

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Solihull College

Date of visit: 28 September 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

Early indications are that standards continue to rise on level 2 and 3 programmes for 16-18 year olds. The college is committed to raising students' success rate further. Where there are variations in standards to what extent has the college identified reasons say, by levels, curriculum areas or student groups and agreed appropriate actions?

- College performance report shows overall success, retention and achievement rates on long courses in 2004/5 for 16-18 learners to be around national rates. For adult students the comparable rates are slightly below national rates. In both age groups this is an improving trend over a three year period. Analysis of 2004/05 data by level indicates the success rate of 16-18 year olds on level 1 long courses are at the national rate, level 2 are above and level 3 are below national rates. For adults level 1 long courses are below national rates and levels 2 and 3 are at the national rates. Value-added on level 3 courses and distance travelled on level 1 and 2 courses in 2004/05 are around the national rate.
- During the annual assessment visit in September, preliminary 2005/06 data was available for 16-18 students only. This indicates an improvement at levels 2 and 3, and improvements in retention on level 3 courses, an area targeted in previous self-assessments. Success data for AGCSE AS and A levels shows significant improvement. It is too early for any indications of achievement of adults to be apparent.
- The college is in the process of self-assessing the current position against trends and targets. Variations in standards between curriculum areas or student groups are being identified and actioned.
- Student success rates in the key skills were very low in 2004/05. What is the early indication of student success in key skills in 2005/06? What action has been taken to raise standards in 2006/07?

- Achievement rates in 2005/06 on key skills in application of number (AON), communication and information technology (IT) qualifications for learners other than work-based learning remain low: 39%, 43% and 53% of learners achieve a level 1 qualification in AON, IT and communications respectively. Achievement levels at level 2 are 10% in AON, 31% in IT and 24% in communications. At level 3 achievement is low: in communications it is 9% and in IT it is 5%. Very few learners take AON at level 3. Inspectors did not explore the achievement of wider key skills during the visit.
- Not all learners fully appreciate the importance of key skills or take sufficient ownership to produce good quality portfolios in time. Some learners are making very slow progress. There is variation in achievement across curriculum areas, some, such as hairdressing and sports and fitness have provided key skills in vocational context and are more successful. In some area vocational and key skills tutors have jointly designed assignments to ensure appropriate key skills coverage.
- Senior managers have now taken greater ownership of the underachievement in this area and taken steps to improve the situation. These include improvements in teaching standards using national resources, greater sharing of good practice within the college and more careful monitoring and recording of learners' progress. Assessment has been made more flexible and is now available on-line. Achievement is now monitored by curriculum area, qualification and by tutors. This will be used in performance management and to spread good practice in teaching, design of programmes and modes of delivery. Staff development is focused on broadening teaching skills of vocational staff instead of having a core team of tutors of key skills. The impact of all these initiatives has not yet led to improvements in learner achievements.

Quality of education and training

The college has identified a number of key risks to the achievement of the Quality Improvement Plan and activities to mitigate the risk. To what extent are activities such as benchmarking, good practice visits and peer review built into the quality improvement plans of curriculum areas to ensure consistently high standards across the college.

- The college has good communications, an open and inclusive management style and staff are committed to the aim of raising standards. There is considerable evidence of the sharing of good practice, especially informally from one curriculum area or team to another. This is

becoming more formal and systematic across the college, especially through whole college development days where staff share methodologies. Through these days there has been an increased focus on teaching and learning, but it is too early to identify specific themes based on 2006 inspection priorities. In addition advanced practitioners and subject learning coaches have a formal role of disseminating good practice in a number of curriculum areas. The college has developed partnership arrangements with a number of other colleges to share practice and act as critical reviewers. Staff regularly visit these colleges and work jointly with professional colleagues.

- Inspection and self-assessment has identified areas where punctuality is an issue. How robust are the planned actions to address punctuality?
- The college revised its procedures on absence in 2004/05 and staff describe them as being fit for purpose. Following inspection, management has taken prompt action to reinforce the policy with staff. Through induction students are now well aware of the policy and procedures and their own responsibility to be punctual. Tutors enforce this through a combination of teaching measures and discipline as necessary. For example, persistent late comers are referred to the head of school. Nevertheless some adult students indicated negative experiences of lessons being disrupted this term by students arriving late, especially when teachers repeated work for them. The college has recently provided a staff development session for some staff on the integration of students into class when they arrive late.

Inspection, self-assessment and internal audits have identified the need for short term learning targets to be more precise. To what extent are initial individual learning plans (ILPs) indicating an improvement in target setting?

- The college revised its procedures on tutorials, target setting and monitoring in 2004/05 with a further review in 2005/06. The process for setting longer term targets with students is thorough and current new students have agreed these targets during induction. Since inspection the major approach to improving short term targets has been the enforcement of the existing policy across the college, including staff development on current procedures. There is evidence of consistency in approach in tutorials, both group and individual, and student progress meetings. There is some evidence of marked work being audited internally to ensure that students receive good guidance on what they have to do to improve. The monitoring of short term targets for students in receipt of

additional learning support (ALS) is strong and there has been some sharing of good practice between the ALS team and tutorial team. Students do not take responsibility for their own tutorial records: these are maintained by personal tutors. It was too early for inspectors to see any ILPs or judge their robustness and impact on students.

