



Learning+Skills Council

Key findings from area-wide inspections that took place in the autumn term of 2002 and the spring term of 2003

Quality and Standards
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INTRODUCTION

In its White Paper *Learning to Succeed – a New Framework for Post-16 Learning*, published in June 1999, the Government looked to the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) to lead area-wide inspections of 16 to 19 education and training. Prior to April 2001, OFSTED carried out these inspections in conjunction with the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) Inspectorate and the Training Standards Council (TSC). Since that date, OFSTED has worked in partnership with the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI).

The area-wide inspections have been carried out in mainly urban areas across the country. The areas vary in size of population, cultural diversity and levels of social and economic deprivation. Most of the areas had significant levels of social and economic deprivation, at least in some wards/districts.

This report is the fifth and last summary of area-wide inspections of provision for learners aged 16 to 19. Area-wide inspections now cover the 14 to 19 age group and the first 14-19 inspections have already taken place.

The Annual Report of the HMCI for 2001-02 comments on area-wide inspections. The HMCI states that whilst in general the pattern of provision 'serves relatively high-achieving students well' it has emerged 'largely without planning or design'. At the time of inspection none of the areas had a clear strategy for rationalising provision and raising the standards of education and training.

The key findings of the area-wide inspections relate to:

- access and participation
- standards achieved and progress made
- curriculum and programmes
- teaching and learning
- support and guidance
- management, collaboration and liaison
- strategy and planning
- cost effectiveness and value for money.

Key findings from inspections that took place in autumn 2002 and spring 2003

Access and participation

Participation rates vary widely between areas. In some areas the staying-on rate is well above the national average, but is below it in other areas. In most areas, the percentage of young people staying on in post-compulsory education varies significantly from one district to another. This variation may be attributed to the differing quality of schools in the area, or to socio-economic factors.

Participation in work-based learning is declining in a number of areas.

Standards achieved and progression

Retention and achievement rates vary significantly from one provider to another, and across courses. In several areas, retention and achievement rates are starting to rise.

Achievement rates in work-based learning are generally low.

There are significant variations between areas in the proportion of learners who progress to higher education.

Curriculum and progression

Many colleges and schools offer a wide range of both academic and vocational courses to learners aged 16 to 19. In many areas, however, a broad curriculum is not available to learners in every district.

The range of provision below level 3 is often inadequate, particularly for learners at entry level or level 1. The range of vocational courses available in schools tends to be limited, especially below level 3.

Teaching and learning

Teaching is mostly satisfactory or better in colleges and schools. In two areas, however, inspectors commented that there is little very good or excellent teaching.

The majority of teachers in colleges and schools have relevant teaching qualifications. In some areas, work-based learning providers have few staff with teaching or training qualifications.

In some areas there is insufficient use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching.

School libraries and facilities for independent learning are often underdeveloped.

Support and guidance

Most pupils in schools receive comprehensive careers advice. In some schools, however, the careers advice given to young people focuses disproportionately on the benefits of transferring to the school's sixth form, or to a sixth form college. In many areas, young people are given little information or advice about other options including work-based learning. Work-based learning is often considered to be a less desirable option and one that is only suitable for learners who are low achievers.

The service provided by Connexions is often greatly valued although there is some variation in its quality. In many areas, the Connexions service is making valuable links with the local secondary schools.

Most learners receive good personal support and the relationship between staff and learners is often good.

Management, collaboration and liaison

In most cases, individual providers are managed effectively.

In most colleges, quality assurance systems in colleges are well established and effective. The quality assurance procedures of schools and work-based learning providers, however, vary widely in terms of their effectiveness and some are poor.

There are good links in most areas between colleges, and between colleges and schools. There are few links between work-based learning providers.

Collaborative activity is not generally the result of systematic needs analysis and planning.

Strategy and planning

Many areas do not have a fully developed overall strategic plan. In most areas, however, there are good partnership arrangements between the local Learning and Skills Council (local LSC) and the Local Education Authority (LEA) and through these, a firm basis is being established for the planning of post-16 provision.

In several areas, a detailed self-assessment report has been produced. In some cases, the self-assessment process has been led and co-ordinated by the local LSC.

Cost effectiveness and value for money

Most colleges and schools offer satisfactory or good value for money except where class sizes are small and/or retention and achievement rates are low. There is no accepted method for measuring the extent to which the provision of work-based learning gives value for money. Since the achievement rates on work-based

learning programmes are often low, however, it is considered that much of this provision does not give value for money.

Changes since the area-wide inspections began

This is the fifth summary of area-wide inspection reports. For the most part, the picture has not changed significantly. The key strengths and weaknesses include:

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- the broad curriculum of many providers
- good support for learners

Key weaknesses

- some low retention and achievement rates in many areas
- narrow and inadequate range of provision below level 3 in many areas
- failure of many schools to provide pupils with sufficient information about work-based learning opportunities and opportunities outside the school's own sixth form
- failure of many providers to offer good value for money.

The significant changes that have happened during the period covered by the cycle of inspections include:

- more collaboration between providers
- increasingly productive partnership arrangements between local LSCs and LEAs leading to the development and implementation of learning strategies.

Inspection reports

This summary is based on the findings of the inspections that have taken place in autumn 2002 and spring 2003 in:

- St Helens
- Stoke on Trent
- Wirral

- Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham
- Halton
- Leicester
- Sheffield
- Wolverhampton
- West Cumbria
- Sefton