

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Bishop Auckland
Date of visit: 9 October 2006

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit (AAV). It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

At the last annual assessment visit success rates for 16 to 18 year olds were reported to be improving at all levels. Has this improvement been maintained?

- Success rates for 16 to 18 year olds have continued to improve slightly year on year for the past three years and are satisfactory. The success rate for level 1 qualifications has risen from 49% in 2002/03 to 62% for 2004/05. The rate of improvement is slightly better than the yearly increases in the national average that currently stands at 69%. At level 2 the rates from 2002/03 have risen from 48% to 60% for 2004/05 and this is almost equal to the national average at 62%. At level 3 the rates from 2002/03 have risen from 49% to 58%, but this is still well below the national average at 67%.

The quality improvement plan identifies actions to monitor and review retention, achievement and success rates across the curriculum. How effective have these actions been?

- The college is effective in its monitoring and review of achievement, retention and success rates. A key factor in the college's effectiveness in 2005/06 is the improvement in data handling across the college. A new management information system has been introduced and is available to all staff through their laptops. Curriculum programme leaders report that they are much better informed about the performance of their areas. The senior management team also now receive reports every two weeks about performance across the college. This allows quicker intervention in areas requiring improvement. The learner profile and individual learning plan are improved and now incorporate prior achievement, average point score, initial screening and diagnosis. There is greater consistency of documentation and information across the college. There has been extensive staff development in the setting and use of challenging targets.
- Key skills' achievement continues to improve and has increased by 11 points to 46% in 2005/06. There has also been increased work with parents and use of learning mentors. Project work for example in the use of information and

communication technology has also improved motivation and achievement in child care and hair and beauty. In partnership with other providers the college is also working to bring learners who are not in education or training back into learning. Such projects would benefit from more effective cross-county strategic development.

- Recent analysis shows that 76% of all under 19 years of age college learners are enrolled on level 1 and 2 programmes. Initial screening shows that many of these learners are operating at entry levels for communication and numeracy. The college is well aware of the impact that this proportion of learners has on its capacity to deliver additional learning support.

Are there any improvements in the success rates for advanced apprentices?

- The success rates for advanced apprentices have continued to improve for the last three years. The rate in 2003/04 was 26%, for 2004/05 it was 38% and according to the College data for 2005/06 it was 50%. The rates for 2003/04 and 2004/05 are both slightly better than the national average. Learning and Skills Council data record nine fewer learners than the college accounts for in financial returns. Although related to small numbers of learners (11), the performance of 19+ learners has declined and is currently at 18% for 2005/06.

Has the framework success in business administration continued to exceed the national rate?

- Success rates for apprenticeship programmes in business administration continue to be around the national average. The rate for 2002/03 was 50%, a reduction occurred in 2003/04 to 45% but this has recovered for 2004/05 to 55%.

Quality of education and training

The quality improvement plan places great emphasis on improving teaching and learning practice. What impact have improvement measures made on teaching and learning?

- The teaching and learning observation system is robust and well managed. The observation team have undergone training in observation, feedback and moderation. There are several opportunities to gather information from observations: as part of appraisal, through standards team review, peer observation or by external observer for quality assurance purposes. Observation findings are reported to the recently established teaching and learning group and a profile for the college is produced that informs both the continuing professional development (CPD) programme and curriculum review. There are detailed procedures to develop all grades of teaching observed and

systems to share good practice. Tutors are encouraged to develop their teaching, for example through the use of the virtual learning environment and the Teaching Effectiveness Enhancement programme. Tutors report that in 2005/06 retention has improved and that when data is validated success rates will also show improvement. In 2006/07 learning support assistants are being used to provide in class support for learners at levels 1 and 2 who have entry level communications and numeracy profiles. Good use is made of subject coaches and learning mentors.

The quality improvement plan identifies internal verification and external verification as areas for development. What actions have been taken and have they led to improvements in learners' assessments?

- Internal and external validation procedures have been systematically reviewed and amended. A sub group of the teaching and learning group has focussed on providing a calendar of external validation events and more systematic responses to examiner reports. Curriculum restructuring in 2005/06 has helped the college to look across curriculum areas and identify best practice in assessment. In 2006/07 the group is focussing on reviewing and revising policy and documentation for internal verification procedures.

