new buildings at its Sim Balk Lane site. The building project, which had an overall budget in excess of £60 million, provides purpose-built accommodation on a single site. The project was completed on time and within the financial parameters set.

2. The college offers a wide range of subjects, levels and modes of study. It has approximately 12,000 learners of whom 3,400 are in full-time further education, 700 are in work-based learning, 480 in higher education, 150 are international students and over 800 are on Train to Gain programmes. The college is recognised as a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in a number of areas including rail and signal engineering, stonemasonry, hospitality and tourism. The college employs around 580 full-time equivalent staff. Its senior management team comprises the principal, director of teaching and learning, deputy principal (operations), deputy principal (quality assurance, customer support and information systems), and the director of finance.

3. The City of York has a population of 186,000. The main traditional industries in York are rail, engineering, food manufacturing and construction. In recent years, there has been considerable growth in employment in the tourism, science, finance, and retail sectors. The unemployment rate for the city is 1.6%, compared with the national average of 2.8% and the Yorkshire and Humber region figure of 3.3%.

4. Some 3.3% of learners at the college are from minority ethnic groups. In York, just 2.2% of the population is from minority ethnic groups compared with 4.4% in the region and 5.6% nationally, based on the UK Race Statistics (May 2004). In 2007, 67% of 16-year-old pupils in York gained five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above, compared with the national average of 60.3%.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2

Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2

Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2

Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity	*Good: Contributory Grade 2*

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision   Good: Grade 2

5.   The college assessed its overall effectiveness to be good and inspectors agree. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Success rates at level 3 are high, and on programmes for 14 to 16 year olds they are very high. Overall, success rates on work-based learning and Train to Gain are satisfactory. Level 1 and 2 long course success rates are below the national average. Key skills success rates have risen significantly but are still low.

6.   Teaching and learning are good. Good use is made of information learning technology (ILT). Assignment specifications are challenging and interesting and supported by detailed guidance and grade descriptors. Arrangements to support learners' literacy and numeracy needs are satisfactory.

7.   The range of provision is very good. Courses are offered from entry level to higher education level, and almost all sector subject areas are represented. The college has strong collaborative links with its partners. The college has a very good enrichment programme and a very positive approach towards engaging learners.

8.   The college provides very good specialist support. The needs of learners with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified and supported at an early stage. Tutorial provision is comprehensive and very effective. The college provides good information, advice and guidance, and learners have good access to careers advice.

9.   The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. It offers a wide range of programmes. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress within mainstream courses. Learners overcome barriers and make good progress through the provision of flexible programmes and very good specialist support. The college values and celebrates the cultural diversity of its learner population.

10. Leadership and management are good. Senior managers provide clear strategic direction. The new college provides an outstanding environment for teaching and learning. Governance is very effective. Financial management is good, as is value for money. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive. Strategies to improve success rates have not been fully effective. Progress has been slow in improving the management of key skills. There has been insufficient monitoring of the management of work-based learning. This has been recognised by the college and measures are in place to improve the situation.

Capacity to improve   Good: Grade 2

11.   The college demonstrates good capacity to improve. The new college provides an outstanding learning environment. The college has a clear strategy for improvement with a strong focus on teaching and learning. The self-assessment process is well established and effective at all levels. Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive. The college has improved success rates but some are still below the national average. Good progress has been made in improving success rates in work-based learning.

12.   The self-assessment report is evaluative and self-critical. Judgements are well supported by evidence. The report correctly identifies most key strengths and areas for improvement but overstates some key strengths. Grades awarded by inspectors closely match those in the self-assessment report.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

13.   The college has made satisfactory progress in addressing most areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Very good progress has been made with the availability of ILT. Quality assurance and the quality of teaching and learning are more consistent across the college. Curriculum management has improved, but the management of some work-based learning and key skills is still weak. Progress in improving success rates at levels 1 and 2 has been too slow.

Key strengths

- good success rates at level 3
- good use of information learning technology to promote learning
- strong collaborative links with employers, schools and other partners which benefit learners
- very broad enrichment programme, valued highly by learners
- very good specialist support for learners
- very effective governance
- clear strategic planning and direction
- good financial management
- outstanding environment for teaching and learning
- particularly effective approach to equality of opportunity.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- low success rates at levels 1 and 2
- low success rates in key skills
- insufficiently well developed strategies to improve success rates
- slow progress in improving the management of key skills.

