

Keeping quality outstanding

The Further Education sector has just announced results for 2006 that show a step-change in success-rates on the last five years. The Colchester Institute team of **Neil Rippington, Carmel Asbury** and **David McCaskey** show how their Centre for Hospitality and Food Studies CH&FS, a first-wave CoVE, has now capped that achievement with an 'outstanding' in a recent ALI/Ofsted inspection. Here, while sharing the secrets of their success, they show the industry just what a complex operation vocational education and training has become.

LESS THAN AN hour away by train from the bright lights of London's West End and the bustle and clamour of its myriad of kitchens and restaurants you'll find CH&FS: the Colchester Institute's Centre for Hospitality and Food Studies. In

The CoVE initiative has had a continuing impact on vocational education. In November 2000, David Blunkett, then education and employment secretary, outlined his vision for a modern skills-supply system in a statement to colleges. In this statement

he envisaged

the re-invention for a new century of vocational and technical education... of the same standard and delivered with the same rigour as academic opportunities with new approaches to delivery... I envisage a network of specialist centres of vocational

education built around colleges or groups of colleges working with business partners.

In 2003, CH&FS was one of the first hospitality schools in the UK to achieve CoVE status (Centre of Vocational Excellence)

2003, CH&FS was one of the first hospitality schools in the UK to achieve CoVE status (Centre of Vocational Excellence) and where they are currently celebrating their Ofsted/ALI inspection result of 'outstanding' at grade one.

Here we will reflect on the challenge of attaining and maintaining CoVE status and on the key strengths necessary to achieve a Grade One inspection.

Grade: 1 Justification

Outstanding success rates on NVQ courses
Excellent success rates in key skills
Outstanding development of learners' practical skills
Outstanding specialist resources
Strong curriculum management with effective strategies for improvement

Figure 1 Summary of self-assessment

For the college to meet this challenge, it was recognised that their vocational provision needed to:

- Reflect current and future needs of the economy
- Focus on sound preparation for employment, as well as up-skilling and re-skilling the workforce
- Develop higher skills with clear routes of progression
- Supplement vocational learning with excellent learning support and opportunities for breadth.

Following this statement, Colchester Institute adopted in their strategic plan an objective to achieve CoVE status for at least one centre of expertise, to raise the profile of the college and bring in additional funding. The centre for Hospitality and Food Studies was chosen for the college's initial application on the

Main qualifications

NVQ Level 1, 2 & 3 full-time programmes (Professional Chefs). Level 1 being piloted on the VRQ Diploma in Introduction to Professional Cookery 2006/7 (11 groups)

NEEVOP Programme (North East Essex vocational options programme) 14/19

NVQ Level 2 & 3 part-time Food Preparation and Cookery Programmes (unitised at Level 3)

Work-based training FMA

ABC Advanced patisserie Level 2/ 3

Certificate in Professional Cookery

School Links (Colne Community College) part-time

Enrichment programmes for Foundation courses

BTEC National Diploma in Hospitality Supervision

NVQ 2 Reception FT (from September 06 known as Front Office)

NVQ 2 Food & Drink Service PT (Part-time)

NVQ 3 Hospitality Supervision (Restaurant and Front Office) FT (Full-time) and PT

Projects

NVQ 2 Profit for Learning (PFL) includes food & drink service, hospitality quick service, and bar service. It is based on the delivery and completion of assessments taking place in the workplace within Essex.

Short courses

BIIAB National Certificate Personal Licence Holders (Level 2)

C&G Level 2 in Food Safety

Health and Safety at Work Certificate (Level 1)

Figure 2 Scope of provision

basis of its consistently good grades in Ofsted inspections, and as a way of building the college's strength as a vocational provider.

In *Success for all – reforming further education and training – our vision for the future*, published in November 2002, the government re-affirmed its desire to meet the skills needs of the country and its commitment to the expansion of the COVE programme. This vision and commitment were further reflected in *21st Century Skills: realising our potential*, presented to Parliament in July 2003; this white paper sets out the national skills strategy.