How successful is recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) for non-accredited learning?

- The college undertook systematic developmental work in relation to RARPA in 2005/06. However, RARPA is in its early stages of development and it is too early to measure the impact on learners. The college has taken a whole college approach to the embedding of RARPA. With the support of the RARPA champion for County Durham the college is using County Durham's manual of guidance as a framework for implementation. In 2006/07 RARPA is being embedded in all curriculum areas including full-time and part-time programmes. Substantial CPD has been undertaken and more is planned in 2006/07. RARPA is now incorporated into standards reviews and the teaching and learning observation scheme.

How is the Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in Adult Social Care developing?

- Managers have achieved good development and progress since the formation of the CoVE for Adult Social Care. The CoVE successfully completed its development year and achieved full CoVE status quite recently and a formal launch event is imminent. Clear strategic direction provides an effective focus on the development of a range of activities. Organised events focus effectively on both dissemination of practice as well as provision of training. Good collaboration takes place with other CoVEs in the region. Recruitment of

learners has exceeded targets by 25%. Work is underway in utilising a system for a paperless portfolio. Plans are in place to promote this and to remedy the potential for learners' misgivings about their information technology abilities. Areas for future development include assessing sustainability and developing programmes for safe handling of medicines.

Leadership and management

The college has commissioned the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) to provide a new management training programme. How effective has this been and what are the outcomes for learners

- The training programme has been effective in developing teams, improving data handling, improving networking and communication across the college. Action learning sets have been established and managers report that they have ownership of the groups' ideas. The use of a senior member of staff acting as a critical friend provided a valuable objective view of the groups' work. The management training programme has supported the restructuring of the college and given opportunities for capacity building among the curriculum programme leaders. The programme will be further developed through the college's CPD programme.

In the self-assessment report (SAR) construction has been re-graded to satisfactory. What actions have been taken to address issues raised in the area of plumbing?

- Management actions have been effective to remedy the issues identified by the external verifier of the plumbing programme. The main issue related to awarding body (BPEC) confusion about the competency of heating engineers to assess or verify plumbers and resulted in the removal of self-certification for plumbing national vocational qualifications. A newly-recruited plumbing member of staff undertook all the assessments and received significant support from internal verifiers whilst attaining A1 and A2 qualifications. The tutor achieved these awards in November 2005. The CITB co-ordinator provided good mentoring resulting in implementation of an improved tracking system. Changes to the workshop area resulted in a more realistic assessment environment. Recent external verifier visits have expressed no major concerns and centre self-certification was re-instated.

How successful has the college been in implementing the strategy for employer engagement?

- The Business Development Unit in the college has been successful in implementing the employer engagement strategy. Increasingly the emphasis of

the business development unit is on full cost programmes and managers view employer engagement as a cross-college activity affecting all curriculum areas. Curriculum staff are encouraged to develop their business skills. A wide range of training programmes are available to respond effectively to employer needs. The college has been successful in obtaining a substantial Train to Gain contract for £500,000 over the next two years. The unit is on target to achieve self-sufficiency and to be less reliant on grants or external funding.

- The college also contributes to a range of other engagement activities, including an extensive community programme as well as links with schools. The college manages a successful Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP). In the past up to 90% of these learners progressed onto recognised further education programmes. The college maintains good links with the Connexions service as well as with a consortium of training providers. A very positive relationship with the Prince Bishops Agency links the college with a range of training providers to enable them to offer a much broader range of opportunities through the IFP.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

- Equality and diversity

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

- The college recognises the need to support governors to develop their understanding of the college's work. In particular the college has strengthened governor training through an improved induction programme. Miniature workshops held before meetings have also been useful in updating governors about specific issues. Governors are also encouraged to attend college for either a full or half-day to improve their understanding of curriculum areas.
- The college's new building project is developing well. Currently the building work is ahead of schedule. The project is well managed and the college is undertaking a risk assessment in relation to the most appropriate time to move into the new building.