Main findings

Achievement and standards   Satisfactory: Grade 3

Contributory grades:
Work-based learning   *Satisfactory: Grade 3*
Train to Gain   *Satisfactory: Grade 3*
Learners aged 14 to 16   *Good: Grade 2*

14. Achievement and standards overall are satisfactory. Success rates for the 75% of 16 to 18 year old learners who are studying at level 3 are high and most are above the national average. Pass rates on A-level programmes are above the national average, but the college recognises the need to improve value-added scores.

15. Success rates on programmes for 14 to 16 year olds are very high. The college delivers a wide range of vocational programmes for these learners. Learners generally achieve at higher levels than predicted by their school and significant numbers progress onto vocational courses within the college.

16. Success rates for work-based learning programmes are broadly satisfactory. Overall, success rates on the work-based learning programme subcontracted from Construction Skills are high. However, the majority of work-based learners are on the college's own LSC contract. As recognised in the self-assessment report, although overall success rates for these learners have improved very significantly, they are still well below the national average for advanced apprenticeships, and at the national average for apprenticeships. Overall Train to Gain success rates are satisfactory. Construction is the largest programme offered, and success rates here are good at 80%. However, in other areas success rates are poor. The college recognises this and is implementing improvements.

17. As recognised in the self-assessment report, level 1 long course success rates for 2006/07 were below the national average overall. At level 2, long course success rates overall are also below the national average. College data shows that in-year retention for 2007/08 has improved, particularly at levels 1 and 2. Data also indicates that success rates on learners' main qualifications are significantly higher than for courses which count as additionality.

18. Key skills success rates were a key weakness at inspection in 2004. They have risen significantly but are still very low at 35% overall. The most improved area is work-based learning, where success rates in key skills have risen from 34% to 55% over three years, but when work-based learning is taken out of the whole-college figure, the success rate drops to 27%. The success rates for key skills at level 3 have improved, but are still only 17% overall.

19.   Learners in the college develop good practical skills and produce work to a high standard. Attendance and punctuality are good and learners are courteous and well behaved. Learners from minority ethnic groups achieve at or above the level of the college as a whole.

Quality of provision   Good: Grade 2

Contributory grades:
Work-based learning   *Satisfactory: Grade 3*
Train to Gain   *Satisfactory: Grade 3*
Learners aged 14 to 16   *Good: Grade 2*

20.   Teaching and learning are good overall. The college has an effective and rigorous system for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Senior tutors, subject learning coaches and advanced practitioners work collaboratively to implement new initiatives and support staff. Arrangements for staff training and sharing good practice are effective. Lesson observation records include evaluative judgements with clear links to strengths and areas for improvement. Line managers effectively monitor the resulting action plans. However, records of progress made in improving teaching and learning are not held centrally. In work-based learning, well coordinated on- and off-the-job training is supported by knowledgeable employers with a good understanding of apprenticeship programmes.

21.   Good use is made of information learning technology (ILT) in promoting learning. This was a weakness at the 2004 inspection. Since then the college has made significant investment in ILT. All full-time and many part-time tutors have been provided with tablet computers and have received training in their use. All teaching rooms in the new college are fitted with digital projectors, amplifiers, speakers and docking stations. The whole college is enabled for wireless communication. The college's learning centre is extensive and well equipped. Learners develop good independent learning skills, frequently accessing learning materials from the college's virtual learning environment and intranet.

22.   Assignment specifications are challenging and interesting and they are supported by detailed guidance and grade descriptors. Tutors' feedback includes positive comments on all good aspects of work, while providing clear explanations where assessment criteria have not been met. Learners are very aware of their attainment and progress and tutors review progress regularly. Parents are well informed through parent evenings and formal progress reports produced twice each year. Targets set during reviews on work-based learning programmes are insufficiently specific. Some short-term targets do not support timely progress towards long-term learning outcomes.

