

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Bolton Community College  
Date of visit: 28 February 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

Have success rates continued to improve? In particular has the college achieved further improvement in level 2 and 3 success rates for 16-18 learners and for shorter courses 19+?

- Success rates at level 2 for learners aged 16-18 on long courses improved between 2003/4 and 2004/5 from 44% to 58%. In 2005/6 success rates were maintained at 58% which is still below the national rate. Within this overall figure for 2005/6, retention rates improved. Success rates for 16-18 year olds on long courses at level three have improved over the last three years from 40% to 65% in 2005/6; retention improved from 67% to 71%. Success rates for short courses of 5 weeks and under for learners aged 19+ have been maintained in 2005/6 at 80% and are in line with national rates. Success rates for short courses of over 5 weeks improved during 2005/6 and are also in line with national rates. In 2005/6 success rates for all courses improved by 12 percentage points and retention improved to 85%.

Is improvement in success, achievement and retention rates consistent across the curriculum? If not is the college employing strategies to address improvement in weaker curriculum areas?

- While across all levels there continues to be an improving trend in success, achievement and retention rates, this is not always consistent across all subject and curriculum areas. The college recognises areas of weakness and has strategies in place to address under-performance. For example, in 2005/6 science and mathematics success rates at level two, while improving, were still low, and success rates declined at level three to significantly below national rates. In 2004/5 construction success rates were very low at level two at 32%, well below the national rate. However in 2005/6, as a result of improvement strategies, success rates reached 65%. In information

technology (IT) success rates were declining at level three and in 2004/5 they were 14% below national rates; however in 2005/6 they improved and are now satisfactory. In both leisure and travel and social sciences, success rates are below national rates at all levels and they are declining at level three. Retention in these areas is very low at levels two and three. However in 2005/6 success rates improved by 18% to 61% in leisure and travel and by 14% to 70% in social sciences.

Have good success rates in work-based learning and outstanding progression rates for E2E been maintained?

- Overall success rates for apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships demonstrate an improving trend. Over the last three years success rates for apprenticeships have improved from 54% to 73% in 2005/6, some 20 percentage points above the national rate. Success rates for advanced apprenticeships have risen over a three year period to 52% in 2005/6, 8 percentage points above the national rate. Overall success rates for NVQs at level two and three are broadly in line with framework success rates. Timely success rates also demonstrate an improving trend: for apprenticeships these are now at 51%, some 18 percentage points above the national rate. For advanced apprenticeships timely success rates have improved to 44%, 17 percentage points above the national rate. Framework success rates are very good at 79%. For 2005/6 progression rates for the E2E programme were outstanding and the achievement of learning goals for E2E are also very good..

Have success rates for key skills continued to improve?

- Success rates for key skills at all levels and ages were at 37 per cent in 2004/5 and just above the national rate. However success rates varied by level: for example, level one was 41%, level two 28% and level three 19%. In 2005/6 the college has improved key skills success rates further to 47%. At level one success rates are now 55%, at level two at 46% and level three at 26%.

## Quality of provision

Has the use of information learning technologies (ILT) to enhance the curriculum improved?

- The college has continued investment in ILT equipment, having installed over thirty interactive whiteboards in the last year. New ILT rooms have been introduced to allow for increased access for individuals and groups. Evidence from internal lesson observations show an increased use of ILT across the curriculum. Schemes of work and lesson plans make reference to the integrated use of ILT in the curriculum.

Have enrichment opportunities, especially in sport and community activities, improved?

- The college has appointed a student liaison officer to promote sport and community activities. Successful arrangements are now in place with several local sports clubs and centres for students' use. Participation in team sports has increased. A wide range of cross college activities including mentoring programmes and work with voluntary organisations are now organised on a regular basis with good student participation.

How effective is language support for bi-lingual learners?

- Support for bi-lingual learners is good. In response to the increase in the number of refugees and influx of eastern European migrant workers, the numbers of language support workers has increased from two at the last inspection to eleven at the time of the visit. Much awareness-raising training has been carried out with college tutors and language support needs generally are being identified earlier and effective specialist support put in place. More learners are receiving language support. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision has been broadened to include citizenship, geography, science and literacy and numeracy. Progression from ESOL courses into mainstream courses has significantly improved.

Has the tutorial programme improved?

