



Northampton College

Re-inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published June 2007	Provider reference 130769
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Introduction

Northampton College was inspected in May 2005. 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 for work-based learning in hairdressing and beauty therapy which was found to be less than satisfactory. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is less than satisfactory within two years of the original inspection. If inadequate areas of learning or aspects of provision remain inadequate following re-inspection, inspectors will continue to monitor progress at annual assessment visits, but the areas will not be re-graded. They will be re-inspected during the full college inspection.

The less than satisfactory work-based learning provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy was re-inspected on 22 and 23 May 2007. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Work-based learning area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	4	2

Context

The college provides work-based learning programmes in hairdressing. There are 101 learners on apprenticeship programmes and 17 learners on advanced apprenticeship programmes.

Strengths

- good resources to support learning
- effective links with employers
- good management of work-based learning

Areas for improvement

- insufficient use of target-setting to promote the progress made by learners

Achievement and standards

At the last inspection in May 2005, low achievement in work-based learning was identified as an area for improvement. The achievement of apprenticeship frameworks has now improved and, in 2005/06, the overall success rate was similar to the national average. Many learners develop a high standard of practical skills. They carry out their services with confidence and act professionally at all times. Many learners on the advanced apprenticeship programme make good progress and are able to perform complex hairdressing services with ease.

Quality of provision

Improvements have been made in the key skills provision which is now provided earlier in learners' programmes and has been made more vocationally relevant. Specialist accommodation at Northampton had previously been unsuitable but has improved significantly and is now good. A new industry-standard salon has been built. Interactive whiteboards are used in classrooms and salons and learners make use of a good range of professional products. Effective links are in place with employers. Assessment practice in hairdressing has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Insufficient use is made, however, of target-setting in assessments and reviews to promote the progress made by learners. Initial advice and guidance have improved and learners are placed on programmes at the appropriate level.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of work-based learning have significantly improved and are now good. Management responsibilities have changed since the previous inspection and, for example, on- and off-the-job training is now much better coordinated. Good use is made of the college management information systems to aid decision-making and to inform self-assessment.

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Northampton College
Date of visit: 22 and 23 May 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

How well do learners achieve?

- The overall college success rate for long courses in 2005/06 improved by 5% to 63% which is similar to the 2004/05 national average for general further education colleges.
- The overall success rate for 16-18 year olds on long courses in 2004/05 was 8% below the national average. The overall success rate improved in 2005/06 by 6% to 63%. The 2004/05 national average for 16-18 year olds on long courses was 65%.
- The overall success rate for adults on long courses in 2004/05 was 4% below the national average. The overall success rate improved in 2005/06 by 6% to 62%. The 2004/05 national average for adults on long courses was 61%.
- Value-added indicators published by the Learning Skills Council (LSC) suggest that most learners achieved in line with expectations in 2004/05 based on their prior attainment. The college uses the ALIS value-added system for learners on AS and A2 courses. ALIS data suggests that many learners in 2004/05 did not achieve the results expected based on their prior attainment, although improvements were made in 2005/06.
- Distance travelled indicators suggest that progress was slow for learners on GCSE and GNVQ (Intermediate) courses. The college has recognised this weakness, which in part can be attributed to slow progress for learners on GCSE English and mathematics courses. Entry criteria for these courses have been reviewed and the college now offers a wider range of relevant intermediate courses.
- Work-based learning data indicate that overall success rates for apprenticeships have improved in recent years. In 2005/06 the overall success rate was similar to the national average. Timely success rates for apprenticeships have also improved, but have remained below the national average. Progression from E2E courses is satisfactory.

- The proportion of learners remaining on programme in 2006/07 is higher than that at a similar time in 2005/06.

Quality of education and training

What action has the college taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning? In particular, how has it attempted to improve the teaching of theory lessons and the proportion of lessons graded as outstanding? What has been the impact of these actions?

- Following the last inspection, the focus in teaching and learning has been to eliminate unsatisfactory teaching. In the event of an unsatisfactory grade being awarded at an observation of teaching and learning, a detailed action plan for improvement is produced within 3 days and a further observation is carried out 6 weeks later. Only one re-observation this year remained unsatisfactory and this was rectified at a subsequent re-observation. In 2007/08 detailed action plans will be produced for any teachers whose sessions are graded as satisfactory in order to promote further improvement.
- Internal observation reports are used to inform faculty and college training plans and staff development events to address common areas for improvement. There have also been presentations for staff on the features of outstanding teaching and learning. Teachers, awarded good or better grades following observations, may be invited to participate as mentors for new teachers. Advanced teaching practitioners provide additional support for any members of staff who have an action plan following an unsatisfactory observation.
- In its self-assessment report the college judged the teaching of theory lessons and the proportion of outstanding lessons as areas for improvement. Observations of teaching and learning completed in 2006/07 have shown that 67% of theory lessons were good or better, and 4% were judged to be unsatisfactory. This reflects improved teaching and learning in theory lessons. There has also been a slight increase in the proportion of lessons graded as outstanding.