23.   The quality of key skills teaching and assessment varies between curriculum areas. The college has developed relevant information and material to support the delivery of key skills, but many schemes of work and lesson plans have insufficient detail on how key skills are to be taught and

assessed. The college has recognised this, and measures are in place to bring about improvement. Arrangements to support learners' literacy and numeracy needs are satisfactory. All learners at levels 1 and 2, and some at level 3, complete diagnostic assessments. Vocational tutors and a specialist learning support team support the literacy and numeracy needs of learners as required.

24. As identified in the self-assessment report, the range of provision is very good. Courses are offered from entry level to higher education level and all sector subject areas are represented. The college's vocational provision is strengthened by the CoVEs in stonemasonry, rail and signal engineering, and hospitality and tourism. The college provides good progression routes, but recognises the need to develop these further. Provision for 14 to 16 year olds and for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Part-time, community-based and distance learning courses benefit many adult learners. Progression into higher education and employment is good.

25. The college has strong collaborative links with employers and other partners which benefit learners. Links with schools are extensive. The college is a major provider of Train to Gain, and delivers a wide range of customised training for employers. Work with voluntary groups has provided good opportunities for learners to contribute to the community and develop new skills.

26. A very good enrichment programme gives learners many opportunities to engage in sport, recreation and other activities. The college has a very positive approach towards engaging learners and listening to their views. An active students' union makes a full and growing contribution to college life.

27. The college accurately identified support for learners as a strength. It provides very good specialist support through a well qualified and experienced team of staff. The needs of learners with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified at an early stage and specialist support is provided very quickly. Tutor managers work very effectively with the central team to set up and monitor this additional support. Achievement for learners receiving additional learning support is as good, or better, than for learners as a whole.

28. Tutorial provision is comprehensive and very effective. Full-time learners are well supported through regular one-to-one tutorials. Valuable extension activities are provided through a programme of core and optional group sessions. Sessions reflect Every Child Matters themes and include drug and alcohol awareness, equality and diversity, healthy eating and financial planning. A range of resources available through the intranet support tutors in planning sessions. Overall attendance at tutorials is good, but better for individual than group sessions.

29. The college provides good information, advice and guidance to help prospective learners select appropriate courses. School visits and college open days provide very good further opportunities for prospective learners

to make informed choices. Learners have good access to careers guidance through tutorial and one-to-one sessions.

Leadership and management   Good: Grade 2

Contributory grades:
Equality of opportunity   *Good: Grade 2*

30. Leadership and management are good, as identified in the self-assessment report. Senior managers provide clear strategic direction. The college has recently moved to a new purpose-built campus. The planning and building project were managed very effectively with minimal disruption to learners. The new college provides an outstanding environment for teaching and learning. Resources for ILT and teaching are now outstanding. Communications are effective and have greatly improved within the new college building.

31. Governance is very effective. Governors are highly committed and provide a wide range of expertise. They are well informed and provide effective challenge and support.

32. Financial management is good. The college's financial health is category A. Value for money is good. The sale and disposal of the original site has enabled the college to maximise income and reduce long-term borrowing requirements.

33. Inspectors agree with the college's own judgement that the promotion of equality of opportunity is good. The college is very committed to equality of opportunity and diversity. A wide range of appropriate policies effectively meets current legislative requirements. However, progress reviews for work-based learners do not sufficiently reinforce their understanding of equality of opportunity.

34. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive. The teaching and learning observation process is rigorous and identifies improving trends in the quality of teaching. Managers are informed by timely and accurate data. Internal verification arrangements are effective in ensuring that assessment decisions are robust and consistent.

35. Staff development is well linked to college priorities. A high proportion of staff have teaching qualifications. All staff complete an effective annual appraisal. The child protection policy is reviewed annually. Arrangements for the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults are satisfactory. A nominated member of staff and governor for child protection are in place.

36. Strategies to bring about improvement in success rates have not been fully effective, particularly at levels 1 and 2. The college recognises this in its self-assessment report and continues to implement improvement. Progress has been slow in improving the management of key skills. Although key skills success rates have improved, they are still low.

