

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Sandwell College  
Date of visit: 18 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

Achievement and standards were inadequate in the last inspection. What does the available data for 2005/06 indicate about achievement and standards?

- At the time of the annual assessment visit, it was too early to judge the overall success rates for 2005-06, as the college was still processing achievement data. The college was able to provide data on retention rates for 2005-06. For learners aged 16-18 at level 1 the retention rates for long courses have increased between 2003-04 and 2005-06 to be above the national average. At level 3, although the retention rate for long courses in 2005-06 was at the national average, the increase between 2003-04 and 2005-06 was significant at 20%. However, at level 2, retention rates for long courses between 2003-04 and 2005-06 have decreased to just below the national average. Overall retention rates for adult learners at all levels showed a substantial increase between 2003-04 and 2005-06 to around the national average. Retention rates for most areas of learning between 2003-04 and 2005-06 increased to around the national average. However, in health, public services and care they were substantially below the national average.

Success rates for learners aged 14-16 were good in the last inspection and in some areas there was good post -16 progression to college provision. Has this trend been maintained?

- The college has maintained these strengths. Success rates for learners aged 14-16 remain high and many progress on to courses at the college.

Success rates on work-based learning courses 2005-06

- Overall success rates for work-based learning courses in 2005-06 were substantially below the national average. Overall success rates for work-

based learning between 2004-05 and 2005-06 declined slightly but the decline was particularly marked for advanced apprentices. Success rates for business administration and law learners in 2005-06 were good and well above the national average. However, success rates were unsatisfactory in engineering and manufacturing technology and very poor in construction, planning and the built environment. Data available for the first part of 2006-07 indicate a very significant improvement in work-based success rates.

#### Success rates on key skills courses in 2005-06

- A weakness at the last inspection was low key skills success rates. Key skills success rates for 2005-06 although not high were above the national averages. All key skills success rates showed an improvement from 2004-05, particularly application of number and communications.

#### Quality of education and training

How much progress has been made with the quality improvement strategy in addressing issues related to teaching and learning and tutorials?

- At the time of the last inspection, teaching was judged satisfactory with insufficient teaching which was good or better. A new comprehensive lesson observation scheme was being implemented but had not been embedded. Since the inspection, the college has produced a summary report for the observations of teaching and learning carried out in 2005-06. It rightly identifies the proportion of lessons judged to be good or better as being too generous. The recommendations outlined by the report recognise the issues around rigour and training. The report provides a good summary of the strengths and areas for improvement found in the lessons observed. As a result, very good progress has been made in developing further a rigorous scheme by which to monitor teaching and learning. A larger team of trained observers is now in place and these observers undertake joint observations to ensure consistency of grading. The college is placing a key focus on improving teaching and learning through a structured staff development programme and support from external consultants; both of which are crucial in moving the college forward. The links between the outcomes of lesson observations and training needs and staff appraisal are good. Observers highlight the use of information learning technology (ILT) on lesson observation forms to identify effective practice. Overall the college has made good progress

since the last inspection in developing teaching and learning. However, at this visit it was too early to judge the rigour of the changes to the formal lesson observation scheme until the new cycle is completed.

- Tutorials, particularly for learners aged 16-18 were judged inconsistent at the time of the last inspection. The college has undertaken a great deal of work to develop a learner tutorial progress file and tutor guide for 2006-07. The tutoring guide provides tutors with clear guidance and responsibilities. The college has developed a wide range of online activities for learners to complete as part of the tutorial process. The college will be monitoring the impact of the new tutorial materials via lead tutors who will observe tutorials and review tutorial activities.

## Leadership and management

Do college leaders and managers have a clear view of what needs to be done to address the key areas for improvement in the last inspection? Have all the weaknesses in the inspection report been addressed in the post inspection plan? Are timescales and actions appropriate?

- The post inspection plan is comprehensive and thorough and addresses all the key weaknesses in the last inspection report. The local learning and skills council and the quality improvement agency have accepted the plan. Timescales and actions are appropriate. The senior leadership team monitors the action plan in a variety of forms via monthly performance review meetings. The plan runs from June 2006 to June 2007 and the first formal review is due at the end of October 2006.

Three curriculum areas were considered inadequate in the last inspection, information communication technology (ICT), preparation for work and life, business administration and law. What progress has the college made in addressing the weaknesses in these curriculum areas?

- The college revised its management structure shortly after the last inspection to address weaknesses in leadership and management. It formed three new curriculum directorates each with a deputy director. Directors have a reduced teaching load and undertake a minimum of 15 lesson observations each year, with a clear focus on quality improvement of the learners' experience. Each curriculum area has an advisor from the quality improvement agency and receives support and guidance from a high performing college. The post inspection action plans are detailed and

thorough; they have a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. The college has strengthened its use of data to monitor and review learners' progress and performance. Staff and managers have received additional training on how to understand data on learners' performance and how to plan actions to remedy issues. It is too early to assess the full impact of the curriculum action plans.

- For ICT the data available for 2005-06 on retention and success rates indicates some improvement. The emphasis for the start of 2006-07 has been to ensure that learners receive appropriate advice and guidance at enrolment. The college has screened all learners aged 16-18 to identify additional learning support needs. The advisor from the quality improvement agency works with the team, offering individual and group support, and has undertaken a number of formal lesson observations. Training has taken place on the use of ILT in lessons and improving teaching and learning.
- In business, the college has rationalised provision and has removed underperforming courses. The data for 2005-06 indicates a mixed picture with some courses such as AVCE, GCSE business studies, GCE A level accountancy and business showing good improvement. However, GCE AS courses are not so successful. The college has introduced a new BTEC level 1 course to ensure learners have appropriate choice of courses from levels 1 to 3. The advisor has supported the manager in developing quality assurance issues. The support from the high performing college has focused on operational issues, such as sharing resources and developing teaching and learning. Learners are positive about the new learning resource facility and dedicated business studies base at the West Bromwich campus. The opportunity for all curriculum teams to meet weekly has improved communication. These meetings allow for regular items such as attendance to be discussed and actioned. Student liaison officers will support staff in monitoring attendance but they are not yet in place. The links with industry continue to be developed with some visits already taking place and further identified links planned.
- In the preparation for life and work area, a key weakness in the last inspection was the low success rates on most certificated English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. Early indications from college data show that the college has addressed this weakness. Most ESOL certificated course success rates have increased between 2004-05 and 2005-06 by 40% to 75%. However, retention rates for learners aged 16-18 have decreased between 2004-05 and 2005-06 by 11% to just below the national average. The college has reviewed the curriculum offer

and has reduced the number of programmes for adult learners. The ESOL team has started a programme of improving teaching and learning which includes a range of staff development initiatives involving external specialists.