

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: North East Surrey College of Technology
Date of visit: 19 June 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

What progress has been made in improving success rates?

- Early indications are that the rapid improvement in success rates in recent years has continued in 2006/07. The proportion of students who have completed their courses has risen. Managers' predictions, based on reliable data, are that success rates on long courses will rise to over 70%, which is well above the most recent available national average. Evidence suggests that the rate of improvement in success rates at the college will be faster than that found nationally.
- Success rates for adults on level one courses are improving rapidly, partly due to the discontinuation of a significant proportion of the provision in information and communications technology at off-site centres.
- Many factors have contributed to the improvements in success rates. These include improved advice and guidance to ensure learners are enrolled on to appropriate courses; the provision of more appropriate courses at levels one and two; the discontinuation of GCE A and AS level courses; and robust measures to identify and improve under-performing courses.

What progress has been made in improving achievements in key skills, especially numeracy?

- At the time of the visit, it was too early to judge the impact of measures taken to improve achievements in key skills. However, the current rate of portfolio completion by learners indicates that success rates are likely to rise. Good progress has been made in ensuring that learners see the relevance of key skills by delivering them through a vocational context. The specialist key skills team based in the "skills zone" have been effective in raising the profile of key skills, and make good use of IT both as a source of materials and for tracking learners' progress.

Have attendance rates continued to rise?

- Attendance rates have risen by around 2 percentage points over the last three years, to around 84%. The college has done much to try to improve attendance further, particularly through the role of the student attendance monitors (SAMs). Currently, the SAMs contact learners, whose attendance slips below 80%, using an effective "traffic light" system. The college may wish to consider raising this threshold of acceptable attendance in order to improve attendance rates further.

In work-based learning (WBL), are full framework completions improving?

- Good progress has been made in improving the proportion of work-based learners who complete all aspects of their apprenticeship framework. Overall success rates for the current cohort are expected to rise to 89%, and most learners have completed their frameworks on time. This represents a considerable improvement on the very poor success rates in WBL three years ago.

Quality of education and training

What improvements have been made to the quality of teaching and learning? What progress has been made in integrating (Information Learning Technology) ILT into teaching and learning?

- Following the QIA led lesson observations and the curriculum inspections in autumn 2006, the college targeted observations in spring on those teachers not observed in the inspection, new teachers and those involved in higher education. In addition there has been a focus on in-service training on managing challenging behaviour, ILT in the classroom and differentiation. The recent appointment of a manager for ILT and continued professional development has brought greater emphasis on improving the overall standard of teaching and learning across the college. There are realistic plans for lesson observations in 2007-08 and to relate the outcomes to staff development activities. The college recognises that, since half of all lessons observed have been graded as satisfactory, there is still a lot of work to do in this area.

Are there more opportunities for work experience for students?

- Good progress has been made in making sure that work experience is available for all those students to whom it is appropriate. The management of work experience has been merged into the group

responsible for employer engagement and work based learning. Students in both business and IT have been out on appropriate work experience since the New Year. Around 80 percent of those students who require it can now access work experience. The college acknowledges that there is still some further work to do here.

Are group tutorials more consistent and individual learning plans (ILPs) more specific and detailed?

- Progress has been made to make sure that tutorials are more consistent and that they conform to the college policies and procedures. An audit of tutorials has taken place and a better balance of one-to-one sessions and group tutorials sought. College managers state that more specific and detailed ILPs are still 'work in progress' and require further development.

Leadership and management

What is the view of senior management regarding progress with the post-inspection action plan?

- The principal and senior managers continue to focus relentlessly on bringing about improvements to quality monitoring systems and to students' success rates. Overall progress with the post-inspection action plan was judged to be good and inspectors agree with this assessment. Sensible plans are developed to merge college functions, where appropriate, and to build on existing strengths. The college increasingly now has the confidence of the local Learning Skills Council (LSC) and curriculum and accommodation developments can be contemplated.

What is the current financial position of the college? What is the current position regarding accommodation changes?

- The financial position of the college has continued to improve rapidly. The deputy principal with responsibility for finance has recently been appointed. Realistic budget setting and monitoring has been introduced at all levels in the college by the principal and deputy principal. Clear and informative monthly accounts are received and discussed at both governor and senior management team meetings. The college is aiming for a surplus of £800,000 this financial year which is £650,000 better than the budget forecast. In addition, the staff pay to income ratio has decreased to 64 percent and the college will come out of financial recovery one year earlier than planned. Recent audit reports have been good with no major concerns raised. As a result of the significantly

improved financial position the college is likely to move from category C to category B. The college is considering a major rebuild of accommodation. The educational case is currently being investigated and the governing body has recently set up a property strategy group to take plans further. The local LSC has indicated that it is willing to consider funding for an extensive rebuild in 2010-11.

What actions have been taken to increase employer engagement?

- The college has done much to develop a strategy to improve and increase its range of services and provision to meet the needs of employers. At the time of the visit much of this activity was in progress, and it was too early to judge the full impact of the measures being taken. A coherent unit has been set up to take forward employer engagement, and the branding and marketing of the employer unit as the 'Epsom Downs Business Centre' has been well thought out. Links between the dedicated employer unit and curriculum areas are appropriately close. The college is applying for "Action for Business College" status, and its assessment begins next month. Links with a large number of employers have been developed in recent years; these links are particularly strong in aspects of building services and care.

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

- In order to hasten the pace of change and improvement in sport, the principal introduced a "board of studies" to the department. This involved more detailed scrutiny of procedures and intensive support to students in order to help them complete their assignments. The results of this sensible and direct approach have been much improved students' achievements and an increase in staff confidence in the sports department.