

RE-INSPECTION OF DUNSTABLE COLLEGE

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OUTCOME OF RE-INSPECTION

The overall provision in the curriculum area of business administration and professional is now **satisfactory**.

The overall provision in the curriculum area of computing and information technology is now **satisfactory**.

The overall provision in the curriculum area of literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages is now **satisfactory**.

BACKGROUND

Dunstable College was inspected in November 2002. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in business administration, computing and information technology and literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages, which were found to be less than satisfactory.

Ofsted and the ALI have particular duties in relation to colleges where their inspection report indicates that individual curriculum and/or work-based learning (WBL) areas are unsatisfactory or very weak or where leadership and management are unsatisfactory or very weak. Where a college has been judged to have less than satisfactory leadership and management, or less than satisfactory provision in solely WBL, inspectors from Ofsted or the ALI will visit the college to carry out monitoring inspections of the less than satisfactory areas. As a result of the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors may judge that previously less than satisfactory areas of provision, or leadership and management, are now satisfactory and that no further visits are required. Where leadership and management are satisfactory, but there is curriculum provision that is less than satisfactory, there will be no monitoring visits. All less than satisfactory provision will be re-inspected, normally during one week, within two years of the original inspection.

If, after approximately 24 months, the college has not made sufficient progress to justify a judgement that the curriculum or WBL area or leadership and management are satisfactory, the original grade for the area that continues to be unsatisfactory will remain on the college's record until the next full inspection within the cycle. Ofsted will inform the local LSC that provision remains unsatisfactory and the reasons why.

DATE OF THE RE-INSPECTION

In accordance with the above procedures, re-inspection of business administration and professional, computing and information technology, and literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages took place during the week of 15 to 19 November 2004.

Business administration and professional

In the November 2002 inspection, the quality of the overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- Good retention and pass rates on trade union courses
- Good on-the-job learning opportunities for work-based learners.

Weaknesses

- Poor retention and pass rates in most areas
- Much unsatisfactory teaching and learning
- Unsatisfactory assessment of modern apprentices' key skills in the workplace
- Inadequate use of targets to improve student performance
- No foundation programme in business
- Weak curriculum leadership and management.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses and that the overall provision in this area is now **satisfactory**.

Pass and retention rates have improved in most areas. The pass rates on level 3 full-time long courses have improved and are above the national average. The pass rate on the AVCE has been well above the national average for the last two years, and the recently introduced National certificate had a pass rate of well above average this year.

There is good retention on level 3 courses. Retention on the AVCE course has improved consistently over the last three years and is well above the national average. The recently introduced BTEC national has continued that trend. Pass rates on the recently discontinued GNVQ intermediate were poor. Pass rates on the certificate in secretarial and administration have improved significantly and are now at a satisfactory level. Pass and retention rates on part-time courses are variable, but continue to be good on the trade union courses. Levels of attendance and punctuality have improved.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. Most teaching observed was good or better although there was one unsatisfactory session. Teachers are now making greater efforts to challenge students and check that learning is taking place. Realistic targets are now set to improve students' performance. However, there has only been limited progress in improving the assessment of key skills in the workplace.

A foundation programme in business was set up immediately after the last inspection but later failed to recruit students and was replaced by a level one course in business administration.

Curriculum management has improved and is now good. Quality assurance has been strengthened and much more stress has been placed on improving teaching and learning. Course reviews are now more rigorous.

ICT

In the November 2002 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- Effective part-time course provision for adult students
- Good widening participation
- Good IT facilities for students.

Weaknesses

- Poor retention and pass rates on full-time courses
- Poor punctuality and attendance on full-time courses
- Inadequate information and learning technology resources to support teaching and learning

- Ineffective tutorial system for full time students
- Lack of foundation provision for full-time students.

Following the re-inspection inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now **satisfactory**.

Retention and pass rates have improved. There are high pass rates of 79% on the level 1 IT user course (there is no national average for this mode of attendance) and the rates have improved 27% to 71% on the first diploma IT practitioner programme, which is now nearly at the national average. However, the pass rate is still low on the national diploma IT practitioner programme at 58%, compared with the national average of 82%. Retention is good on the level 1 IT user course at 88% (there is no national average for this mode of attendance). Retention is at 84% on the first diploma IT practitioner programme in 2004, compared with the national average of 72%.

A tutorial assistant monitors registers regularly and contacts absent students. Attendance has improved on full-time courses and was 82% during the re-inspection, which is at the national average for ICT. However, there is still poor punctuality in some lessons for full-time students.

The college has now acquired interactive whiteboards, data projectors and CD re-writers, and has provided students with memory sticks. The college intranet can be accessed by staff and students from home or work and is developing students' use of interactive learning materials. Many lessons were enhanced by the appropriate use of these new resources. In the many good lessons, a wide range of effective learning techniques encouraged students to relate computing theory to practice.

There is now a structured tutorial programme, including one-to-one sessions, in which students draw up action plans. These individual tutorials occur approximately every six weeks and during review week, when all students are seen and their progress checked. Group tutorials are well planned and cover a good range of topics, for instance how to manage finance. Students report that they value their tutorial sessions.

The college has developed its foundation provision to include an IT user level 1 course. This course was offered for the first time last year and students achieved high pass rates of 79% and good retention at 88% (there is no national average for this mode of attendance). This year, two groups are enrolled on the course.

Course management is now good. Performance data is used systematically in course meetings and course reviews. These reviews are evaluative and lead to a useful self-assessment report. An action plan is compiled from students' views, evaluation questionnaires and for course representatives.

Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

In the November 2002 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- Good pass rates on OCN courses in franchised ESOL provision

- Good retention rates on ESOL provision.

Weaknesses

- Poor planning to meet the individual needs of students
- Too much unsatisfactory teaching
- Weak assessment practices
- Deficiencies in management.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now **satisfactory**.

Planning to meet the needs of individual students is now rigorous, detailed and embedded in good individual learning plans and lesson plans. It is based on thorough initial and diagnostic testing. Support for those who need it is provided speedily and effectively. Re-testing of students after a period of support shows that they have made progress in their literacy and numeracy and that they achieve higher test scores than at the time of initial testing.

The quality of teaching has improved and is satisfactory overall with some examples of good and very good teaching, as well as a very small proportion of teaching which is less than satisfactory. Teachers know the needs of their students well, as shown by their careful and responsive planning at individual, class and course levels. Where teaching is most effective, there are clear learning objectives for the class and for individuals; activities are varied and interesting; and students are fully engaged in their learning. There are opportunities for students to develop their skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Extensive training has been completed by all basic skills and ESOL tutors and this has enhanced the quality of teaching.

Assessment practices are now robust. All full-time and substantial part-time students are assessed by means of a nationally recognised test. Students can also self-refer. Most students have a clear understanding of how well they are performing, and what they need to do to improve. All students on foundation programmes are entitled to additional support, which links basic skills outcomes to their main course of study. Support provided in skills for life is monitored through effective internal verification.

Leadership and management of the area are efficient and effective. There is now a clear management structure for skills for life and ESOL. Staff have taken part in training to improve their skills. They have a strong commitment to achieve the new basic skills qualifications. Quality assurance of teaching and learning has improved significantly and the self-assessment report is

sufficiently critical. There is now more sharing of good practice, but this could be further developed.

There will be no further re-inspection of the college because there are no remaining unsatisfactory areas.

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