

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Huddersfield New College
Date of visit: 3 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

What are provisional college figures for success rates for level 3 courses?

- Performance has improved in all areas at level 3. GCE A-Level pass rates have improved to 97.3% which is above last year's national average of 96.6%. Retention has improved from 93.7% to 96.7%. The number of high grades (A/B) has increased by 4.5% to 30%. Overall this translates into an improved success rate from 91.2% in 2005 to 94.1 % in 2006. This represents good progress as the prior attainment on entry to the college is low compared to other sixth form colleges. There are significant improvements in advanced vocational courses (single award): retention has improved from 63.4% in 2005 to 78% in 2006, achievement from 93% in 2005 to 98.7% in 2006. Overall success rates have improved from 58.9% in 2005 to 77% in 2006. All outcomes are above the national average. The vocational double award shows a similar pattern of continuous improvement. Recently introduced National Diplomas have been successful: success rates have increased from 65.1% in 2005 to 73.8% in 2006, again above the national average. Possibly the most significant achievement for the college is the improvement in retention at AS level, a key weakness in the last inspection. From 82.1% in 2005 to 84.3% in 2006 and overall a rise of nearly 5% since the last inspection. Achievement has risen from 85.6% in 2005 to 87.2% in 2006. Success rates have risen by 3.2% to 73.5% in 2006. Retention remains low in a few areas and the college continues to monitor this.

How has the increase in retention been achieved? Is the improvement evident in all courses?

- The key strategies employed across the college to effect the overall improvement in retention has been closer monitoring of vulnerable groups and better targeting of students for support in the study centres. The college has also revised its provision at level 3 to better meet the needs of

all students. Until recently, college policy has been to encourage students who meet the entry criteria to follow a full programme of 4 AS levels. However, a slight departure from this policy has been to offer students a greater variety of BTEC national diplomas and equivalents. This revised course offer appears to have been very successful: all of the students interviewed during the visit spoke of the great choice and range of courses on offer at the college as one of their key reasons for choosing New College as opposed to other colleges. They also spoke highly of the support provided by the college and the encouragement they received from all staff.

What do 2006 data, tell us about value-added performance in individual subjects? Has outstanding performance been maintained? Has low value in some areas been improved?

- The college uses two national value-added systems to assess the progress that its students make, ALIS (advanced level information system) and ALPS (advanced level performance systems). ALIS data show that the college adds significant value at GCE AS and A-level. ALPS data for 2006 give the college a grade 3 for value added at GCE A level and also, for the first time, a grade 3 at AS level. This places the college in the top 25% of all colleges. This is good achievement, especially at AS level, for the college who have worked hard to improve performance at AS level.
- ALPS data for 2006 indicate outstanding performance in Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (Subsidiary) (AVCE(S)) and A-level information and communication technology (ICT), art and design, business studies, design and technology, English language and literature, French and physical education (PE). Consistently good performance is seen in ICT, art & design and PE. Of the others, French and design technology have improved their value added significantly from 2005. Subjects that indicate underachievement for some students in 2006: human biology, chemistry, design & technology (resistant materials), economics, English literature, film studies, media and sociology. In most of these subjects there is no clear pattern of underperformance in previous years.

What are the final achievement rates for level 2 (and level 1) courses?

- Provisional college data show an overall decline in success rates for GCSE courses (English, maths and science) in 2006, although they still remain high and well above the national average. At the time of the visit, the college was awaiting the outcome of further remarks of GCSE English

papers: eighteen have already been subject to remarks and have had their grades revised from grade D to Grade C. Success rates for level 2 vocational courses remain well above the national average at 88.2%. Performance on level 1 courses remains particularly high and is a consistent strength of the college.

Quality of education and training

How does the college reconcile the teaching and learning profile with any underachievement by students in a few areas? What evidence is there that sufficient action is being taken to improve differentiation (identified as a weakness in 2004/05)?

- The results of the well established lesson observation procedure in which the teacher can choose the lesson to be observed, gives the college a very high proportion of good or better teaching and a very small amount of satisfactory or inadequate teaching. Teaching and learning has a very high profile in the college and teachers speak very highly of the many staff development opportunities to help improve their teaching. Of particular note is the sharing of good practice through 'good practice seminars' which took place in the summer.
- Scrutiny of the lesson observation records show a number of good features: clear reference to the learner and the impact of teaching on the learning. In a minority of records there is little reference to what the students are actually doing, for example, learning took place throughout, but no reference to what they were learning. In general, especially where the lesson was graded outstanding, there was insufficient commentary to justify the grade. In a few cases, the strengths which were considered to be good, were really what might be expected. For example, 'objectives explained to the students' and 'clear lesson plan'.

What courses does the college offer for local 14-16 year olds?

- Key areas of involvement in 14-16 provision include: leisure and tourism, GCSE photography and IT courses. The college provides resources, including staffing and the courses are partly delivered on the New College site.
- The college is keen to be involved in on-going debates about the curriculum offer for 14-19 year olds. It is an active participant in the local collegiate, set up to encourage participation in 14-19 developments. However, the college's own lack of capacity and funding, is hindering further progress in this area.

Leadership and management

Generally, how is the SAR moderated to ensure consistency across all departments?

- The moderation process is carried out by the principal and other senior managers and is supported by colleagues external to the college. The inconsistencies arise mainly because the college adopts a flexible approach to the use of value added systems and other data: some departments will use ALPS and others ALIS, and some use both. Senior managers agree that some weaknesses may be overstated in a few cases.

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

The progress made in checking the evidence against the criteria for grading each Every Child Matters theme.

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

- It is noted that the principal will be taking early retirement in September 2007.
- The college has a planned expansion programme in the near future.
- Good monitoring of groups of students, for example, underachievement of males and in particular, Pakistani males. The college is effective in targeting resources to tackle these issues. For example, as a result of a range of strategies, the progress of Pakistani males has improved and is now around the same as White British males in the college.