

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: The Blackpool Sixth Form College
Date of visit: Thursday 5 October 2006

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 improved in 2006?

- College data indicates that success rates increased in 2006 by 3% on level 3 courses and by 7% on level 2 courses. The improving success rates on level 3 courses are not yet sufficient to bring the college's success rate to the national average for the sector.

At the last AAV in March 2006 the college's retention rates appear to have improved. What are the final retention data for 2005/06?

- College data indicates that retention rates have improved on level 2 and level 3 courses. Learner numbers show that retention improved from 89% in 2005 to 91% in 2006.

How much progress are learners making? What does value-added data tell us?

- Overall value-added data indicates that learners are making progress in line with expectations. In 2006 the ALPS scores on both AS and A2 courses are grade 5. The number of A2 courses in the bottom 25% has fallen to 7 out of 34 subjects; 4 of these have remained in this category for the past 3 years. Whilst the value-added score at AS level remained satisfactory, the number of subjects in the bottom 25% doubled and includes almost half the AS subjects delivered at the college.

Have achievements on level 2 courses improved with the introduction of new vocational courses?

- In 2006 the percentage of A* to C grades at GCSE improved in English to 61% and in mathematics to 72%; both these are now significantly above the sector average. The high grade achievement on other GCSE courses, including the new applied courses, varies significantly from 14% to 69%. Success rates on many of these courses remain a concern. All learners on the new BTEC first certificate in leisure and tourism passed their course.

Quality of education and training

Have the strategies to improve teaching and learning and share good practice had an impact? What do the outcomes of the college's lesson observations tell us about the quality of teaching and learning?

- The outcomes of lesson observations have been used to improve the quality of teaching and learning through staff training and sharing good practice. Learners comment that lessons have clear learning objectives and describe a range of learning activities. Diagnostic testing is completed promptly during induction and the college has increased the amount of learning support and the use of mentors to support learning. The college has revised its observation guidelines to further raise standards.

How have the new vocational courses settled into the college's curriculum?

- Enrolments and staffing on vocational courses increased further in 2006. Self-assessment indicates that course leaders and their teams are clear about what needs to be done to improve the quality of their provision. The achievements on applied GCSE courses were low in 2006 and a number of changes have been introduced, for example, GCSE information technology has been replaced by the DIDA qualification. Initial results on the first year of the BTEC national courses are good.

How have the college audited the impact of the changes in the use of minimum target grades and assessment? Is the use of minimum target grades used consistently to monitor learners' progress?

- Individual learning plans, including a calendar of assessments for each course have been revised and the policy is clear to staff and students. All learners interviewed during the visit were clear about their minimum target grades and how they were progressing in relation to these. Teachers' feedback to learners has improved; there is now a minimum requirement that learners receive fortnightly written feedback in relation to their target grade and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Have the college evaluated the impact of the strategies introduced in September 2006? Are managers clear about the priorities for improvement across the college?

- Self-assessment has been revised and is more rigorous in identifying both strengths and areas for improvement. Quality improvement plans include

clear criteria, timescales and responsibilities against which success can be measured. Managers at all levels are focussed on raising standards and middle managers feel well supported by the new senior leadership team. The strategies implemented in 2005 have been reviewed and where appropriate have been adjusted for 2006.

Have the variations in the quality of curriculum provision been identified and acted upon?

- Underperforming courses are identified and placed in special measures by the senior leadership team. Fortnightly meetings support course leaders in bringing about improvements. The outcomes of this strategy is mixed; in a minority of courses the success rate and value-added has improved significantly whilst they remained low in other curriculum areas.

Have the college revised its safeguarding children procedures in line with the new guidelines?

- The college's arrangements for protecting and safeguarding children partially meet the statutory regulation and recent guidelines. The child protection policy is currently being revised with support from the local authority. All staff and governors have received child protection training and procedures for vetting staff are in place. The staff working in the college canteen have not all been CRB checked as routine.

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

- The college has revised its entry criteria, particularly for GCSE courses and improved its guidance and enrolment procedures. Initial indications are that fewer learners have requested courses changes and the numbers leaving college early is much reduced. Learners new to the college feel well supported in their first few weeks.