

Doncaster College

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130526

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Last day of inspection: 30 September 2009

Type of provider: General Further Education college

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Doncaster College is a large general further education college situated in the metropolitan borough of Doncaster in South Yorkshire. The main campus of the college is the waterfront development in the centre of Doncaster, 'The Hub', which opened in September 2006. The University Centre, Doncaster is the college's second campus which is at High Melton, six miles west of Doncaster. The college is the major provider of post-compulsory education for the residents of Doncaster and is a regional and national centre for a number of specialist courses. It offers programmes from foundation to postgraduate degree level. Further education courses are provided in all of the 15 sector subject areas.

The most recent inspection report was published in December 2008. The college was judged to be satisfactory in overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, quality of provision and leadership and management. Achievement and standards were judged to be inadequate. Of the seven subject areas inspected, engineering; construction; information and communication technology; languages, literature and culture; and business administration and law were judged to be satisfactory. Provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy was judged to be good. Provision in sport, travel and tourism was judged to be inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has been made in improving the quality of curriculum area self-assessment reports?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection identified that the accuracy of self-assessment at curriculum level needed to be developed further. Self-assessment is now more thorough and makes better use of data to support the judgements made. The process is now consistent across subject areas. The procedures and documentation provide a good framework within which appropriate and relevant judgements are made. Curriculum area reports make good use of course review to provide much of the evidence and now present a critical and realistic assessment of the provision. Programme area self-assessments do not make sufficient use of learner views and comments as supporting evidence. Self-assessment reports contain a description of how learners' views are collected but do not use the outcomes to support self-assessment judgements.

The consideration given to equality and diversity at curriculum level is superficial. None of the reports offer a contributory grade for equality and diversity and many

fail to mention the promotion of equality and diversity. Insufficient attention is given to the performance of different groups of learners.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has been made in improving long course success rates? Reasonable progress

Achievement and standards were judged to be inadequate at the last inspection. Since then there have been significant improvements in many long course success rates. The success rate for all long courses for 16 to 18 year olds and for adults has improved from 58% in 2006/07 to 71% in 2008/09. This is 2% below the national average for 2007/08. The college has secured similar improvements for both age groups at levels 1 and 2. Success rates at level 3 have improved marginally but with both rates around 7% below the national average they remain an area for concern.

Learners enjoy their studies and feel safe in the college and in the workplace.

Curriculum managers are not giving sufficient attention in their self-assessments to closing the achievement gap. Senior managers, in their overview of all subject areas, have identified differences in achievement between some groups of learners. These groups are usually made up of a small number of learners spread over a large number of subject areas. Consequently, curriculum managers conclude erroneously that the number of learners affected is statistically insignificant and do not recognise the issue in their self-assessments and improvement plans.

How much progress has the college made in improving low and declining success rates in sport, travel and tourism? Reasonable progress

The previous inspection identified low and declining success rates. This is no longer the case for the majority of courses. Recent data show improved success rates for most long courses with a few above national average. In 2008/09, the success rate for all long courses was in line with the national average at 73%. This was an improvement of over 11% on the previous year. However, the success rates for adults remain low on many courses. The college has developed effective strategies to address the low success rates, such as the introduction of regular performance management meetings which monitor progress and outcomes closely.

Appropriate action is taken when poor performance is identified. For example, in sports there has been a reduced offer of short courses during term time as these additional qualifications had low success rates in previous years. Learners are not disadvantaged by the reduced offer and will still be able to study for additional qualifications towards the end of the academic year.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in increasing the amount of good or better teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection it was judged that there was insufficient good or better teaching and learning. As part of its strategy to improve teaching and learning, the college has focused on improving the use of Information Learning Technology (ILT) in the classroom. It has formed good links with the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) and has obtained additional funding to support the development and increased integrated use of learning technology in classes. The development of the college virtual learning environment continues across the whole college. Individual academies are adding a wide range of content to the database. The college is replacing the previously successful ILT Champion with an Advanced Teaching Practitioner role which will support all aspects of teaching and learning including ILT.

The college provides good support for new staff to ensure that they gain a positive experience as quickly as possible. The staff toolkit and detailed induction are particularly effective in helping new staff to settle in quickly. Managers use information from lesson observations in their appraisal of staff which helps reinforce the importance of good teaching and learning. Some academies are developing a range of strategies such as peer observations with small groups of teachers, but these are not consistent across the whole college. Teachers and observers do not place sufficient emphasis on developing the promotion of equality and diversity in classes.

The college continues to develop and improve arrangements for observing teaching and learning. New observers receive appropriate support. Observations are often undertaken by two observers which help moderate grades and share good practice. All observers receive appropriate training and continuing development in the observation process and selected staff are being trained as advanced practitioners of teaching and learning. The college observation profile for 2008/09 indicated a small decrease in good or better teaching to 65%. Inspectors agree with college managers that this is a reflection of the improved, more rigorous observation process.

How much progress has the college made in improving achievement and standards in key skills in sport, travel and tourism? Insufficient progress

At the time of the last inspection, key skills success rates were low. The college has taken action to tackle this and success rates have improved slightly. Success rates have improved more in travel and tourism than in sport but they remain low and below the national average in both areas. Key skills training for staff has been insufficient. Arrangements to cover for staff absence are unsatisfactory. Many

learners do not value their key skills sessions and find them uninteresting. Learners did not find the sessions productive or relevant. Improvements are planned but not yet implemented

How much progress has the college made in improving teaching and learning at level 3 in sport, travel and tourism? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection there was insufficient challenge and variety of teaching at level 3. The self-assessment report and internal observation process still identifies this as an area for development. In the better classes there is good attention to the individual needs of learners and lessons include a good range of teaching methods. However, in the weaker lessons there still remains insufficient challenge for the more able learners and a lack of variety. In most lessons there is insufficient use of resources to enhance learning. Learners are now provided with adequate levels of support and guidance. For example, there are better recruitment arrangements in place to ensure individual learners study at an appropriate level. Taster courses, recently introduced, now give learners the valuable opportunity to experience their course before finally committing to it. Learners are set sufficient targets to support their learning. Their progress towards targets and general progress overall is monitored using a database management system. Within sports programmes learners have benefited from a more manageable timetable and improved assessment planning.

Leadership and management

How much progress has the college made in improving leadership and management? Reasonable progress

Leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection. Governance was judged to be good. Since then the corporation has continued to scrutinise reports carefully and ask searching questions about all aspects of the college's performance. Recent enquiries by governors into departures from procedure and insufficient clarity in internal reports have resulted in significant and unexpected changes in senior management. Governors remain well-informed and continue to develop a good working relationship with managers.

The recently appointed interim principal has set a clear strategic direction for the college. The well-conceived strategic and recovery plans have been produced in consultation with senior managers and funding bodies and shared with staff. The whole process has been managed effectively and it is expected that the plan will be implemented by the summer term next year.

Following the recent re-structure there are still vacancies in the senior management team. Interim arrangements are effective and the college has started the process to fill the vacant posts.

How much progress has the college made in improving the quality improvement plan in sport, travel and tourism	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection the quality improvement plan was judged to be unsatisfactory. Since then a more thorough self-assessment has given rise to a more detailed quality improvement plan. The monitoring and review of progress against actions is regularly undertaken. Managers make good use of performance data to evaluate the provision. There has been a clear focus on improving success rates with all staff given appropriate levels of accountability. However, in common with other subject area plans, there is insufficient focus on equality and diversity.

Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that teachers need further support to develop their teaching skills. For example, the self-assessment report recognises that many staff need to make better use of technology in lessons. Staff development in the use of smart boards has been set as an action point in the quality improvement plan.

Within this subject area there is a clear focus on improving learners' experiences. Improvements have followed the identification of good practice from within this and other colleges.

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