Following an investment of £6m, a substantial building programme emerged—three kitchens, two patisseries, a workshop, a demonstration area and two restaurants—all purpose-built with up-to-date equipment. CH&FS was opened, with much ceremony by its patron Gary Rhodes in

2002. The following year COVE status was granted. With this accolade further funding of £350,000 was granted which enabled the centre to purchase additional technology. There is no doubt with the assistance of the new resources, its reputation and the commitment of staff and students that CH&FS was set for better things. To date at Colchester Institute, two additional COVES have followed, one in construction and the other a partnership in computing in 2006.

The government target was to have 400 COVES established by March 2006. But as Ruth Kelly, the then education secretary said during her speech on 6th January 2006

'We cannot afford to stand still ... We should celebrate these achievements—but we should celebrate them, and then keep moving on, moving forward. Standards are much better, but still not good enough.'



One of the outstanding students of CH&FS in recent years:
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Action

Increase by at least 10% retention and achievement on the BTEC National Diploma in Hospitality and Catering

Increase emphasis on literacy and numeracy in practical and vocational theory classes

Ensure learners undertake the wider Key Skills, particularly 'improve own learning performance' and 'problem solving', upon completion of Skills for Life targets.

Focused department staff development in order to ensure a more consistent approach to action planning and feedback provided within individual learning programmes (ILPs)

Review curriculum offer to increase flexibility for non-NVQ qualifications (ie First Diploma in Hospitality & Catering, National Certificate/Diploma with links to practical pathways

Progress

Between cohorts completing in 2004/05 and 2005/06: retention increased from 69% to 75% (Benchmark (BM) 62%)

Achievement of completers increased from 73% to 93% (BM 91%)

The success rate increased from 50% to 70% (BM 57%)

Throughout the year, Skills for Life issues and targets were regularly discussed during Centre meetings. As a result, vocational tutors have made significant developments in support of Skills for Life and recognise their importance alongside the vocational qualifications being studied. For example, vocational tutors have developed lessons, materials and assignments that have been team taught with key skills/skills for life tutors. There has also been increased emphasis on communication skills in public areas and developments to increase learners' confidence.

45 learners were enrolled onto a wider key skill during 2005/06

40 learners were retained (89%)

38 learners were successful in achieving the key skill (Achievement ~ 95%, Success ~ 85%)

The College's ILP system has been followed throughout the year by the various course-teams within the Centre. Course-teams discussed the most practical and appropriate ways that the system could be deployed which led to some ILPs being issued electronically and administered through the Administration office, whilst other were paper based. Both systems worked effectively and learners received regular feedback from their personal tutors, including an input in the target setting process.

The team gained approval to offer the First Diploma in Hospitality and Catering and this was included in the full-time prospectus for September 2006/07 starts. Unfortunately, we received less than ten applications for the programme making it unfeasible to run this year. However we intend to continue to market the course for a 2007/08 cohort.

The team also gained approval to offer the National Certificate in Hospitality and Catering and carefully selected units that fall into both pathways (Certificate & Diploma) to make this a feasible proposition. All of our current learners are enrolled onto the National Diploma pathway although the Certificate is a viable pathway. Curriculum development during the last year has promoted and developed practical applications within units and merged partial units together in a practical context. For example, learners took responsibility for a team during the eight Indian and Chinese dinners offered to the general public, linking the unit in Leadership with the units in Indian and Chinese Cuisine.

Figure 3 Progress on last year's action/improvement plan

Under the leadership of head of centre, Neil Rippington and his experienced and enthusiastic team, it was determined that the Centre should meet this challenge of moving forward. In their last inspection, a grade two 'good' was achieved: now they had to move from good to outstanding.

Each year the department carries out an annual monitoring report in which they determine the improvements made and claim the grade they expect. The report for 2005-06 claimed an outstanding grade

one and was presented to the Ofsted ALI inspectors prior to their inspection in October 2006. Here are some extracts, to be read alongside the tables.

How well do learners achieve?

