

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Lakes College, West Cumbria  
Date of visit: Monday 21 April 2008

### Context

Lakes College is a medium-sized general further education college located on the west coast of Cumbria between Workington and Whitehaven. The college draws its students from a wide geographical area. It operates predominantly from a modern, purpose-built site with additional buildings for construction just under half a mile away. The main catchment area falls within the district of Cumbria and includes the boroughs of Copeland and Allerdale, with a population of around 170,000. Much of the area is sparsely populated and has pockets of socio-economic deprivation. Unemployment rates are lower than the national average. The college is a part of the Cumbria Colleges Collaboration initiated in 2002, which includes all four of the regional general further education colleges. Since the previous inspection, a new principal has been appointed and a new college structure was introduced in September 2007.

### Achievement and standards

Has the college continued to make progress in improving success rates for 16-18 year olds?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to build on the improved success rates for 16-18 year olds identified at the annual assessment visit in June 2007. Overall, long course success rates for this group of learners improved significantly in 2006/07. However, national vocational qualification success rates for 16-18 year olds fell in 2006/07.

Success rates for adults on long courses are above national averages at all levels, but at levels 1 and 2 they were lower in 2006/07 than in the previous year. However, level 3 success rates have improved each year and are significantly above the national average.

Short course success rates in 2006/07 improved for 16-18 year olds, but fell for adults, although both are above the national average. Overall, key skills success rates have risen from 40% to 66% over the past three years. Success rates for 14-16 year olds taking vocational programmes in 2005/06 and 2006/07 were 82% in both years.

In work-based learning, overall success rates have improved over the past three years, but have not matched improvements in national averages. In 2006/07 overall success rates for work-based learning were around the national average. For

apprentices they were slightly below the national average. Success rates for Train to Gain in 2006/07 were 78%. In 2007/08 success rates are currently 34%, with the potential for 92% to complete successfully.

Inspectors found that the national averages used by the college, generated by its management information software were, in many cases, different from those in the college performance report. This included average success rates for work-based learning.

### Quality of provision

Has further progress been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the small number of less effective lessons, and developing the wider use of information learning technology across the college?	Significant progress
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The college has introduced subject learning coaches in all sector subject areas. They support teachers and promote the use of Standards Unit resources, as well as help develop further teaching resources. In some cases, for example mathematics, these resources have been used across many sector subject areas.

Results from observations of teaching and learning during 2006/07 show a slight increase in good or better teaching from 68% in 2005/06 to 69% in 2006/07. The observations to date in 2007/08 show a significant increase in the proportion of good or better teaching to 78%, with the proportion of outstanding sessions doubling in the period. The proportion of inadequate sessions has remained low at around 2%.

The results of teaching and learning observations are thoroughly analysed and a detailed report is produced identifying key strengths and areas for improvement across the college as well as for individual sector subject areas. This has led to focused staff development to drive improvement. Evidence indicates that learners experience more interesting and challenging activities in many lessons, and greater use is made of information and learning technology in lessons in motor vehicle engineering, sport and hairdressing.

The observation of teaching and learning grades are moderated through the use of paired observations with collaborating colleges, and by the adoption of common observation documentation. Observations now take place in a shorter timescale and more tutors are taking advantage of pre-observation meetings to ensure they understand the process and can maximise their performance.

Has further progress been made in improving the use of individual learning plans and target-setting for learners?	Reasonable progress
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The college is developing a virtual management environment for learners. This links to the management information system, and is currently focused on the tutorial

system. It is planned that by the end of the current academic year, pastoral tutorial records will be online and easily accessible. It is intended that this will be expanded to cover all tutorials, reports and individual learning plans during 2008/09. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these measures.

Staff development has taken place in the setting of specific and measurable targets, and the impact of this training is monitored during teaching and learning observations. The full analysis of the 2007/08 lesson observations is not yet complete. However, lesson observations during 2006/07 still found areas for improvement in target-setting and in the use of individual learning plans.

The teaching and learning leader has provided individual support for academic staff on the use of new documentation for sector subject area individual learning plans. This documentation is well established on the pathways programme and in mathematics, but is less well established in other areas. In hospitality, tutors have combined one of the softer key skills (improving own learning and performance) with the learners' individual learning plans which has worked well.

What changes have been made to the range of provision since the previous inspection (including planned changes)?	Significant progress
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The range of provision has improved, and further changes are planned. An introductory level 'quick service' qualification has been introduced in catering and hospitality for learners wishing to progress to level 1 food preparation and level 1 food service. In collaboration with other Cumbrian colleges, the college was successful in obtaining the FEAST (food excellence and skills training) contract which involves delivering a range of healthy eating programmes aimed at improving the health awareness of school pupils.

In leisure, travel and tourism, courses are now offered below level 3. Level 1 introductory diplomas have been introduced across the whole programme area. In addition, a level 2 first diploma has been introduced in travel and tourism. The college plans to offer individual units from this course as additional qualifications to other learners across the college. Engineering has also introduced lower level courses; a certificate in manufacturing at entry level 3; and performing engineering operations at level 1 and level 2. Provision is well thought out and monitored through course reviews. An increased range of access to higher education programmes have been introduced, along with new foundation degrees.

## Leadership and management

Have the changes to the college's organisational structure, including the management of key skills and literacy and numeracy, been fully implemented and have they led to improvements?	Reasonable progress
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The college is approaching the end of an academic year in which many staffing and structural changes have been introduced. These include, for example, the implementation of a new pay structure and staff appraisal system; the reduction in the number of sector subject area faculties from three to two; the appointment of programme area managers and course leaders to manage the provision within faculties; and a greater strategic focus on external relations, including the appointment of a new assistant principal with this responsibility. Staff and managers see the new structure as better focused, with more supportive management structures.

The college continues to make progress in improving the quality of its key skill and skills for life provision, with further staff development for these areas and improved monitoring of learners' progress. At the overall college level, achievements of key skills have improved each year for the past three years. However, the impact of some recent changes is not yet evident. The college structure diagram is very detailed and comprehensive. It clearly identifies line management responsibilities, but does not clearly identify job roles or functional groups, and links between the diagrams are not clear.

Has further progress been made in improving the consistency with which quality assurance procedures are used across the college, and the use of management information?	Reasonable progress
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The restructuring, which was introduced from September 2007, has ensured that more staff are actively involved in the quality improvement process, particularly in course review and evaluation. Strategies are in place to ensure better identification of common areas for improvement, clearer action-planning, and improved staff development. Action-planning is carried out at whatever level is appropriate, for example, in information technology, where all courses have benefited from more intense support and closer monitoring.

Staff development has included training in college management information systems for newly appointed programme area managers and course leaders. Reports from the management information systems are now more closely tailored to the needs of sector subject area managers. The college recognises that it will take time for some changes to fully impact on the learners, but analysis of recent learner surveys shows a generally improving trend in feedback, with less variability in learners' responses to questions.

Has the college maintained the improved management of work-based learning identified at the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to develop its work-based learning provision. However, overall success rates are no better than national averages on both apprentice and advanced apprentice programmes. The college has performed better against work-based learning financial targets in the current year.

Communications are now good between work-based learning managers and the vocational areas. Monthly work-based learning programme area meetings are effective in monitoring success rates, identifying risks and areas of concern. Detailed individual progress reports are discussed each week between individual training advisers and the work-based learning project officer. The college has a clear focus on improving performance but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the more recent initiatives.