

Tyne Metropolitan College

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Tyne Metropolitan College, a medium sized general further education (GFE) college, was established in March 2005 as a result of merger between Tynemouth Sixth Form College and North Tyneside GFE College. The main campus, offering mainly vocational programmes, is located in Battle Hill, North Tyneside; the Sixth Form Academy is in North Shields. The college offers a broad curriculum in all areas of learning funded by the Learning and Skills Council for full- and part-time learners aged 16 to 18, and adults. Higher education courses are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council and are also offered in partnership with the University of Sunderland. An increasing proportion of learners are enrolled on apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes. The college's mission statement, revised in 2009, is 'to provide outstanding education and training so that students, the community and employers can succeed and prosper'.

The college was last inspected in December 2007. At that inspection the college's capacity to improve was judged to be inadequate and all other aspects were satisfactory. Provision in the sector subject areas inspected was judged to be outstanding in one, good in one, satisfactory in three and inadequate in one area, health, care and public services.

At the re-inspection monitoring visit, carried out in March 2009, capacity to improve was judged to be inadequate; provision in health, care and public services was satisfactory. Of the eight themes investigated, reasonable progress was being made in two, insufficient progress in five and no discernible progress in one.

This report, the first since the re-inspection, focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving the arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement? Reasonable progress

Self-assessment is now central to the college's drive to raise standards and has contributed to improvements in success rates and the quality of teaching and learning. The process involves all staff in using a wide range of evidence to analyse and evaluate performance in subject and support areas. Their judgements inform departmental and the whole college self-assessment reports and improvement plans. Good use is made of the results from learner surveys to inform judgements made about the quality of provision. The use of learners' views to improve quality has been strengthened recently through forums held within the college. However, insufficient

use is made of employers' views. The grades and judgements made through self-assessment are subject to rigorous moderation by college staff and external consultants prior to validation by governors. The final report is self-critical and evaluative.

Outcomes for learners, which were inadequate in 2007/08, have improved and are now satisfactory. Most of the other grades in the 2008/09 self-assessment report have remained the same as the previous year. Grades awarded by the college to subject areas now accurately reflect learners' levels of attainment. However, judgements made about the quality of teaching and learning are over-reliant on observation grade profiles. In some subject area reports there is insufficient analysis and evaluation of the quality of other aspects of the provision.

Outcomes for learners

What do data for 2008/09 show about the progress made in improving outcomes for learners? Reasonable progress

In 2008/09 there was a good improvement in the overall success rate on long courses. For learners aged 16 to 18, success rates at foundation and intermediate levels improved significantly and are now satisfactory. However, at advanced level the rate did not improve and remains low. For adult learners, success rates improved significantly at foundation and intermediate levels and are now high. At advanced level the success rate is now satisfactory. Success rates on short courses, although improved, remain low.

The GCE A-level success rate has improved and is now in line with the high sixth form college average. On GCE AS courses the rate has not improved and remains low. The proportions of learners who attain high grades at GCE AS and A level are low. Key skills success rates have improved at all levels but remain an area for improvement. Overall and timely success rates on apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships have improved and are now satisfactory. Train to Gain success rates are high.

Overall success rates have improved in most subject areas and are satisfactory. However, in information and communication technology, and social sciences they are low.

Overall retention on long courses has improved steadily over the last three years to just above the national average. Attendance has improved slightly. Retention and attendance rates in the sixth form academy are lower than the college averages.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

The college has prioritised successfully its resources and management time to improve teaching and learning. Evidence presented to inspectors supports the college's judgements that strategies are having impact, standards have improved and that much teaching and learning is now good. The observation process has been strengthened and the moderation of grades is more rigorous. Joint observations and a high number of observations carried out by external consultants are used effectively to ensure that the college makes robust judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. Subject learning coaches provide good support and mentoring for teachers whose lessons are judged to be satisfactory or inadequate. Most improve their grades at re-observation. However, arrangements for other teachers to receive the support that they need to maintain high standards are not systematic. Focused staff development and improved arrangements for sharing best practice are effective in improving standards. All teachers have one hour each week and three days per year devoted to their own learning and development. College observation records for teaching by agency staff show that the quality is not as good as that of other teachers.

Teachers increasingly make good use of information learning technology and are supporting learners to make better use of the virtual learning environment to extend their studies outside of lessons. Learners informed inspectors that they are highly satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning.

How much progress has been made in improving support for literacy and numeracy? Reasonable progress

Initial assessment to identify learners' levels of literacy and numeracy is carried out at enrolment and identifies effectively those in need of extra help. Additional support is organised promptly for most learners. Teachers and learners make referrals throughout the year and these are responded to appropriately in most cases. Learners are supported through a range of interventions including in-class, one-to-one, small group and drop-in workshops. Subject teachers and learning support assistants provide well-embedded support in all sessions for learners studying at foundation level. The Skills for Life strategy is beginning to show impact on whole college approaches to the development of literacy and numeracy.

Learning mentors provide good support for learners identified to be at risk of not completing their programmes and to help those studying at the sixth form academy to achieve their target grades. The recent appointment of a specialist dyslexia teacher has increased the range of support services available. A good range of assistive technology helps learners to overcome specific barriers to learning. Learners whose first language is not English receive appropriate language support. Although observation of support sessions has been introduced recently, the college does not

evaluate routinely the impact of support provided on learners' outcomes. Too few learning support staff are qualified to advanced level or above in literacy and numeracy.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving senior leadership?

Significant progress

Governors and managers have made significant progress in implementing actions to improve the senior leadership of the college. Following the last monitoring visit governors took decisive and very effective action to improve leadership at the most senior levels of the college. In October 2009 the new Principal took up post following a period during which an interim Principal provided strong leadership. In addition one of the two deputy principals has been replaced with an interim post holder. Much progress has been made by senior managers, with strong support from governors, to set a clear strategic direction for the college. In consultation with staff, the mission, vision and values, and a new strategic plan have been produced.

Governors have received good training to support them in understanding the changing external and local context and to improve their effectiveness in monitoring the performance of the college. They now receive much improved curriculum and financial information about the college. They have reviewed the corporation's committee structure and strengthened arrangements for performance management of senior post holders, which are now rigorous.

Communications have improved significantly. The new Principal is working in collaboration with local schools to enhance opportunities for learners to study at advanced level through sixth form partnerships. Within the college, staff at all levels are now clear about their role in achieving the strategic aims and feel that their own and learners' achievements are valued by the new senior managers.

What has been the impact of restructuring in improving arrangements for performance management?

Significant progress

Highly effective and prompt action has been taken to resolve weaknesses in the management structure that were highlighted at the last monitoring visit. Governors and senior managers have implemented a substantial restructure, and a complete re-organisation of curriculum management, exceptionally well. The new organisational structure has resolved weaknesses in decision-making processes and improved team working and the sharing of best practice. The roles and responsibilities of staff at all levels have been clearly defined as part of the restructure and are linked effectively to the college's raising achievement strategy. Staff are clear about their accountabilities and procedures for performance management have improved significantly. Line management arrangements are understood by staff. Individual staff performance is reviewed through regular one-to-one meetings which focus on improving the quality of the experience provided for learners. The college is aware of

the need to use a wider range of performance indicators to evaluate and improve the performance of teachers and managers. Arrangements for monitoring performance against curriculum and financial targets have been introduced through regular business and curriculum review meetings. These hold managers to account for their performance against key performance indicators and have increased their management skills and capabilities.

How much progress have managers made in improving the weak financial position? Reasonable progress

Managers have made reasonable progress in implementing actions to improve the financial position of the college. Restructure has realigned senior accountability appropriately and new managers have been appointed with relevant external experience in the area of financial control. Much improved arrangements for business and curriculum planning have ensured that the college is able to set targets for learner numbers based upon sound information. Good training and support is provided for managers to assist them in these processes. The curriculum restructure has substantially reduced staff costs and improved arrangements for budget management. Additional management controls have improved planning and monitoring of partnership contracts. Management accounts for budget holders and reports to governors now enable staff at all levels to monitor and control the financial position of the college. The college has achieved a target set by the corporation to reduce staff costs as a proportion of income to become in line with the sector average and is on target at the half year point to achieve a break-even operating position for 2009/10. However, legacy financial issues continue to provide challenges for working capital management. Senior managers are taking proactive action, in discussion with national bodies, to resolve these challenges.

What progress has been made in implementing actions to resolve weaknesses in the college's capacity to improve? Reasonable progress

Reasonable progress has been made to resolve weaknesses in the college's capacity to improve. Governors and senior leaders now have a clear understanding of the underlying causes of underperformance in the curriculum and in financial management. They have provided strong direction and support to staff at all levels to take ownership for their roles in improving the services provided for learners and the communities that the college serves. Governors have been provided with useful training to support them in carrying out their roles. They now receive comprehensive information which allows them to monitor progress against strategic targets and to challenge the performance of senior managers. Arrangements for self-assessment are central to the college's drive for improvement. The impact of actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning can now be seen in good improvements in success rates in 2008/09. New arrangements for course reviews were introduced recently that identify clearly the criteria for success. The college recognises that more work is needed to embed these processes so that they support consistent improvements across all subjects. The new management structure that was implemented quickly and efficiently has resolved the issues raised at the last visit.

Arrangements for financial management have improved. Governors now have confidence in senior managers and in the pace of improvement.

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