Grade 1

Justification Learners' achievements are outstanding with consistently high success rates across the curriculum. Achievements are consistently above national benchmarks. Learners' success in key skills is also

CH&FS were runners-up in this year's College Restaurant of the Year (CROTY) competition, run by *Restaurant* magazine. The team is shown left, after they'd changed: they scored 44 out of a possible 50, half a point behind the winners, Thames Valley University. The judges commented: Very good over all. Surely a future Croty winner.



very high.

Learners develop very good practical skills in both food preparation and cooking and a well prepared to meet the needs of industry.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

Grade 2

Justification The teaching of practical skills is outstanding. Demonstrations are very effective, making very good use of the visual technology to reinforce learning. Learners are well motivated, enthusiastic and enjoy learning. Teaching of key skills is very good, in line with the excellent achievements.

Some theory teaching is unimaginative and learners' understanding of underpinning knowledge requires further development.

How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?

Grade 1

Justification Programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners well. Links with employers are particularly strong. For example, all first year groups on the Professional Chefs' Programme are

assigned an industry mentor. The mentors regularly visit the college and work alongside tutors and learners to bring an industry perspective. Learners' feedback in perception surveys is consistently high with regard to meeting their needs and interests.

How well are learners guided and supported

Grade 1

Justification Guidance and support for learners is very good. Learners are provided with vocational advice

Strengths

Learners' achievements are outstanding.
 Excellent key skills results
 Learners' development of practical skills in food preparation and cooking and food service, preparing them well to meet the needs of industry
 Outstanding specialist resources facilities
 Outstanding leadership and management with effective strategies to improve

Weaknesses

The teaching of applied theory

Evidence

Success rates – Pro-achieve
 Success rates – Pro-achieve
 OFSTED Inspection Report, December 2006
 CH&FS building, OFSTED and ICT Inspection Report, December 2006
 OFSTED inspectors' findings – OFSTED Inspection Report, December 2006v

Evidence

OFSTED Inspection Report, December 2006

Figure 4 Strengths and weaknesses

Action	Evidence
<p>Being healthy</p> <p>The new VRQ qualification has a mandatory unit on Health and Safety and Healthy eating which is also followed up with a food safety unit. Healthy eating options are available in all refectory eating areas.</p> <p>Student-services induction programme provides information and introduces learners to college specialists who can advise on personal problems such as drug abuse, pregnancy, etc.</p> <p>The Ark Foundation delivers a presentation on the dangers of drugs and alcohol annually. The Ark foundation is directly sponsored by the hospitality profession and founded by the former head chef of the Ritz Hotel London</p> <p>All students undertake a short course in food hygiene which highlights safe and unsafe eating practices.</p> <p>Tutorial programme which introduces the learners to college specialist who can deal with personal problems such as solvent abuse, drugs, pregnancy, sexual issues.</p> <p>Staying safe</p> <p>Colchester Institute's Student Handbook contains advice and contacts in the event of help being needed</p> <p>Course Induction programme introduces the students to the support mechanisms available. This is also introduced at the Centre's taster day in June</p> <p>All staff are fully briefed on the Child Protection Policy and procedures</p> <p>CCTV Cameras have been installed throughout the Centre of Hospitality and Food Studies, helping to deter any unsafe actions or intruders</p> <p>Panic alarms have been installed in key areas around the Centre, primarily areas where students may be working alone and unsupervised</p> <p>Areas where students have access are well maintained and regularly serviced, with staff responsible for carrying out risk assessments. A detailed health and safety induction is carried out on the first day to help ensure learner safety</p> <p>All learners are made aware of what are risks/hazards and gain knowledge of different health and safety legislations within their Health and Safety unit.</p> <p>College wide procedures in place and followed concerning bullying, harassment and disciplinary issues.</p> <p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <p>Feedback for learners via student survey is very positive; this is also supported by retention and achievement statistics.</p> <p>A first year student won the 'most promising chef' award and students who showed excellence in a <i>Ready Steady Cook</i> competition were awarded a Shun Knife as a prize.</p> <p>Attendance and punctuality is closely monitored with an instant contact system. This is closely monitored through the centralised absence reporting system</p> <p>Additional learning support by subject specific tutors is excellent and contributes significantly to the overall achievement statistics</p> <p>Students Union Fresher's Fair encourages team building and settling into the new learning environment</p> <p>Learners' survey feedback gives opportunity for learners to voice their views. Learners are also asked to give feedback on tutors.</p> <p>End of programme student awards are given to learners who have shown the greatest improvement over the course of the programme.</p> <p>Learner achievement has increased both on their main qualification aim, additional qualifications and key skill achievement.</p>	<p>New standards</p> <p>Aramark refectory and the Hospitality and food studies take-away shop</p> <p>Students union and student services</p> <p>Diary records of visit and record of student contribution made to charity</p> <p>Learning aim summary</p> <p>Student feedback</p> <p>Student handbook</p> <p>Student services</p> <p>Centre meeting minutes</p> <p>Cameras installed</p> <p>Location disclosed on request</p> <p>Induction records, Codes of practice and health and Safety records held in the Hospitality stores and head of centre</p> <p>Health & safety unit</p> <p>Scheme of work</p> <p>Centre in-house training</p> <p>Student feedback data</p> <p>FE Awards</p> <p>Instant contact</p> <p>SAA records</p> <p>Learning support records and SAA records</p> <p>Students union</p> <p>Students' survey</p> <p>Student feedback/course meetings</p> <p>Learning aim summary</p>

