

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: West Suffolk
Date of visit: 11 December 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 record (CPR) data indicate that, although overall success rates were high in 2004/5, the figure for students aged between 16-18 years of age was significantly higher than for students aged 19+. This was mainly due to relatively low retention for this age group. What happened in 2005/6, and did retention improve for 19+ students?

- The college made good progress in 2005-06 and retention of students aged 19+ improved markedly. At levels one, two, and three, improvements were by 11%, 6% and 5% respectively. At levels three and one, overall retention for these students is now at the national average, and it is 5% above the national figure for level two. Improvements have been associated with the closure of Tektra information technology (IT) provision together with the improved performance of courses identified as being at risk. The college is predicting a further increases for retention in 2006-07 of around 2-3%

The success rate for students aged 19+ on level one provision declined to around 5% below the national figure in 2004/05. What happened in 2005/06?

- The success rate for students aged 19+ on level one provision improved markedly in 2005-06, from 62% to 71%. This is 10% above the national rate. Actions taken above have contributed to this improvement, and the college is anticipating a further improvement in 2006-07 as these have a continuing impact.

What trends were apparent in the achievements of work based learners in 2005/06?

- The achievements of work based learners improved further in 2005/06. Framework success rates increased by 4% to 63%, timely success rates by 5% to 42%, and framework national vocational qualifications (NVQ) rates from 64% to 65%. These figures are significantly above the national averages.

Achievement in Key Skills was outstanding 2004/05. What happened in 2005/6?

- Achievements for key skills remained outstanding in 2005/06. In addition to the maintenance of high success rates, the college successfully extended key skills provision to many more students than in the previous year.

What happened to NVQ achievements in 2005/6?

- In 2005/06 overall success rates for NVQ provision improved on the already high rate by a further 6%.

The last annual assessment visit (AAV) identified varying achievement of high grades in national diploma courses. Has this changed?

- Value added for national diploma courses improved markedly on 2005/06 and is now positive. The number of courses in which overall attainment was below that expected declined from 12 to six out of 20. The college has identified underperforming national diploma and has implemented actions to improve them.

Quality of education and training

What factors led to the relatively low overall retention of students aged 19+ in 2004/5, and has the college addressed them?

- The college has successfully addressed issues of retention in 19+ students (see above). Overall retention is now at or above the national figure at all levels for this age group.

The last AAV evaluated quality assurance of teaching and learning as good. How has the college continued to improve its teaching and learning?

- Many aspects of teaching and learning have improved in the short time since the last inspection. A scrutiny panel now evaluates the accuracy of lesson observations, and external validation is also used. There is an improved emphasis on the learning rather than teaching, and criteria for grading have been clarified to ensure a more accurate and consistent grade profile. Close attention is paid to students perceptions. The college is working towards using single lesson observations to inform both the college's lesson observation scheme and initial teacher training (ITT) courses. The college recognises the need for documentation to recognise that these processes evaluate different aspects of professional practice and development.

How effectively does the college evaluate the effectiveness of the support it provides for students?

- The college has made a good start to evaluate the effectiveness of the support it provides. Initial analysis indicates that those students in receipt of support achieve significantly better than those who do not receive it. The college is working on the more detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of support so that it can be targeted more effectively.

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

- The college is making good progress towards having a fully qualified workforce. 88% of full time staff and 70% of part-time staff have a teaching qualification

What improvements to the quality of provision has the college implemented since the last inspection?

- The college has made many improvements to the effective use of information learning technology (ILT). Teaching staff now use ILT extensively. Students make good use of IT, for example as a means of recording key skills evidence. Extensive use is made of wikis, blogs and podcasts. In addition, staff agree that management information systems (MIS) have become more accessible and useful for up to date

students evaluation. A networked assessment tracking system is currently being trialled.

Leadership and management

The last AAV identified that the sharing of good practice was well-developed. Has this continued?

- The college continues to effectively identify and share good practice, especially ILT. A good programme of staff development sessions is available, that often builds on aspects of good practice. The college is very good at the identification of developmental needs, and staff feel well-supported in their professional role. All managers have a target to visit at least one other organisation to observe practice within their own area.

The last inspection identified that the college should further develop the use of value added measures. What progress has been made?

- The college has made a good start in the use of value added measures both to evaluate students' progress and course performance. It has a good understanding of its own provision. Plans are in hand to further develop the use of learner achievement tracker (LAT) data so that target setting and value added can be precisely applied to individual students.

At the time of the last inspection, the college had intentions to recruit a governor with a HE background. Has it been successful?

- The college is currently awaiting full validation by the University Campus Suffolk. There is not at present a vacancy on the Governing body. The issue of a FE / HE representative will be considered by the governing body when a vacancy occurs.

At the last inspection, curriculum management was described as good rather than outstanding. How effectively is the college developing the leadership and management skills of curriculum and other middle managers?

- The college continues to effectively develop managers across the college. In-house training is available to both aspiring and practicing managers. There is good access to accredited training e.g. diploma in management studies. All managers are required to visit another organisation to observe practice. Intervention strategies effectively improving satisfactory provision and managers feel well supported. Communication and networking between managers is well developed and a whole-college ethos means that sharing of ideas and improvement is good.

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

- None

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

- The college has improved further since the recent inspection