How has the college secured good participation by learners aged 14-16 years? What is it doing to promote further participation? How successful are these learners on their courses and do they progress to further education, training or employment?

- The college works closely with a number of partner schools and pupil referral units. Good participation for 14-16 year olds has been secured through offering a range of taster events in vocational areas not available at the schools. Participation has also been improved through

successful collaborative work using school facilities and college teachers or *vice-versa*, and through joint teaching on courses by school and college staff.

- The main programmes for 14-16 year olds lead to a wide variety of qualifications including GCSEs and NVQs. Success rates on these courses are broadly satisfactory. Progression to full-time programmes at the college for year 11 pupils participating on 14-16 programmes was 34% in September 2006. The college does not receive data to monitor progression to other destinations.
- Plans are in place to extend 14-16 provision in 2007/08 to include ESOL courses for Year 11 students at school and to increase the number of opportunities on catering and sports courses. The college has also been involved in submissions for a number of specialised diplomas starting in 2008 and 2009. It also plays a leading role in the Daventry Learning Partnership, which involves two colleges and two schools working together to review and develop 14-19 provision in the town and local area.

Leadership and management

How effective is the management of work-based learning in the college?

- Since the last inspection, the college has restructured the management of its work-based learning (WBL) provision. It has disbanded the work-based learning unit and reallocated most of its resources to the college faculties, which now have responsibility for WBL. The three faculties each have a programme manager who manages WBL and is supported by training coordinators, assessors and internal verifiers. A senior manager has responsibility for co-ordinating work-based learning provision across the college.
- Employer engagement and the coordination of on- and off-the-job training have improved. The college management information system now produces more detailed weekly and monthly reports to inform managers about retention and achievement rates. The college has installed a new system to track the progress of learners in each aspect of their apprenticeship framework. Programme managers meet regularly to discuss the development of WBL. Staff involved in WBL also meet regularly to exchange good practice and standardise procedures between faculties.
- Overall and timely success rates for work-based learners improved in 2005/06 and college data indicate that further improvements are likely in 2006/07.

How has the college tried to improve the consistency of practice between sites in curriculum management and the provision of support services?

- Following the merger of Northampton and Daventry Colleges in August 2004, staff at the merged college recognised differences in the management of curriculum areas and in the provision of support for learners across the two main sites. A number of steps have been taken to improve the consistency of practice between sites.
- A new operations management team was set up in 2006/07 to support greater consistency of curriculum management across the two main sites. A greater proportion of managers and teaching staff work at both Daventry and Northampton campuses. Course team meetings and curriculum planning days involve staff from both sites. The college reports no significant differences in the quality of provision between the two sites.
- The college has sought to provide standardised provision of learner support across its two main sites. All support staff spend some of their working time in both Daventry and Northampton. Improvements in joint working have contributed to greater consistency and better quality provision. Differences in additional learning support have also been addressed through cross-site working, additional recruitment and staff training and standardised procedures for the provision of support. The proportion of learners with identified needs who access support has significantly increased in the last two years. The overall success rate of learners with disabilities in 2005/06 was higher than that of the college as a whole. The college does not yet compare the success rates of learners receiving literacy and numeracy support to those of the college as a whole.

How has the college benefited from participation in the East Midlands Peer Review Project?

- The East Midlands Peer Review Project (EMPRP) involves joint working on quality improvement activities by five further education colleges in the region. The project started in December 2005.
- The initial focus of the EMPRP was on the self-assessment processes of the participating colleges. Staff from Northampton College visited the other colleges to validate judgements in self-assessment reports. This process proved beneficial in terms of the professional development of the individuals concerned, the sharing of good practice and establishing informal networks of curriculum areas. It also helped Northampton College to improve its own self-assessment process.

- The EMPRP visit to Northampton College was also used to validate self-assessment. As a result of this visit, improvements were made in the links between observations of teaching and staff professional development. The visit also prompted Northampton College to establish an Internal Quality Review system in 2006/07 to further enhance its quality assurance arrangements.
- Additional EMPRP work in 2006/07 will include further sharing of good practice around curriculum self-assessment and cross-college functions, and a leadership and management project involving 12 colleges in the region together with the LSC and the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL).

What action has the college taken to improve the measurement of the impact of action plans?

- The college self-assessment report for 2005/06 recognises the need to improve the measurement of the impact of action plans.
- Clear targets are set for faculties and course teams for recruitment, attendance, retention and achievement rates. Additional indicators are also used to assess the performance of courses and learner satisfaction. Performance against targets is reviewed formally three times each year and also discussed at monthly faculty meetings. The Executive Management Team also review performance against targets with faculties at least twice each year.
- Targets in some quality improvement plans make insufficient use of quantitative indicators to assess the impact of actions. A wide range of data is available from the college management information systems, but this is not always used effectively to measure the impact of quality improvement activities.
- The college is seeking to make more effective use of a greater range of measurable indicators to assess the quality of provision and to drive forward quality improvements at a faster rate.