Figure 5 How this Centre of Study meets the outcomes for learners under 25, continued over

Action

Enjoying and achieving continued

Enrichment activities in the form of vocationally relevant visits are organised for all students. For example, students have been to East Mersea Youth Camp for a team building day.

Making a positive contribution

Group representatives are nominated within the first four weeks. These nominees are invited to join the Student Union committee and represent their peers at course committee meetings

Learners are required to sign learning agreements, encouraging a positive approach to their learning

The College Principal holds six student focus groups each year where students are invited to raise issues and make suggestions

At the end of each programme learners are encouraged to organise a social activity – this year the group organised a lunch in town. There also was a Centre trip to Alton Towers.

All learners are informed of their rights whilst at the College, in the form of tutorials, hand books and learning agreements.

Achieving economic well being

The new VRQ unit 'Introduction to the Catering and Hospitality Industry' is used as the basis of enriching careers guidance for the 1st year intake

Each group of 1st year Professional Chefs students have a designated mentor from local industry who will discuss various career paths as part of the mentor enrichment programme.

Students are encouraged to take part in an extensive visits programme including Hotelympia, which offers information on careers nationally and internationally. Compass provides a designated seminar room with speakers.

Learners develop key skills in numeracy, communications and ICT alongside their primary qualification. Key skills achievement data is excellent

All learners are given impartial information, advice and guidance on careers and higher education.

All learners are encouraged and supported to find part-time employment relevant to their programme.

Evidence

Course file

Student's feedback

Course committee meeting minutes

Minutes of meetings – Secretariat

Student's feedback

Course file/Notice board

Scheme for the unit

Mentor list – Course File

Visits records

Key skills data and schemes

Tutorial Scheme of work

Tutorials

Figure 6 How this Centre of Study meets the outcomes for learners under 25, completed

and are supported in the search for full and part-time employment. Effective support is given to learners with additional learning needs. Learners' progress is regularly and carefully monitored and communicated to the learners and, when appropriate, to their parents/carers. Learning plans are effective in providing learners with the information they need to improve and progress.

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievements and supporting learners?

Grade 1

Justification Leadership and management are outstanding with effective strategies to improve. For

example, in the recent Ofsted Inspection, inspectors identified that strategies were effective in leading to improvements in all the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

'golden' vocations like electricians and construction workers will enjoy an earning boost ... and further affect numbers entering the hospitality sector

Curriculum management is strong and improvements in data-management have improved and used well to effectively monitor the curriculum performance.



