

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Suffolk College
Date of College: 16 November 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

Success rates for GCE provision were poor for students aged 16 to 18 in 2004/05. What do the data for 2005/06 indicate?

- The overall success rates for GCE A level and AS provision improved in 2005/06 for students aged 16 to 18, though they remained below the national average (for 2004/05) by 6 percentage points and 5 points respectively. Success rates for the significant numbers of students aged 19+ on these courses remained significantly above the national averages for colleges of this type. Overall value-added data indicates much variation between subjects in the degrees of progress made by students, though many perform within expectations.

Success rates for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) were good in 2004/05. What happened in 2005/6?

- Success rates for NVQ provision remained high in 2005/06. They were significantly above the national averages (for 2004/05) for all levels and age groups.

Performance in key skills was very poor in 2004/05. What happened in 2005/6?

- Key skills achievements improved overall in 2005/06, though in some instances they remain poor, especially at levels 2 and 3. For example the success rate for students on level 3 communications was 11%, and for level 2 application of number it was 12%.

At the last inspection, work-based learning (WBL) success rates were poor. Have they improved in 2005/06?

- WBL success rates, whilst still low, have improved significantly. Overall success rates improved from 15% in 2004/05 to 36% in 2005/06. Timely success rates improved markedly over the same period from 8% to 27%.

The last annual assessment visit (AAV) identified that the proportion of students achieving high grades on national diploma courses was high in 2004/05. Was this sustained in 2005/06?

- The proportion of students achieving high grades on national diploma courses increased further from 32% in 2004/05 to 35% in 2005/06.

Quality of education and training

The last inspection identified that the college was making changes to improve the delivery of key skills and that there were indications of improvement. Has this been sustained?

- Improvements have been sustained, though success rates remain low in some instances.

How successfully does the college monitor the effectiveness of support?

- The college's monitoring of the effectiveness of the support it provides is underdeveloped. Though support is extensive, the college has not evaluated whether those students who receive support achieve better than those who decline it. It has not determined whether the effectiveness of support varies between curriculum areas and consequently where it can be targeted to benefit students most.

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

- The college is progressing well towards having a fully qualified workforce. For full-time staff, 79% have a teaching qualification with 16% in training. For part-time staff around 60% have a qualification.

The last AAV identified that, though target setting for students had improved, the use of management information systems (MIS) in this process was underdeveloped. What developments have there been in 2005/06?

- Target setting has improved. For GCE provision, the use of targets to drive progress is becoming well established. Across the college, standardised documentation is enabling a common approach for different curriculum areas. Students understand their targets and are generally clear about what they need to do to improve. Though access to and use of MIS has improved, its use for student target setting remains underdeveloped.

Leadership and management

How effectively has the college addressed issues around the quality of GCE provision for the significant number of students aged 16 to 18?

- There have been very recent changes to the management of GCE provision. A number of initiatives aimed at improving success rates have been implemented and there are early signs of improvement, though it is too early to be sure that they will be sustained. These include improved target setting and monitoring, personal action plans and changed admission criteria. The curriculum has been changed and some unsuccessful provision has been removed. Progress tracking is now extensive, though recently introduced. The use of MIS in this process is improving, though it remains underdeveloped as a means of sharing information. The quality assurance of these changes is not yet well developed.

The last AAV identified that the identification and sharing of good practice could usefully be extended further. How has this developed in the last year?

- Since the last visit the college has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at identifying and sharing good practice. These include cross-college teaching and learning development sessions, the 'Sparkle' programme aimed at improving satisfactory teaching, and dedicated cross-college training in specific areas such as the use of interactive whiteboards and the learning of students aged 14 to 16. Staff development days have a greater focus on identified needs. The college has also introduced a curriculum centre head forum to identify and share good practice further.

To what extent has the management of key skills and WBL improved achievement?

- The achievement of WBL and key skills improved in 2005/06. Challenging targets have been established at curriculum level, and detailed quality assurance action plans for the improvement of WBL and key skills have been produced and are regularly monitored. Key skills coordinators have carried out paired observations of key skills lessons and delivery has been further contextualised. Assignment briefs are moderated by coordinators. The management of WBL has improved. The college has appointed a coordinator with cross-college responsibility for work based learning. Monthly fora have been reintroduced at which learners' progress and other quality issues are discussed. Achievement coaches have helped drive up success rates, and links with employers have been strengthened. The college plans

to introduce a clear and well designed website for employer engagement.

The last inspection report stated that appraisal systems lacked rigour and were being revised. Have these improved?

- Appraisal systems remain uneven across the college. Appraisal practices are inconsistent and insufficient attention is given to the overall evaluation of training needs across the college. The appraisal workload for centre heads is very variable, and for some it is large. The extent to which teaching and learning observations inform appraisal is uneven. The college is awaiting the appointment of a new human resources (HR) Director before harmonising the process.

How is the college addressing issues of variation in the quality of curriculum leadership and management identified in the last inspection

- The college has reorganised the curriculum centres to ensure that those with successful outcomes are paired with others which are less successful under the responsibility of individual senior managers. This has enabled some sharing of good practice. There have been a number of changes of middle managers. New and established curriculum centre managers are well supported. They have discrete development events and mentoring and buddying arrangements. In addition, external consultants spend time coaching those who are newly appointed.

As well as curriculum centre heads, the college has a number of senior lecturers within curriculum centres. Their role in supporting the centre heads varies considerably across the college and many have management responsibilities, which include lesson observations. However centre managers have not had structured programmes of management training. Senior lecturers have not had training for their course management role in order for them to support the centre heads more effectively. In addition, the training of senior lecturers for lesson observations is incomplete.