

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

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This feedback contains brief findings from the monitoring visit. It focuses on the issues explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the institution's performance.

Achievement and standards (KQ1)

How well have students achieved overall since the last inspection and in the most recent year of 2006/07?

Historically, the faculty has used course level data as a basis for self-assessment. Using kite marked software, very recently installed, managers are now able to look at an overview of students' performance, with the potential to produce much more sophisticated reports to support self-assessment and improvement planning. An overview of success rates on long courses over the last two years shows a mixed picture, with improvement at level 1, a dip at level 2 and a small improvement at level 3. The overall success rate for long courses is just below average. Of 13 substantive long courses, a comparison with the previous year shows improvement and above average success rates in just over half, but a decline and below average rates in 5. Where success rates are below average, this is largely due to low retention. Retention rates of current second year students on level 3 animal and equine courses due to complete their courses in summer 2008 are low. However, retention of first year students on these courses is much improved. There is currently no evaluation of value-added or distance travelled measures, nor is it possible to consider the success rates of different groups of learners by age, gender or ethnicity. This is largely as a result of the limitations of the management information system, which is currently being updated.

Whilst data showing key skills success rates for 2005/06 are inaccurate, they are accurate for 2006/07. Data show poor success rates in almost all subjects at levels 1 and 2 with almost no enrolments at level 3. Pupils from

schools are very successful on their courses and the impact of the faculty's work in encouraging them to progress to full-time courses or to stay on at school and consider higher education options post advanced level is very positive. A progression rate of 58% is high.

Much of the faculty's work is in the provision of short courses, especially in food manufacture and technology at the Holbeach campus. It was not possible to consider an overview of performance at the time of the visit. Success rates are mixed for these courses. Some large courses have high success rates, such as basic and intermediate food hygiene and ESOL for the food industry. However, for about half of courses, albeit in some cases with small numbers of students, rates are below the national average.

On work-based learning courses, the trend across a 3 year period indicates that both framework and/or NVQ completion is improving but not as fast as the rate of improvement seen nationally. Timely completion of frameworks is also improving. Success rates improved to 53% in 2006/07, 6 percentage points below average. Timely completion has increased dramatically to 45%, 5 percentage points above average. Advanced apprentices outperform apprentices.

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

What actions have been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and target setting since the last inspection?

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection. The faculty's observation scheme is used effectively to provide evidence about the quality of lessons and to support improvement. Useful summaries identifying strengths and weaknesses are produced promptly and used effectively to inform staff development activities. Moderation arrangements for observations have been considerably strengthened and the process is far more established and valued by teachers. It is increasingly providing a springboard for sharing good practice. The faculty has undertaken useful and productive collaborative work to improve teaching with other linked colleges.

Observations, which are unannounced over a 3 week period, are already completed for 2007/08. The profile of grades shows an improvement in the amount of good or better lessons and in particular those graded outstanding. No teaching graded unsatisfactory. There appears to be no correlation between the quality of teaching and courses where performance is lower than average, however, managers recognise that this requires further scrutiny.

Improvements have been made to assessment and verification procedures, including greater use of formative assessment of practical skills. Target setting is now used more effectively to motivate students. Minimum grades based on prior attainment are established, although the effective use of these grades and associated targets varies in tutorials. Most students are aware of their progress and feel well informed about what they need to do to improve.

They consider the support and help given to them are good and the level of challenge is realistic and sufficient.

How has the curriculum developed within the faculty?

A broad curriculum has been maintained covering the main areas of land-based provision and food manufacture and technology. The college is the only specialist provider of land-based courses in the county. Work-based learning and provision for 14 to 16 year olds has grown and become established. The response to the needs of employers is strong, especially in the area of food technology and manufacture. In particular, courses for immigrant workers from Eastern Europe to support their language skills have been developed in close consultation with the food industry. The college is leading on the land-based diploma bid within the county along with several clusters of schools, and contributing to specialist diploma in the food industry set to run in September 2009. Work-based learning provision remains underdeveloped and is not yet well integrated into subject areas at Riseholme. Numbers in learning remain low.

What progress has the faculty made in responding to the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) themes?

The faculty has responded positively to the ECM themes. Self-assessment includes evaluation of provision relating to these themes but does not yet measure the impact on students effectively. An analysis to identify any gaps in the faculty's response has been usefully undertaken, but this has not yet extended to mapping themes into the curriculum to ensure full coverage. There are a considerable number of activities and promotions that cover aspects of healthy lifestyles and safety. Students make an increasingly valuable contribution to university life, especially now that the student council has been reinstated and is operating so effectively. Evidence to support their contribution to the wider community is less strong. Students consider themselves generally fit and knowledgeable about health.

Leadership and management (KQ5)

How has the department responded to issues of equality and diversity and social and educational inclusion?

At the last inspection, the promotion of equality and diversity was judged as insufficiently developed and a key area for improvement. The faculty recognises that progress with strategies for promoting equality and diversity has been slow. Recent changes to legislation are not yet reflected in the equality and diversity action plan, staff development has been limited and data are not used systematically to identify and measure performance of different groups.

The faculty's response to educational and social inclusion was also judged

unsatisfactory at the last inspection. Whilst there is no specific evaluation of social and educational inclusion through self-assessment, there is plenty of evidence of where the faculty is enabling access and promoting participation by under-represented or non-traditional groups. The inclusive ethos of the university supports students with a wide range of ability on entry and specific courses are tailored to meet needs, such as in supporting language and basic skill development.

How effectively are managers and teachers using performance data to raise levels of achievement?

Managers and teachers use data available to them increasingly productively. They have effective monitoring and tracking systems in place to support learners' progress. Retention is monitored rigorously and more timely intervention now takes place. Course level data are used to reflect on past performance but not to set targets to raise levels of learner performance. Data at course level are well presented and national rates are appropriately used for comparison. The level of attendance reported at the last inspection was 79%. In 2006/07 on-line registration was further developed and attendance for full-time students was 94% and part-time 90%, representing a significant improvement.

How effective are quality assurance procedures, including self-assessment?

At the last inspection, quality assurance procedures were evolving and self-assessment was judged as insufficiently rigorous. Quality assurance is now much improved and comprehensive. However, formalising the accountability of subject leaders for some aspects, such as the quality assurance of individual learning plans, is underdeveloped. Self-assessment is detailed and completed promptly. The move to self-assessment by sector subject areas is sound and has increased ownership of provision and outcomes by middle managers. These reports are full with a number of examples of thorough analysis and evaluation. However, a sharper focus is needed overall. In particular, to ensure that judgements are fully justified and clear for each overall key aspect, and that evaluation is of success rather than pass or retention rates. Grading of achievement and standards, based on the most recent full set of performance data, is over generous. There is too little evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning contained in the report.