

FE in HE Monitoring Visit Themes to explore
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Context

The University of Cumbria was established in August 2007 as a result of a re-organisation of the provision offered at St Martin's College, Cumbria Institute of the Arts and selected aspects of the provision offered by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) at the Newton Rigg campus in Penrith.

Further education (FE) provision is offered on two of the University's main sites. The Faculty of Arts, located at the Brampton Road campus in Carlisle, offers level 3 provisions in the visual and performing arts and media. At the Newton Rigg campus, in Penrith, the Faculty of Science and Natural Resources provides specialist land-based provision and an expanding range of other courses from entry to level 3. This includes courses in childhood studies, animal management, countryside management, sport and outdoor education, and skills for life. Work-based learning programmes and provision for around 140 pupils aged 14-16 from local schools is also offered at Newton Rigg.

The FE provision was recently re-organised with the aim of bringing together the different aspects under one management structure. A new Head of Further Education and School of Vocational Skills was appointed in November 2007.

In 2006/07, there were 269 students aged 16 to 18 and 80 aged 19 and over enrolled at the Brampton road campus in Carlisle. At Newton Rigg there were 585 students aged 16 to 18 and 908 aged over 19. The two self-assessment reports (SAR) of the provision offered during 2006/07 by the former organisations, have been used to inform the themes identified below which were explored by inspectors during the monitoring visit.

Achievement and standards (KQ1)

What does performance data for 2006/07 show in comparison with the previous years' performance and national averages?

The Institute's self-assessment of achievement and standards for the provision offered at Newton Rigg in 2006/07 is broadly accurate. In 2007, the overall success rate on long courses was satisfactory having declined by 12% from the previously good rate of 82%. At level 3, there were good improvements in the success rates for students aged 16 to 18 and for those aged over 19. At level 2, there was a small improvement in the success rate on long courses for students aged 16 to 18. However, the rates declined at level 2 for students aged over 19 and at level 1 for all students. Success rates vary between curriculum areas. The rates are good or better in a number of areas including science, engineering and, animal care and equine. However, they are low on level 3 sports courses. Key skills success rates have improved over the last three years.

Inspectors did not agree with the School's self-assessment of achievement and standards for the provision offered by the former Cumbria Institute of the Arts in 2006/07. The quality of this provision has deteriorated since the last inspection. In 2007, the success rates on many of the courses were low. The rates on eight courses declined in 2007 when compared with the previous year's outcomes, only two improved. The success rate on the national diploma in music is good. However, the rate for the diploma in foundation studies in art and design is significantly below national average for general further education colleges.

What action has been taken to identify and improve underperforming courses?

The University has taken action to ensure that all courses are benchmarked against national averages. As a result underperforming programmes are now

clearly identified. Arrangements for setting and monitoring performance against challenging targets for retention and success rates are in the very early stages of implementation. Whole institution monitoring and reporting of in-year retention and attendance are underdeveloped. Currently the institution is not able compare in-year retention and attendance rates with those of the previous year. New systems in the process of being implemented should provide a baseline for future monitoring.

At Newton Rigg there are effective on-line arrangements for monitoring students' attendance at lessons. A retention officer then follows up students not attending regularly. At Brampton Road arrangements for recording and monitoring attendance using management information are not well developed.

Quality of education and training (KQ2, KQ3, KQ4)

The quality improvement plan for 2007/08 has drawn together the issues identified in both of the self assessment reports into one set of actions for all of the FE provision. What progress has the college made in the following improvement actions:

- Implementing consistent arrangements across the provision for observing teaching and learning

Arrangements to assure the quality of teaching and learning are sound although they are more embedded at Newton Rigg than at Brampton Road campus. The University is working to bring together different systems for observation of teaching drawing on best inspectorate and teacher training practice. Teachers welcome the focus on students' learning and attainment and the prompt actions taken to support improvement. In future the target is that all teachers will be observed annually. New staff are supported well through several observations during their probationary year. Whilst some progress has been made in sharing and moderating practice with other colleges and specialist consultants, the grades awarded to some lessons are overly generous and not fully supported by the evidence. Not all observations take sufficient account of trends in students' attendance, punctuality and retention. The University has yet to explore the relationship between the quality of its teaching and learning and student progress and success.

- Increasing the effective use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning

Some progress has been made recently in improving the availability and use of ILT. Staff report that they have better access to training opportunities. For example, initial training in the use of the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) has taken place at Newton Rigg. Investment in more data projectors in classrooms is helping teachers to use a wider variety of learning techniques and materials. However, access to and use of the VLE is still very new. Although there are some good examples of performing arts students developing their own website, and music students producing a group CD, more needs to be done to ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop their key skills as an integrated aspect of vocational programmes. Some teachers require more help in identifying opportunities to develop key skills in lessons.