- Inspection and college records have shown take up of numeracy support to be low. How effective are college processes for identifying and setting up support to address language, literacy and numeracy needs?
- Prior to inspection the college had implemented a revised management structure to improve the coherence of skills for life (SfL) provision. As a result a number of changes have been introduced at the start of 2006/07. Initial assessment identifies students' needs accurately and additional support is arranged in a timely manner. The process of identification of all language, literacy and numeracy needs is subject to a thorough ongoing review. It is planned that support needs and support provided will be made more relevant to the curriculum area. For example, maths and communication for sports students to include teaching materials and assignments relevant to the sports industry. College plans include a strong focus on the integration of SfL and key skills into the curriculum. Staff offering support are being drawn directly from the curriculum area and will be supported by a planned programme of staff development.

Leadership and management

How effective are the arrangements made by the college for monitoring and reviewing the quality improvement plan against the agreed performance indicators?

- The college is in the process of finalising a revised quality improvement plan which will take forward issues raised in the recent inspection and other issues raised strategically and through the quality system. A separate post inspection action plan has not been drawn up. There is agreement on a range of top level performance measures, against which impact of the plan will be assessed. Appropriate targets are agreed for the achievement of activities within plans. The college has a thorough system of monitoring in place.

How effective are arrangements to monitor the preparation and implementation of action plans in each curriculum area, including those inspected in May 2006?

- Detailed and appropriate action plans have been agreed in each curriculum area which was inspected in May 2006 and these will address areas for improvement. There is regular and appropriate monitoring of achievement of action plans at all levels within the college. In each curriculum area the self-assessment process starts with a review of previous actions and performance targets and any continuing issues are built into the action planning process. Team self-assessment is good and there is a wealth of quality data available to them to ensure the basis of assessment is sound. There is a high level of involvement by managers in the process to validate decisions made.

Since the last inspection in May the college has opened the new Woodlands Campus. What management structures and processes have been established to ensure consistency of standards across the whole college?

- The college has strong quality assurance processes that apply across both campuses. There are strong target setting processes and achievement of targets is closely monitored. There is good communication by the college within the locality and local issues can be addressed including variations in the nature of the provision at the campus. The college management information system identifies students according to the campus they attend and will analyse student success separately to ensure that high standards are achieved at Woodlands Campus. Management and service structures overarch both campuses and students receive a comparable entitlement.
- At the last inspection the quality of provision in work-based learning (WBL) was judged satisfactory, whilst the overall quality of provision for the college was judged good. How effective are plans to raise the quality of this provision to be consistent with the college overall?
- Historically, success rates for apprentices in work-based learning at Solihull College have been very low. These have ranged from 6% in 2002/03 to 24% in 2004/05. These have improved substantially in the current year and now stand at 56%. Success rates for apprenticeship frameworks in 2005/06 are substantially higher than previous years. For example, the success rates for learners in business administration, hairdressing and beauty therapy, hospitality, sport and leisure and retail have improved from 18, 35, 17 and 27 per cent to 54, 56, 65 and 43 per cent respectively. The learners are making good progress on all

programmes. The number of advanced apprenticeships is very low. There are 300 apprentices on programme, 250 are employed with local employers. The remaining apprentices who are unable to gain employment are developing good vocational skills, employment awareness and employability skills.

- The management of WBL has improved. Senior managers have demonstrated their commitment by allocating more resources and streamlining the management processes and procedures. All WBL is now centrally managed but delivered in specialist curriculum areas. The college has taken effective measures to ensure that the learners are on the right programmes. Programmes and delivery modes have been adjusted to maximise the benefit to the learners. For example, to improve retention rates in retail, hairdressing, sports and hospitality, the college has introduced short taster courses and three week programmes. Learners get the opportunity to see if they like the trade before making full commitment. They also gain short trade related qualifications and technical certificates that enhance their employability.
- The college has appointed highly qualified and experienced key skills staff and delivery has improved. Learners complete their key skills at the beginning or alongside their main programme through embedded key skills as appropriate. Assessment including on-line testing is now available on demand. Links with employers are good; they communicate their views on their training needs very promptly. Employers are well aware of their responsibility for the learners' training and make timely and valuable input. Advice and guidance staff promote WBL as a dedicated learning route to young people in schools and at open evenings. Induction to the programmes has improved. Staff monitor learners' progress well. Learners are staying on programme and making good progress in all the main WBL areas of learning.
- Work-based learning is now fully integrated into college structures. Some good practice from within WBL such as teaching of key skills and ongoing assessment is being shared with other parts of the college. Data management and tracking of learners progress has improved. Staff development and support for the staff is good. Quality improvement and audits are working effectively.