

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Shrewsbury Sixth Form College
Date of visit: 31 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

College performance in 2005/06 and current trends

- College data (not yet validated) for 2006 indicate a continuing trend of improvement. The overall college success rate improved from 81% in 2005 to 87% in 2006, which is well above the 2005 sixth form average of 79%. College success rates improved at each long course level and for short courses. This represents a considerable achievement in a year in which managers were faced with the challenges of closing the college's part-time provision for adults and taking forward the project for co-location with Shrewsbury College of Arts & Technology. Retention improved from 87% in 2005 to 93% in 2006. Unusually, for 16 to 18 year old students, there is no significant difference between the performance of male and female students.
- The analyses of students' performance provided by both the ALPS and ALIS systems provide evidence of strong value being added by the college. For example, performance at both AS and A level are graded 3 by ALPS, which is regarded as outstanding performance by that system and places the college comfortably within the top quartile of participating institutions.

Quality of education and training

What evidence is there to suggest the college's internal lesson observation process is sufficiently rigorous and comprehensive to provide a reliable assessment of the quality of teaching and learning?

- The college regards internal lesson observations as an aspect of its quality assurance which requires further development. As part of this process, an external team of consultants, consisting of highly experienced part-time college inspectors, was used to carry out lesson observations during 2005/06. They were shadowed by a number of college managers in order to developing the

college's own internal capacity. The resulting profile is extremely high, with 93% of lessons observed graded as good or better.

- A number of factors have the potential to distort the reliability of this profile and inflate the view it provides of the quality of teaching and learning. The size of the sample, which aims to include one observation of each teacher, is relatively small; teachers were given one week's notice of the specific lesson to be observed; the records of the lesson observations evaluate teaching and learning processes well but provide little evaluation of how much learning actually took place. This makes it difficult to judge the accuracy of the grading.
- The grading of lessons is still relatively new within the college, although the exercise has led to teachers feeling more comfortable with the prospect. The intention is to continue with an element of consultancy support as lesson observations are brought more in-house this year.
- Students generally have a positive view of their lessons. Discussion with a sample of GCE AS and A-level students suggests that information and learning technology is being used well to accelerate learning and hold learners' attention in a good number of subjects. Learners value and make good use of the college intranet and the materials it makes available to them. They enjoy lessons with teachers they feel are creative and enthusiastic, which provide good opportunities for them to interact with teachers and which are more practical rather than theoretically-based. They dislike lessons where long periods of time being spent on the same type of activity. They suggest that lesson objectives are shared in only a minority of subjects and end-of-lesson evaluations are even rarer. Opportunities for group work seem to be infrequent and they could not think of any examples of differentiated learning activities being used to enable learners to work at a different pace.

Leadership and management

The quality of self assessment

- The college has revised the format of subject and college self assessment for this year in an effort to make the process more beneficial to subject areas by reducing the bureaucracy and encouraging more sharply focused evaluation and improvement planning. Section leaders have been instrumental in influencing this development and consequently feel more ownership of the process. They provide good support, advice and examples to subject area heads and become champions of subject self-assessment reports (SARs) during a challenging validation process, which involves a governor and senior managers from several other colleges as well as the college management team. As subject SARs for this year are still at draft stage, it is too early to judge the improvement that has been achieved. Review of a small sample indicates that progress has been made in identifying only genuine strengths

and areas for improvement but that there remains a tendency for teaching and learning to be insufficiently evaluated.

How effective is management action to improve underperforming courses?

- Largely informal processes have proved very effective in addressing underperformance on specific courses. Senior managers, section leaders and subject area heads are all involved in analysing causes and developing solutions during the autumn term of the next academic year. In 2006, success rates on the large majority of courses felt to have underperformed in 2005 showed considerable improvement.

How well has the college responded to consistently poor achievement on part-time course for adults?

- Due largely to the changes in LSC funding, the college has discontinued its part-time adult provision. The interests of students were appropriately prioritised as this closure was managed, with the college ensuring that appropriate alternative provision was available through other local providers. Ironically, the overall success rate for adult students improved from 60% to 78% in 2006.

To what extent does the college comply with recent child protection regulations?

- The college's child protection policy was suitably revised and approved during 2005. Three members of staff and one governor have designated responsibility. All staff and governors have received appropriate training. However, the college does not yet comply fully with requirements. There are gaps in CRB or List 99 checks being carried out where required and a recording mechanism to demonstrate that all necessary checks have been carried out for each member of staff is not yet in place.

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

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

- The range of applied GCE AS and A-levels has been extended this year. These are now provided in business studies and leisure studies as well as health and social care and travel and tourism, which were previously available as AVCEs. Use of mathematics was introduced at advanced level in 2005 for those learners wanting to achieve a maths qualification without having to take maths at AS level.

- The college has a leadership role in 14 to 19 developments with neighbouring schools and colleges and the local authority. In particular, the college is planning to be involved in the development of three of the first five specialised diplomas, the introduction of which has been deferred until 2009 locally, and its key contribution may well be on the development of functional literacy and numeracy within the diploma context.