

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: National Star College
Date of visit: 3 July 2007

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. 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

Did the college maintain the good achievements in 2005/06?

- Achievements were very good in 2005/06. 89% of learners achieved full accredited qualifications and there was a 95% retention rate. 75% of learners went onto mainstream further education (FE), higher education (HE) and training or work and 57% went to supported/ independent living. Progression between levels is also good.

Are the current learners making good progress?

- Learners this year are making very good progress and predicted achievements are very good. Non-accredited progress is now captured efficiently and recorded on progress sheets each term. Records are detailed and clearly identify what learners can do at a particular point in their training that they couldn't do previously.

What progress has the college made in collecting destination data from previous learners and how has the data been used?

- Good progress has been made in collecting destination data and tracking the progress of previous learners. The college initially sent out a questionnaire to learners who had left as far back as 2000. They have since sent out an annual questionnaire in the term after learners have left the college. Last year there was a 65% response rate. The information gleaned from the questionnaire has been used effectively to develop the entry level curriculum, the work placement programme and the transition process. The college is also in the process of developing a website for previous learners to enable them to keep in touch with the college and each other. This site should also provide the college with a lot of useful information on previous learners. The site is to be piloted next term.

Quality of education and training

How well developed are the links between the literacy and numeracy department and vocational tutors and what support have vocational tutors received this year?

- Links between the literacy and numeracy department and vocational tutors are developing well. Tutors have been supported by a range of initiatives, including: an audit of vocational schemes of work identifying potential literacy and numeracy skills that arise naturally within the vocational area; a buddy scheme, whereby a member of the literacy and numeracy team works alongside the vocational tutors; developmental teaching observations that include an evaluation of the embedding of literacy into the lesson planning; a work shop for tutors where they can discuss their schemes of work, lesson planning and targets. Tutors are finding that the realistic application of literacy and numeracy helps learners to consolidate skills and take a more positive attitude towards their development.

What progress has been made in putting literacy and numeracy targets into 'user friendly' language and do learners understand their targets?

- National Star has made good progress in developing literacy and numeracy targets that are relevant and understood by learners. Learners know what their targets are and whether they have achieved them. On the preparation for employment programmes learners develop an action plan indicating what they need to do to meet the targets and where they might find the opportunity to develop and/or practise them.

What progress has been made in broadening opportunities for learning and increasing access to vocational courses?

- Good progress has been made in broadening opportunities for learners and increasing access to vocational courses. Vocational choices have been broadened and modularised so that learners for whom it is appropriate do not have to follow one full-time programme. They can follow different modules at different levels according to their interests and abilities. More courses deliver projects and activities outside the classroom so that learning takes place in more realistic contexts. The college is making greater use of the infrastructure to offer internal work placements.

How well has the college developed the transition arrangements and do they link sufficiently well with the learners' learning programmes?

- Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The transition manager is now part of the education team so works very closely with tutors, key workers and other staff. The college have also appointed a new team member with housing expertise to commence in August.
- A good range of resources has been developed to support transition, this includes a website, a newsletter and the 'Launch Pad', which is a resource area for careers and other information to support the transition process. The area is well resourced with a good range of software to support career development. The transition database is also a key part of the more structured transition process. All information provided to learners is logged on the database in the learners' individual file. All staff have access to the database and tutors can more easily track the progress of learners through the transition process.
- A recently developed resource, 'The Lift off Log', is to be rolled out in September for all learners. The log identifies the ten main areas learners need to cover to make sure everything is in place for when they are ready to leave college.
- Good links have been made with a local domiciliary company and five of last years leavers were placed in purpose built accommodation through the company. This year 11 leavers have secured accommodation with the local companies.

Leadership and management

What has the college done to ensure that activities in the vocational areas are possible and meaningful for entry level learners?

- Significant changes have been made to the entry level programmes. Three strands are now offered, one that is a full-time preparation for employment, one that is focused on learning in vocational areas and one that combines life skills with skills for work and focuses in particular on community engagement and in-house 'companies' to service the college. These companies include activities such as maintaining an internet site

and food production and sales. In all of the programmes there is greater emphasis on learning in realistic settings. Learners studying in vocational areas may have the opportunity to study alongside learners at level 1 and level 2 on specific modules. The preparation for employment programme involves external placements on employment related projects.

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

- The teaching and learning programme has been further developed since the last inspection. Observers have been provided with extensive training and the college is part of a cross-county teaching and learning project. The percentage of lessons in which teaching and learning was graded good or better has risen from 66% last year to 80% this year.
- The college has had Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) unannounced inspections across all sites. All four registrations were graded excellent in 2007.
- The college is involved in an e-learning project with three other colleges to develop the use of video to show progress and development of learner's skills and competences over time.
- The volume of work-related learning has increased significantly since the last inspection. All three entry level programmes include aspects of work-related learning, with internal work-related projects as well as external placements. All learners on the entry level work preparation programme have work-placements. The percentage of learners securing work-placements has increased by 21%, from 46% in 2005/2006 to 67% in 2006/2007.
- The college recently developed and hosted an innovative skills festival 'Employability plus' to promote employment for disabled people. The event, involving hands on demonstrations, information, advice and guidance, attracted more than 1,000 visitors over two days from schools, colleges, employers and the community. The event was a very good example of successful collaboration and employer engagement.