

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Esher College
Date of visit: 24 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

How do success, retention and achievement rates compare with previous years?

- Overall success rates were significantly above national averages in 2006. Only a small number of courses had relatively low success rates. The headline success rate for all courses was 87% and 94.4% for A level courses.
- In 2006 retention was high on GCE A and AS courses (A level 95% and AS level 92%; compared to the national average of 90%). Retention was good but more variable on vocational and other courses.
- In 2006 GCE A level and AS pass rates were well above national average for sixth form colleges (99.3% for A level and 93.5% for AS). High grade passes (A and B grades) were also well above national averages (54% A level and 44% AS). Vocational courses at level 3 also showed high pass rates as did the A*-C grade pass rate for GCSE courses at 62.5%. Key Skills pass rates continue to be low; however, VCE students take part in wider Key Skills where achievements have been better.
- The college runs a small number of part-time courses for adults (around 240 learners). Overall retention on these courses is good but pass rates vary. Counselling courses at levels 2 and 3 along with French courses at level 1 have the best achievement rates. Other language courses show much less rates of success. Retention is good on science technician NVQ courses but achievement rates vary.
- Overall ALIS value added data show that students make progress at or above that predicted from their previous attainment. The ALPS database placed the 2006 A level results in the top 10% of colleges and the AS results in the top 25%. Distance travelled data show that GCSE students make better progress than their previous results would predict. However GNVQ intermediate students made much less progress.

Quality of education and training

What changes are in place for the next round of lesson observations?

- The lesson observation team has been widened to include a range of teaching staff skills and experience. In addition tutorials and extension courses have also been included in this round of observations. Training has taken place to ensure that the lesson observation team are clear on criteria for grading observations. It is too early to assess the success of this development.

What changes to the curriculum are in place? What success has been achieved by the new level 2/3 offer?

- Human biology at AS and A level, GNVQ intermediate courses and AVCE 12 unit business studies have been discontinued. GCSE media and sociology have been added to the curriculum provision in order to give a wider choice to those students taking the new level 2/3 programme. Around 30 students are currently taking a mix of 1 or 2 AS level subjects alongside 2 or 3 GCSE courses. It is too early to comment on the success of this development.

How is the total skills strategy for the college impacting on teaching and learning for key skills? What progress with the new approach to profiling? