MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Forster Community College
Date of visit: 12 May 2008

Context

Forster Community College (FCC), formerly known as Bradford Cathedral Centre is a voluntary and community sector provider. This monitoring visit follows the inspection in June 2007, which focused on FCC's adult and community learning and its Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provision in information and communication technology, arts, media and publishing and preparation for life and work. During the inspection, FCC's other provision in neighbourhood learning in deprived communities, entry to employment (E2E), youth and environmental programmes and preparation for employment were inspected but not graded. Since the inspection funding from West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has increased. Approximately 41% of FCC provision is now funded through the LSC and 21% is through the DWP.

At the previous inspection, all aspects of the provision were satisfactory. However, equality of opportunity was good.

FCC still offers provision in seven sector subject areas, but it has updated some courses. Since then, although the numbers of learners have stayed approximately the same, more learners have progressed onto level 2 and level 3 courses.

Achievement and standards

Have the performance rates of learners in ACL and DWP programmes been further improved?	Reasonable progress

It is too early to make a judgement on achievement or overall success rates for most programmes. However, success rates on short courses have improved, from 57% in 2006/07 to 70%. Retention rates for 2007/08 on adult learning programmes have improved. Retention rates on health, public services and care programmes have improved from 54% in 2006/07 to 80% in 2007/08. Retention rates on business administration and law courses have improved from 78% to 93% during the same period. E2E learners' positive progression rates are 62% compared to the target of the local E2E partnership of 51%.

Quality of provision

Have the arrangements for the recording, analysis and use of learners' achievement data improved?	Reasonable progress

Staff meet monthly to discuss learners' recruitment, retention and achievement. This meeting has been very effective in monitoring data and developing systems to improve learners' performance. Clear and good targets in the quality improvement plan relating to the implementation of a new management information system have been, or are on target to be, completed for July 2008. A good range of information about learners' progress is now in place that is understood by all staff. Communication between tutors and staff responsible for the management information system is very good. The system now produces accurate data on retention, achievement and success rates for senior managers. However, course leaders currently have insufficient access to this information. Satisfactory plans are in place to extend access to course leaders in September.

What progress has been made in improving target-setting and progress reviews for learners?	Insufficient progress

Since the previous inspection FCC has improved initial advice, guidance and recruitment arrangements to ensure that learners are enrolled on the most appropriate programmes. In some programmes learners take part in an introductory session to help them make the right choice of courses. Course leaders are working on improvements to target-setting and reviews with many changes already in place. On some courses, targets are now more precise and timely. E2E learners benefit from clear targets and appropriate support to achieve them. Course leaders share and implement new developments in target setting and progress review practices. However, not all sector subject areas have progressed to the same level of effectiveness. The developments have not yet been consolidated into company policy and quality assurance systems. This is recognised by senior managers.

Leadership and management

What steps has been taken to improve operational management?	Reasonable progress

FCC has made reasonable progress in improving many aspects of its management. Following a comprehensive review, it has restructured to improve its provision and financial management. Staff roles and responsibilities are more clearly defined than in the previous inspection and better meet the needs of learners and the organisation. Staff have better awareness of their areas of responsibility and are more accountable for the performance of their courses. Managers monitor the delivery of the provision more effectively. FCC has successfully introduced measures to eradicate its financial deficit and is now projected to have a small surplus. It has

prioritised and allocated appropriate resources to implement a new management information system. FCC is using a range of funds more effectively to support learners. It monitors the effectiveness of each course in more detail and has developed sound arrangements to discontinue courses which have low success rates or do not improve the performance of the learners. FCC closely monitors the performance of its staff and takes effective actions when issues arise. However, it is too early to assess the impact of some of these arrangements.

Has the implementation of FCC's quality assurance arrangements improved?	Insufficient progress

Implementation of quality assurance arrangements was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Since then FCC has developed comprehensive procedures for the observation of teaching and learning. It has made satisfactory arrangements to train eight staff to observe teaching sessions, which includes a number of joint observations. However this new system has not been implemented, and is scheduled for summer 2008. FCC has progressed well to establish a learner forum, which is used more effectively to improve the provision. Staff are better involved in developing quality arrangements and regular meetings are used effectively to identify areas for improvements and share good practice. However, the quality procedures are insufficiently detailed and do not set clear criteria and standards for the main aspects of the learning process. FCC has not fully defined and implemented procedures for monitoring the quality of some significant aspects of the training processes such as learners' individual learning plans or progress reviews. An audit process for aspects of training has been established, but this process is insufficiently linked to the quality system.

Is the self-assessment process more inclusive and the development plan used more effectively?	Reasonable progress

FCC has made sufficient progress in improving the self-assessment process. The process is now more inclusive with staff, learners and some employers contributing well. FCC consults staff particularly well and actively involves them in the production of the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report is clearly written and includes a range of evidence to support its judgements. Some aspects of the self-assessment are satisfactorily evaluative and well considered. However, some of the identified strengths in the sector subject areas are normal practice, and insufficiently consider the affect on learners. FCC's development plan, which is based on its self-assessment, is very thorough and detailed with clear arrangements for the monitoring of actions. The implementation of the plan and the post-inspection action plan is carefully monitored.