37.   There has been insufficient monitoring of the management of the work-based learning. LSC returns in 2005/06 included errors which were only discovered at external audit. The college acted swiftly to rectify this. Two smaller work-based learning contracts, which were not meeting minimum levels of performance, have been terminated. High priority has been given to improving work-based learning and good progress has been made in improving the provision and success rates.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	650	50	65	-15	1,309	64	62	2
	05/06	587	53	69	-16	368	60	65	-5
	06/07*	593	59	N/A		460	64	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	35	80	68	12	-	-	-	-
	05/06	21	71	72	-1	-	-	-	-
	06/07*	15	67	N/A		-	-	N/A	-
NVQs	04/05	103	44	68	-24	6	50	66	-16
	05/06	48	69	72	-3	16	6	74	-68
	06/07*	60	63	N/A		13	23	N/A	
Other	04/05	512	49	64	-15	1,303	64	62	2
	05/06	518	51	69	-18	352	63	65	-2
	06/07*	518	59	N/A		447	66	N/A	

* college data (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	1,291	53	61	-8	2,770	62	60	2
	05/06	1,233	57	66	-9	1,922	70	66	4
	06/07*	1,452	63	N/A		1,211	64	N/A	
GCSEs	04/05	263	54	64	-10	192	60	63	-3
	05/06	230	61	68	-7	100	68	67	1
	06/07*	190	67	N/A		104	52	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	61	79	67	12	1	0	75	-75
	05/06	81	68	69	-1	2	100	68	32
	06/07*	36	61	N/A		1	0	N/A	
NVQs	04/05	274	52	57	-5	315	32	60	-28
	05/06	204	56	65	-9	403	55	67	-12
	06/07*	280	62	N/A		297	58	N/A	
Other	04/05	693	51	61	-10	2,262	66	59	7
	05/06	718	54	66	-12	1,417	74	65	9
	06/07*	946	63	N/A		809	69	N/A	

* college data (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	04/05	5,028	75	68	7	1,379	55	58	-3
	05/06	4,763	76	70	6	1,001	68	63	5
	06/07*	4,913	74	N/A		950	67	N/A	
A/A2 Levels	04/05	1,376	91	86	5	76	70	69	1
	05/06	1,327	91	87	4	50	78	72	6
	06/07*	1,222	90	N/A		59	75	N/A	
AS Levels	04/05	2,604	73	66	7	162	45	52	-7
	05/06	2,406	73	67	6	74	53	55	-2
	06/07*	2,422	72	N/A		91	46	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	140	59	61	-2	1	0	54	-54
	05/06	108	62	66	-4	1	0	57	-57
	06/07*	-	-	N/A		-	-	N/A	
NVQs	04/05	52	81	63	18	238	30	56	-26
	05/06	67	82	71	11	150	46	63	-17
	06/07*	58	79	N/A		154	49	N/A	
Other	04/05	856	59	60	-1	902	62	59	3
	05/06	855	62	65	-3	726	74	64	10
	06/07*	1,211	62	N/A		646	73	N/A	

* college data (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning apprenticeship programmes managed by York College 2004/05 to 2006/07.

Combined figures for York College LSC direct contract and Construction Skills subcontract

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners* *Note A*	Provider/ college NVQ rate** *Note A*	National NVQ rate** *Note B*	Provider/college framework rate** *Note A*	National framework rate** *Note C*
Advanced Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	149	67%	50%	22%	35%
		timely	137	52%	31%	15%	22%
	05-06	overall	156	67%	54%	48%	44%
		timely	153	60%	34%	30%	27%
	06-07	overall	229	70%	64%	54%	58%
		timely	235	57%	42%	35%	37%
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	372	65%	52%	44%	40%
		timely	416	29%	29%	21%	23%
	05-06	overall	403	59%	59%	49%	53%
		timely	425	35%	38%	25%	34%
	06-07	overall	434	72%	65%	65%	61%
		timely	314	58%	47%	52%	44%

Note 'At the time of the inspection - LSC data for 2006-07 had yet to be fully validated'

*   Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

**   College/provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Table 5

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by the college

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2006-07	overall	95	68%
		timely	N/A	N/A
	2007-08	overall	364	68%
		timely	N/A	N/A

Note: 2007/08 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first 6 months of the LSC contract year

*	Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned
**	College/provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'
***	Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'Skills for Life'. Data for 2006/07 is ETP