(Left) The CH&FS new building, designed for the delivery of industry-standard training and education.

The result

The Inspection Report confirmed this claim as Outstanding Grade 1. Their strengths were:

- outstanding success rates on NVQ courses
- excellent success rates in key skills
- outstanding development of learners' practical skills
- outstanding specialist resources including good ICT provision
- strong curriculum management with effective strategies for improvement
- only one area for improvement was identified – the teaching of applied theory.¹

The national emphasis of improving skills over the last decade has improved significantly but the UK still remains fundamentally weak by international standards. As identified in the Leitch review (December 2006)

radical change is continues to be necessary and urgent if the UK is to have any hope of achieving a world-class skill base by 2020.²

The Leitch review is a good overview for change but the challenge lies in the detail. Skills development will need to be more employer demand-led, voiced through the Sector Skills Council (SSC) which will give real power to shape the system towards economically relevant education and skills. We have a long way to go to ensure the UK competes with the best on a global basis. Action needs to be taken now to ensure

that we do not continue to lag behind the productivity rates of other developing countries.

For CH&FS the challenge lies in maintaining and improving standards and being imaginative and creative both for college students and those in the workplace. Being mediocre is not an option and we must raise our game. However, for any educational establishment, government funding needs to be re-balanced for over-19-year-olds if we are to have any hint of hope of achieving our expectations of doubling the numbers in training yearly. Apprenticeships and Train to Gain are the programmes available at present. There will have to be a cultural shift towards seeing

Specific skills shortages are unlikely to map neatly onto the available supply of excellent or even potentially excellent college partners

learning as something that is for all levels and all ages, not just as something to be done by young people. It also needs to be fit for 21st century purposes.

As the 'golden' vocations like electricians and construction workers are set to enjoy an earning boost of 30% over the next 15 years, this will even further affect numbers entering the hospitality sector unless we can raise our profile.³

In order to ensure the future success of CH&FS and its COVE, freshness, dynamism and commitment to growth is needed from all stakeholders. With

(Right) Leeanne Parrisot, seen with visiting chef Garry Rhodes, won the Junior Chef of the Year competition in 2004, when she achieved her NVQ level 1. She has now successfully progressed from NVQ level 2 to the level 3 programme.



the emphasis to increase the skills and innovation of education there has to be a support mechanism—in part financial—to not only attract quality staff but also to motivate and enhance those already in FE. In addition, local businesses need to support these centres both financially and with direct support and involvement.

There is no place for weak and middling performance. The government needs to do more to help many more providers to become excellent while at the same time sustaining those that are excellent already. Specific skills shortages are unlikely to map neatly onto the available supply of excellent or even potentially excellent college partners. In fact, logic tells us that the reverse will be true—many strategic skills shortages exist because there is no provision of adequate training in the area or, even, more widely.

Demands to meet increasingly local major strategic skills needs may well outstrip the available supply of excellence. It follows that excellence observed in present COVES must be created and nurtured. The Government must raise the profile of COVES through marketing and promotional activities to ensure buy-in from colleges, employers and other key players. Further to these recommendations, improved and increased use of electronic communication is essential and so that better and more effective links with key stakeholder organisations like employers can be built while reducing bureaucracy and duplication.

References

- 1 Report available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/pdf/?inspectionNumber=295754>
- 2 Sandy Leitch *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills* Final Report December 2006 (London, H M Treasury 2006)
- 3 City & Guilds 2006



NEIL RIPPINGTON followed a chefs' programme at The Bournemouth and Poole College by working Michelin-starred and other quality restaurants in France, London, Hampshire and the USA. Returning to education in 1994 as chef lecturer, he joined CH&FS as head of centre in 2003 as it became a CoVE.



CARMEL ASBURY is curriculum manager at the Centre for Hospitality & Food Studies. She attended catering college in Ireland and Germany, and enjoyed a decade of professional experience in quality restaurants and hotels in front-of-house management, joining CH&FS as a lecturer in 1994.



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