

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Beaumont College
Date of visit: 18 September 2008

Context

Beaumont College is located on the northern edge of the city of Lancaster. It provides for learners aged 16-25 with physical difficulties and/or complex learning difficulties. The college is owned by Scope, a national charity focusing on the needs of people with cerebral palsy. Beaumont offers both residential and non-residential programmes for 75 young people between the ages of 16 and 25 years, 23 of whom attend on a daily basis. In recent years the college has attracted an increasing number of learners with complex needs.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made on improving learner achievements?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress on improving learner achievements. Learners with communication difficulties continue to significantly improve their self-expression. The person-centred approach continues to ensure that learners make good progress in confidence, communication, social and life skills, and behaviour management. Since September 2007/08, the speech and language therapists and behaviour specialists have been members of the curriculum forum, which has promoted a more integrated approach to supporting learners to achieve.

The college has increasingly focused on the use of accredited qualifications where this is appropriate to the needs of learners. In 2007/08, 14 learners achieved an Arts Award. In the current year 23 learners are enrolled on this programme. Five learners achieved a higher education (HE) certificate worth 20 credits in creative and performing arts. A strong partnership with the University of Cumbria supported the development of this award. Plans are in place for 10 learners to enrol on this course in the current year. Three learners achieved numeracy level 1 through attendance at the Lancaster Adult College and 23 third year learners are attending for a range of other courses. A project has recently been developed in partnership with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) for learners to collaborate with HE learners to further develop their dance skills.

The number of learners with the opportunity to develop work place skills has increased. In 2006/07, 36 learners had external work placements. At the start of the current academic year 26 learners are on work placement already, of whom 16 are on external and 10 are on internal placements. Learners' success on work placement is well celebrated through college certification.

What progress has been made on implementing the principles of recognising and recording of progress and achievement?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress on implementing the principles of the recognition and recording of learners' progress and achievement in non-accredited learning (RARPA). The implementation of the RARPA framework is greatly enhanced by the further development of the management information system. Staff have received significant training to develop their skills in RARPA, including setting clear targets and evaluation. Review of a sample of learner management information system records indicates an overall improvement in target-setting and recording of learner achievement. However, some examples indicate that recording of progress still requires further development. The recent revision of the personal development core curriculum aims to support staff in setting appropriate and developmental targets. However, it is too soon to assess its overall effectiveness. Plans are in place to include the recording of learners' progress and achievement for personal development in the management information system by spring 2009.

Quality of provision

What support is given to tutors to improve the proportion of good or better teaching?	Significant progress
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Tutors receive significant support to improve the proportion of good or better teaching. A clear structure of regular briefings, management and staff meetings is now established. A thorough process of observation of teaching and learning clearly identifies areas for improvement. The college has a significant focus on increasing staff skills and expertise and a wide range of staff development is in place. In 2007/08, staff development included generic training on cross-college initiatives such as equal opportunities, embedding skills for life, development of the self-assessment report, RARPA, target-setting and use of the management information system, as well as a wide range of specialist training related to the specific needs of learners. Such examples include language development, behaviour training and autism. One member of staff is taking an 18 month intensive interaction co-ordinator's course to become an advanced practitioner within the college to support the development of staff skills.

An initiative for developing essential professional skills for curriculum staff was introduced in 2007/08. This is co-ordinated by the curriculum forum and involves

two-week themed training every term that includes a process of training, practise, reflection and further training to ensure enhanced learning. The first theme related to using intensive interaction with learners. The next theme will focus on improving staff skills in supporting learners who use alternative and augmentative devices. The college has appointed lead tutors who support staff across the education department. Monthly education team meetings involve the lead tutor, subject tutors and learning support staff. The curriculum forum monitors the outcomes of these meetings and has led directly to the development of written standards for all curriculum and learning support staff.

