

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Knowsley Community College
Date of visit: 9 November 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

Trends in success, retention and pass rates in 2004-05 and 2005-06

The overall success rate on long courses in 2005-06 increased to 63%, following a decline in 2004-05. Retention rates generally improved for both age groups and at level 1 increased by 6%. Success rates on short courses in 2004-05 were higher than national averages. In 2005-06, the overall pass rate on GCE A-level courses increased to 96%, and the proportion gaining high grades also increased. Value-added data show that, overall, learners on these courses made significantly better progress than that expected. On GCE AS level courses, the overall pass rate declined to 85%. However, this cohort had significantly lower grades on entry than had been the case previously. The overall pass rate on AVCE and BTEC national diploma courses increased to 98% following some disappointing results on vocational level 3 courses in 2004-05. The college's internal measures of learners' progress on vocational courses show that on most courses learners achieved or exceeded their target grades.

The impact on outcomes of the revised retention strategy and the introduction of the 'College First' programme

The 'College First' programme successfully supports improvements in retention and success rates. The programme is effective in directing learners onto appropriate courses and identifying and meeting individual learning needs following rigorous initial assessment. Underpinning this is a broader curriculum offer in both the range and levels of programmes. Many more curriculum areas now offer programmes at entry level and level 1. Good links are maintained with the 'Readiness to Learn' team (see below). This programme links well to the local borough responsiveness programme aimed at young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in partnership with Connexions. The college continues to show strong commitment to providing courses for disengaged young people and its approach to social inclusion remains excellent.

Trends in success rates in work-based learning

Success rates in work-based learning are rising. New Measures of Success data for period 12 show an increase in the success rate from 27% in 2004-5 to 34% in 2005-6. On this data, full framework success rates in areas of learning varied from 14% to 54%. College data (not yet published) for the most recent outcomes, however, indicate that the overall framework success rate was 51%, which exceeds local averages and the college's target of 35% and brings the college performance into line with the national average. These data also indicate that success rates improved significantly in construction from 21% to 59% and in retail from 13% to 57%.

The impact of the red/yellow card system on punctuality

Learners reported that this system is applied rigorously and is effective in encouraging good attendance. Punctuality has improved in many curriculum areas and other benefits, such as improved behaviour have been noted.

Quality of education and training

The outcomes and impact of the review of the use of ILT that was planned to be carried out in March 2006

The college's review of the use of ILT was comprehensive and covered all curriculum areas. The outcomes have since been used effectively to determine training and development needs, to improve resources and to strengthen planning. Much good practice was observed during the review and teachers generally had a high level of confidence in the use of ILT. In a small number of areas the use of ILT was limited. Since the review, the use of ILT has increased, and more hardware and software has been introduced, for example for key skills and e-portfolio building. The college is now planning a further review to determine the extent to which ILT is being used to address the different needs of learners in lessons.

Recent developments in 14-19 provision in partnership with local schools as part of the Knowsley Collegiate, and initiatives such as 'PEP'

The college is a key partner within the Knowsley 14-19 Collegiate Partnership, which has DFES Pathfinder status. Within the Collegiate there is improving provision for pupils aged 14-16 which has led to a significant improvement in overall attainment across the borough at 16 as pupils follow courses that are more appropriate to their needs and interests. One outstanding aspect of the Collegiate provision for key stage 4 pupils is the successful pilot of the Young Apprenticeships in engineering and health and social care. The college has been commended by Ofsted this year for taking the lead with this new national initiative. It also provides courses successfully for young people in Year 11 who are disengaged from learning. They have Personalised Engagement Programmes (PEPs) with the aim of motivating them to progress to positive outcomes. Success is measured in terms of pupils remaining in education after the age

of 16 and approximately 70% of the full-time group who entered in January 2006 are still on college courses.

Impact of the 'Readiness to Learn' initiative

The 'Readiness to Learn' initiative effectively supports the College First programme. The college now provides much greater focus on ensuring learners are placed on appropriate programmes to meet their needs and has successfully targeted the most challenging learners. All staff are clear regarding minimum entry requirements for programmes to ensure that learners are not enrolled on a level of programme which is too high for them.

Leadership and management

Developments in employer engagement

Employer engagement is at the core of the college's curriculum. Business and workforce development remains the key focus of Knowsley Associates, the business development unit, and is successfully engaging with a growing number of employers. Significant work with the TUC has been undertaken. The college has successfully bid for a Train to Gain contract. It is actively involved in a number of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and provides a wide range of programmes for employers including further education, work-based learning and bespoke training. Foundation degrees successfully engage employers. Participation by employers in panels and forums continues to grow and the college has successfully created an on-line employers' forum. Some work with employers has been recognised locally and nationally as examples of best practice.

The impact of the college's involvement in the self-regulation pilot

The college has formed a strong peer-referencing partnership with three other colleges and has contributed fully to strategic and operational groups. Significant time investment has been made by all partners. Peer reviews have been carried out in each college, covering all aspects of the common inspection framework and additional themes such as employer engagement and the five outcomes of 'Every Child Matters'. The benefits derived by the college include common survey mechanisms, standardisation of quality assurance processes, the sharing of good practice, and improved self-assessment. In addition, the opportunities for mutual support and working together for improvement are seen as key benefits. The arrangements provide a credible basis for peer referencing and improve the capacity of colleges to self-improve. The college plans, with its partners, to evaluate the project and then redefine the framework to enhance rigour and consistency.

Arrangements for safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults

The college has well-developed, rigorous procedures for the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. A central record has been compiled of vetting checks that have been undertaken on staff, and the college is on target to meet current DfES requirements.

Appropriate staff and governor training has been provided, including during induction for new staff. The child protection policy is in place and is reviewed annually. The policy on bullying has recently been reviewed and is well promoted. Support for young learners who are leaving public care has been considerably strengthened and student advisors monitor their welfare and progress. Multi-agency working to support these and other vulnerable learners is strong. Additional resources have been provided to ensure the safety of learners, for example additional CCTV. The sample of learners interviewed reported feeling safe and well cared for.

Management of preparations for the introduction of specialised diplomas and functional skills

The Collegiate Partnership, in which the college is a key member, is taking a leading role in the implementation of specialised diplomas. The Partnership will offer all five diplomas, which will be available in 2007 at all three levels. There is good collaboration between the partners over issues such as capital funding, workforce development, employer engagement and developing the functional skills of students. The college has very good arrangements for providing students with information, advice and guidance and is well prepared to meet the needs of students as the diplomas become available.

Actions by the college that have secured the improvements in some curriculum area self-assessment grades and the reasons for some declining grades

The college takes effective action to manage change in order to contribute to improvements in curriculum provision. Risk assessments make good use of key performance indicators such as teaching grade profile, success rates and attendance to identify the need for an internal inspection. The senior management team provide section reports to inform curriculum self-assessment reports. Improvement plans are effectively drawn up. These include compulsory elements such as plans to improve retention and achievement, the use of ILT in lessons, attendance and punctuality and employer engagement. Senior managers monitor and review these plans effectively.