- The tutorial programme has been revised and re-organised. Very good supportive tutorial materials have been developed. Every child matters themes are well integrated into programmes which cover a wide range of useful topics and themes. The tracking and monitoring of student

progress by tutors has been improved with the development of thorough personal development portfolios and personal progress files. There are good and effective staff development opportunities to support tutors. Arrangements for childcare support are good and well communicated to learners.

## Leadership and management

Has the college continued to address some poor accommodation issues?

- The college continues to make efforts to maintain the standard of accommodation while recognising the limitations of the present buildings. There is a well planned and effective year-on-year improvement strategy to maintain and improve buildings and facilities. Plans are in place for the re-location and rebuilding of the college in a landmark site in central Bolton.

How effective has the college responded to local needs? How effectively has the college developed employer engagement activity?

- The college has developed excellent local links through the 14-19 partnership. Working with local schools it has developed a successful 14-16 programme with over 200 students currently on role. In 2005/6 there was good progression from these courses to full-time college courses. For example over 90% of 14-16s enrolled on hair and beauty courses progressed to further education. However the college recognises that it could use data more systematically to analyse enrolment, success and progression rates for 14-16 learners.

There are high numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the local area and the college has responded well to their needs. The college has developed a cross college foundation programme called 'Choices'. The 'Choices' provision is designed for 'those who are unsure which course to take' and comprises vocational tasters, essential skills and personal and social development units. During the course of the programme learners are increasingly able to specialise until eventually their choice is refined to the vocational area where they are most likely to progress. Teaching strategies are designed to engage learners and promote active learning. Specialist staff and vocational staff work well together in the delivery of the programme. Following the first year of operation it was

found that the level of entry was still too challenging for some young people and as a result a parallel preparatory programme, 'Prep-4', was developed. This programme is run along similar lines and is targeted at young people at entry levels one and two. There are very good links and close partnership working with local Connexions advisors. During 2005/6 there were 307 starts on the 'Choices' programme and success rates are good at 82%. All learners who completed progressed to further qualifications in 2006/7.

How effectively has the college developed employer engagement activity? How responsive is the college to employer needs?

- Formal arrangements for the engagement of employers within curriculum areas are still insufficiently developed. However, the college has established a new business development unit and appointed a new director with wide experience of working with employers. The college is also actively involved in the 'action for business initiative' and has two recently established collaborative CoVEs in healthcare and construction. Several successful ongoing projects demonstrate the college positive approach to employer engagement and meeting the needs of local employers. For example, the college is working with the local authority on the provision of playwork in preparation for the introduction of extended schools: another project with the primary care trust seeks to update vocational skills and literacy and numeracy for health and social care workers. Collaboration between the college, local employers and the local learning skills council (LLSC) has promoted an action for achieving construction excellence project (ACE) which has significantly increased the number of construction apprenticeships at the college. The college has developed a very effective national project on water engineering.

What has the college done to promote work-based learning to under-represented groups?

- The participation of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups in work-based learning is only around 4% compared with a local population average of 11%. The college has recognised this short-coming and has responded positively, for example by targeting schools with a high proportion of BME pupils. However the number of BME pupils on some college 14-16 programmes still remains low. The college has worked closely with the council and local Muslim groups and a number of seminars have taken place involving community leaders and parents. In partnership with local organisations and the ACE project the college has set up short six week programmes of construction training for BME groups and from these two young people have progressed into

apprenticeships. Also under the same arrangements discrete courses have been run for enrolling women onto construction courses. The proportion of women on construction courses at the college is increasing and currently stands at over 6 percent. The work-based learning unit produces a termly newsletter and a recent edition was devoted to equality and diversity.

How well is the college addressing the present interregnum without a permanent principal? Has quality assurance continued to be well managed? Has effective curriculum improvement continued?

- The college continues to maintain a strong strategic direction. Quality assurance systems have been maintained to continue sustained improvement in success, retention and achievement rates. Effective monitoring and action planning continue to be strengths.. Coupled with an effective lesson observation system and strong staff development programme, the college has maintained its strong capacity for further improvement. Inspectors considered the college's self assessment to be accurate in identifying strengths, areas for improvement and weaknesses. This has been achieved during a period of significant change in senior management including a period of nearly one year with an acting Principal.