

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Hopwood Hall  
Date of visit: 19 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

#### Learners' achievements 2005/06

- It is difficult to comment on learners' achievements for 2005/06 because a great deal of achievement data is still outstanding. The college is aware of this issue and is working hard to resolve it and improve the timeliness of achievement data. The data available to date for overall achievement at levels 1, 2 and 3 is higher than the corresponding figures for this time last year. But the limited nature of the data available means that it is not possible to draw any conclusions from this.
- The college has employed a number of strategies to improve achievement during 2005/06. These include the enhanced use of teaching and learning coaches, greater utilisation of ILT, and working on raising learner aspiration particularly through the use of employers as visiting speakers.

Retention rates increased markedly from 2002/03 to 2003/04, but then declined in a number of areas from 2003/04 to 2004/05. What strategies have been used to address this decline and what has been their impact?

- Retention rates in 2005/2006 have increased following a decline in 2004/2005 for both age groups and are now above national benchmarks for 2004/2005. This increase can be seen at all levels for both 16 to 18 year olds and adult learners and rates are higher than in the previous two years. The college introduced a wide range of strategies to improve retention. Increased focus on the monitoring and tracking of learners by electronic means has succeeded in providing up to date, accurate information regarding trends and patterns across

different programmes and between different cohorts and groups of learners. As a result, staff are able to intervene early with learners causing concern, through liaison with other agencies such as Connexions. A number of other contributing factors, such as the work of the learning mentors, regular tutorials with personal tutors and the specific targeting of less well motivated learners are being successfully consolidated through co-ordinated programmes for induction and learner support.

Have the improvements in achievement seen in some area of work-based learning (WBL) at last year's AAV been sustained and what progress has made in raising achievement in other areas?

- There is a range of differing achievement data available which makes it difficult to make sound judgements on achievement, as outlined in an earlier section. However, on the basis of the college's own data, framework achievement for 2005/06 has improved in some areas, remained the same in some and deteriorated in one other. No information is currently available on retention rates. There has been significant reorganisation and refocusing of the provision, notably incorporating WBL within curriculum areas rather than as a distinct entity. This is a recent development and has been accompanied by a well-focussed programme of education and awareness-raising for curriculum managers and tutors. There have been similar initiatives with employers which have begun to improve the quality of new learners entering the programme, levels of targeted learner support and learners' opportunities for evidence gathering in the work place. Many other initiatives are still at an early stage and have yet to impact fully.
- A key new initiative is the appointment of a member of staff with responsibility for developing learners' key skills and skills for life. This appointment reflects a recognition that much previous underperformance is due to learners' poor basic and key skills. Learners are now routinely assessed for literacy, numeracy and other essential skills and consequently receive individualised support from tutors and specialist staff throughout their time on the programme.

## Quality of education and training

Provision for 14 to 16 year olds is mentioned as a strength in the last inspection report and the 2004/05 SAR. What strategies are being employed to ensure this provision remains strong?

- The college's approach in this area is evolutionary, widening in scope and expanding the level of provision, which now extends to initiatives with years 5 and 6. Links with schools in the immediate and wider boroughs are strong, productive and the number of schools involved has risen significantly over the past two years. The college's provision is flexible and responsive with a good range of new discrete vocational and integrated course modules tailored specifically to this age range, including the needs of young people who might otherwise not remain in education. Some programme delivery now takes place on school premises, including innovative projects in hair and beauty. Two new young apprentice courses, in hair and beauty and catering, have been successfully introduced since last year. A project targeted at learners who are otherwise likely to disengage from education has been particularly successful in helping them gain a wide portfolio of qualifications and encouraging them to remain in education, enter apprenticeships, training or work. There are currently 52 learners on this project.

The 2004/05 SAR cites improvements in essential/basic skills as strengths in a number of areas, but also the sharing of good practice in delivery of essential skills as an area for improvement. What progress has been made in these areas?

- Essential skills provision has been enhanced in a number of respects. A new manager with responsibility for further developing essential skills practice, delivery and the dissemination of good practice was recently appointed. Staff development and training have been extended and the provision is now part of the college's quality cycle. The college's strategy to improve the delivery and achievement of essential skills is effective, not least its strong and continuing focus on initial assessment of learners' basic skills levels and the subsequent provision of tailored, well-differentiated additional support by tutors and qualified specialist staff. Testing takes place with all learners on long courses. There are currently two different modes of essential skills delivery at each of the two main college sites, and plans to adopt a

single model, using only specialist tutors, in the future. A new online system for testing basic skills was introduced in September. This is more user-friendly, faster to use and progressively adapts questions to learners' levels of ability. In the past year, the college has achieved accredited centre status with a basic skills awarding body (OCR).

## Leadership and management

At the last AAV progress had been made in the use of standardised reports and MIS but this was still seen as an area for further development. What progress has been made and what is the impact on quality assurance?

- There is now a wide range of standardised reports available that staff at all levels are able to access and use. Training is given so that staff are supported in accessing and using data, ranging from filling in registers to producing reports. Data is now more widely used as supporting evidence, for example in the SAR process as staff have high levels of confidence in the data on the college system. Standard sets of data reports are produced and used as a basis for discussion in quality improvement, for example in the four meetings of the performance review cycle. The greater reliability of data means that problem areas can be identified more quickly and addressed before they develop into major issues.
- However the timeliness of production of achievement data is an area for development. The college does not yet have accurate college wide data for 2005/06 achievements as there is a great deal of achievement data still outstanding.

At the last AAV progress had been made in increasing the rigour of the self assessment process. What impact has this had on ensuring weaknesses and strengths are fully identified and addressed appropriately?

- The increased rigour of the self-assessment process has meant that strengths and weaknesses were identified in the 2004/05 SAR. The continued development of the process means that strengths and weaknesses are now being defined with greater clarity so that more focussed action plans can be put in place. The management

restructure has also had a positive impact on self-assessment and quality assurance as it has led to greater consistency across the college. A more prescriptive template for the 2005/06 SAR sections is being put in place to make it easier to make more effective comparison between different areas.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

- None

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

- There is currently a competition process in Rochdale for further LSC funded provision – Hopwood Hall College is preparing a joint bid with local authority for this new provision.