What progress has been made in developing the curriculum?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in developing the curriculum to meet the needs of learners. Learners now make individual choices from a range of curriculum options. The college has a significant focus on developing external links to maximise participation in the community and provide access to a wider curriculum range to benefit learners. This includes links with the Lancaster Adult College, UCLAN, the University of Cumbria and the Arts Council. Learners have access to the HE certificate in arts, the Arts Award, skills for life and other relevant qualifications. Some learners will be developing their dance skills alongside UCLAN learners. Clear plans are in place to develop a national environmental award in collaboration with the local community. A member of staff is currently taking training to co-ordinate this project. The annual arts festival was enhanced in summer 2008, through Arts Council funding which was used to increase the number and specialisms of the artists in residence to work with the learners.

A detailed and comprehensive three-year skills for life strategy and action plan are now in place. The skills for life co-ordinator is now part of the observation of teaching and learning team. Recent changes to the personal development core curriculum links skills for life targets with small steps of progress at pre-entry level. It is too soon to assess the effectiveness of its implementation.

The restructure of the programme areas with the appointment of lead tutors has allowed time for programme managers to develop further links in the community during this current year. Interdisciplinary working in the curriculum is now strengthened by the inclusion of speech and language therapists, behaviour specialists and the workforce development manager in the curriculum forum. Another project focuses on developing the use of laptop computers as communication aids and to integrate technology in the curriculum for those learners with more complex needs. The communication team is now more closely involved in curriculum developments.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made on developing the annual quality improvement cycle?	Significant progress
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The college has a significant focus on continuous improvement. A comprehensive annual cycle and quality assurance framework are in place. Staff are reminded regularly of the current and forthcoming actions required. The senior management team carefully monitors the implementation of the quality cycle. A quality focus group is being established with a focus on monitoring and further developing the quality improvement systems. Curriculum and learning support tutors now have written standards for their roles which are clearly linked to the observation of teaching and learning. Observation of teaching and learning is thorough and the observation team has an ongoing cycle of training and development. A sample of the outcomes of observation is moderated. College data indicates that 93% of sessions observed are good or better. The college feels that through a thorough moderation process the proportion of outstanding lessons at 40% is realistic in comparison with 57% in 2007. Structured plans are in place to extend the observation process to personal development sessions delivered in residences and in the community. External links with the regional Independent Specialist College network for peer review are well-established through participation in the teaching and learning forum.

What developments have taken place to strengthen the college's capacity to improve?	Significant progress
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The college's capacity to improve remains good. Scope has reviewed and strengthened its governance arrangements, its strategic vision and focus for its services. A services committee has been established which has increased the college's accountability to Scope. An experienced and senior Scope trustee is linked to the College and reports to the Scope Board. Scope continues to provide good support as well as funding for refurbishment in the college. All residential accommodation is now refurbished. Scope and the college have a significant focus on leadership development. The principal is a member of Scope's leadership group, which is developing standards for service delivery, as well as leadership principles and behaviours. The college is implementing an initiative for developing leadership at middle and senior management level. This is in partnership with staff from Lancaster University who will provide individual mentoring and coaching for managers to develop their leadership and management skills. Discussions are still ongoing with the Learning and Skills Council for re-development capital funding.

Senior managers continue to take the college forward with clear vision and strategic purpose. This includes a well-defined strategy for developing strong external links for broadening the curriculum, developing transition opportunities, and establishing the college's place in the local arts community. Scope and the college have established a project, Scope Inc. Northwest to develop lifelong community support services. This service, which the college manages, involves trained community teams supporting learners from transition into their home community. Two ex-learners are supported

to access their local community services and further develop their independence. Another initiative involves establishing a social enterprise. A project worker has been appointed and is working with staff to identify opportunities for enterprise development. The Powerful Voices Network project held a seminar at the college for young disabled people, their families and professionals to discuss and examine the issues faced at transition.

College data indicates that the quality of teaching and learning continues to improve. Moderation of observation processes is now more thorough. The revised curriculum team structure with the appointment of lead tutors has a clear focus on improving communication and support for staff. Three new specialist arts tutors have been appointed. Interdisciplinary working has improved through revision of the curriculum forum. The college has achieved the recently introduced Customer Service Excellence Award.