

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: College of West Anglia
Date of visit: 2 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

The college has recently merged with Isle College, Wisbech. A number of achievement indicators are significantly worse for Isle than for the College of West Anglia (COWA). For example, overall success rates for long courses have declined to significantly below the national figure at Isle, whereas they have improved at COWA over the same period. Have these trends continued in 2005/06?

- Success rates continue to be significantly below the national figures for provision at Wisbech. Management information system (MIS) data has recently been improved, and success rates based on this indicate that the declines seen in previous years may have stabilised in 2005/6. They remain poor overall however.

Overall success rates at COWA showed a steady improving trend up to 2004/5. Has this continued in 2005/06?

- At the time of the annual assessment visit (AAV), data was incomplete and awaiting some National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) results. However it is clear that the high success rates seen in 2004/05 have been sustained, and some have improved further. For example, the overall level 3 success rate is now around 10% higher than the national rate. Overall success rates for GCSE and GCE provision now lie between 6% and over 20% above the national average for colleges of this type. These success rates contrast sharply with those for Wisbech.

The last AAV visit found uneven value-added (VA) for GCE provision. The 2004/05 CPR indicates overall VA around the national figure for GCE and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) provision. Has the college successfully tackled the uneven VA seen in the last visit?

- The college has done much to tackle uneven VA in GCE provision. Overall VA has improved and poor VA on some courses has been successfully addressed.

The proportion of students achieving high grades on level 3 provision improved in 2004/05, although the self-assessment report (SAR) recognises that further improvement is necessary. Has this improvement been sustained?

- The college measures high grade achievement in GCE courses using grades A-C, not A-B as in national comparators. However, its own data indicate an improving trend in grades A-C in 2006 though comparisons with national data are difficult.

The last AAV identified improvements in modern apprenticeship (MA) framework completions in a number of subject sector areas (SSAs), though not in engineering, and health and social care. What happened in 2005/06?

- Work-based learning success rates are generally above national averages, timely completion overall is 52% compared to 35% nationally. Success rates for health and social care, and engineering improved significantly in 2005/06, though for engineering they are still below the national figure.

Achievement of key skills appears to be significantly above the national average. Is this still the case, and was it sustained in 200/06?

- Success rates for key skills remain considerably above the national average.

The SAR recognises underperformance in aspects of provision in three SSAs: information technology (IT), leisure and tourism, and history/philosophy. Is there any evidence of improvement in 2005/06?

- Issues of underperforming courses within these curriculum areas have been addressed and success rates improved in 2005/06.

Quality of education and training

The last AAV described the emphasis which the college has placed on the improvement of teaching since the last inspection. However, there were indications of some overgenerous grades and lack of precision. How has this been addressed?

- The college has introduced a range of measures to ensure that its lesson observation process is accurate and that it effectively identifies developmental points. These include internal and external moderation and peer observation. In addition, the college works with two other nearby colleges to ensure standardisation. Action planning following

observations is good, with actions closely matched to developmental points. Feedback from lesson observations indicate that the college has a good understanding of its own teaching and learning.

What actions have been taken to address quality of provision for underperforming courses, and to share good practice in successful courses?

- Through the college's intervention strategy, quality of provision has been successfully addressed in many underperforming courses. Good practice is effectively identified and shared through advanced practitioners, subject learning coaches, and information and learning technology (ILT) champions. Good use is made of standards unit resources.

The last AAV identified improving target setting and monitoring of students. Has this been sustained?

- Improved target setting and monitoring has been sustained. Students feel that they have a clear understanding of what actions they need to take to improve. Targets for work based learners are appropriate and clear.

The SAR recognises that internal verification (IV) processes are not always understood or actioned by some course teams. How is the college tackling this?

- Internal verification processes and policies are readily available to staff and are well understood. The IV policy is detailed and clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of staff to ensure the accuracy of assessment.

How extensively are teaching staff updated and trained, for example in aspects of ILT, and 14-16 provision?

- Staff have regular updating and training sessions both across the college and within faculties. These have included ILT training, child protection, and issues around 14-16 provision.

Leadership and management

How is the college addressing issues of achievement at the Wisbech campus?

- The need to address issues of achievement at the Wisbech campus is well understood by staff. The college has made a good start by cleansing MIS data and resolving MIS issues to give an accurate baseline for the Wisbech curriculum. Staff are working between institutions and good practice is being identified and shared. In addition, separate curriculum

SAR grades are given for both campuses so that improvement can be monitored. Senior management has a clear view of how issues at Wisbech will be dealt with to drive up standards.

The college has introduced new self-assessment documentation to improve the precision of target setting for improvement. Has it been successful?

- New documentation is more precise and has a better focus towards outcomes. Staff feel that the self assessment process has improved. Targets are understood and are effectively monitored by managers.

What measures are being taken to improve achievement in work-based learning?

- Work-based learning achievement is good and improving. Purposeful leadership has ensured an appropriate emphasis on better integration and delivery of key skills so that the proportion of learners is now significantly above the national figure.

What progress is the college making towards having a fully qualified teaching workforce?

- The college is making good progress towards having a fully trained workforce at the King's Lynn campus, where around 90% have a teaching qualification. At the Wisbech campus however, the figure is around 40%. Additional provision is now being offered at Wisbech to increase the proportion of qualified staff.