- Reviewing and extending the range of provision available at levels 1 and 2

Programme directors and course leaders have reviewed the range of provision in all programme areas. At Newton Rigg some progress has been made in introducing better progression opportunities for students at entry level and levels 1 and 2. This is helping to ensure that students enrol on courses at the appropriate level. The University sees this as a critical factor in improving its success rates. A good range of skills for life provision is offered in community venues, including ESOL programmes that are designed to meet the needs of migrant workers, and provision for travellers. Programmes for students aged 14 to 16 from local schools provide successful opportunities for them to experience vocational options, for example, in engineering.

A number of plans are in place to address gaps in the programmes offered from September 2008 and 2009. These meet LSC priorities in the development of more apprenticeships and NVQs, including delivery on employers' premises. There is the potential for some collaboration with Carlisle College over the development of level 2 provision.

- Improving the guidance and support for current students

The University has made good progress in addressing several of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspections. A larger team of learning support assistants (LSAs) support individual students in lessons. Most support is in place by the second week of the course. One-to-one support for students with particular needs such as dyslexia is well-established. All level 2 groups have an allocated LSA to provide in-class support. The academic skills centre is well attended by FE students who want to improve their study skills. A good range of specialist staff including counsellors, and a mental health adviser provide support to students on all campuses. The Early Years Centre offers 47 places to support students' childcare needs. Enhanced marketing has led to improved awareness by students of support services available at Brampton road.

The University recognises the need to unify practice in the use of diagnostic assessment tools and the arrangements to follow up students' individual learning needs across the two sites. Analysis and evaluation of the take-up and impact of additional learning support is not carried out. The University believes that improvements in the support provided have led to better monitoring of students' attendance and increased retention but there is no statistical data to support this claim. Student services managers recognise the need for closer working with academic staff and the need to align their annual monitoring activities. The use of standardised individual learning plans is underdeveloped. Currently the guidance and support services for apprentices are offered separately through the School of Vocational Studies.

Leadership and management (KQ5)

The college has identified the need to harmonise quality assurance procedures between the legacy institutions as an action for 2007/08. What progress has been made in addressing the following?

- Implementing consistent arrangements for self assessment and course review

In the short life of the University a vision for the FE provision is emerging that recognises and aims to build upon the contribution the former institutions made to increasing participation in Higher Education. This is supported by

board directors who bring useful prior experience of the FE sector to the process of setting the educational character and mission for the provision.

The University has made some key early decisions and has prioritised investment in the provision. A new post of Head of FE and Vocational Skills was created and an appointment made to the role of a manager from outside of the organisation with relevant experience. Existing best practice from within the institution in the area of quality improvement has been identified and is being utilised to develop more consistent arrangements for quality assurance.

Work has taken place to implement an appropriate meeting and reporting structure for the FE provision. Two new sub-committees of the academic board have been formed, an FE planning committee and a quality and standards committee. The latter has a key role in validating the self-assessment report and underpinning evidence, including the outcomes from observations of teaching and feedback on the views of students. Beneath these committees there is a clearly defined meeting structure for the FE provision offered at the Newton Rigg campus. However, the provision at Brampton Road sits outside of this meeting structure.

Arrangements for self-assessment are in the process of being reviewed and revised to build on best practice. It is planned that the new arrangements will be in operation from June 2008. The current self-assessment report of the provision offered in 2006/07 is made up of the two reports from the former organisations. They do not accurately identify some underperforming courses, the low success rates in aspects of work-based learning and the issues associated with low levels of key skills accreditation, as key areas for improvement.

- Increasing the use of data to monitor and improve the provision

Building upon the systems being used at Newton Rigg consistent approaches for data capture and reporting are being implemented across the two sites to help to ensure that managers have accurate management information to support improvement. In future, kite-marked software will be used to present information on in-year retention and success rates for all of the provision. The data from the two former institutions are in the process of being merged to provide information in a consistent format to support judgements made in the SAR for 2007/08. Course managers' understanding and use of

management information varies considerably and there is much work to be done to ensure that all staff understand and have ownership of the key performance data for their courses.

- Implementing arrangements for performance management

Course leaders spoken to during the visit reported that new guidance is providing clarity about their roles and responsibilities in relation to quality improvement. For example, recently introduced systems such as 'Meeting our targets' introduced at Newton Rigg in January 2008 are beginning to provide a structure for target-setting and performance management.

What action has the University taken to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are safeguarded?

The University applies thorough and rigorous procedures to assure that children and vulnerable adults are safeguarded. All staff, including temporary staff, have criminal record bureau (CRB) checks and these are enhanced for those working most directly with children and young people. The University has ensured that there is a team of trained staff with clear roles and responsibilities, including a principal safeguarding officer, a network of safeguarding officers who cover all campuses, and a safeguarding working group. Good links exist with the safeguarding board for Cumbria and the independent safeguarding authority. All staff have received initial training. The strong warden team supported by cleaners and domestic staff ensure that any concerns about residential students are rapidly identified and followed up. There are appropriate risk assessments for the use of workshops. The rigour of vetting procedures for work placements with employers, an area for improvement at the last inspection, has now been satisfactorily addressed.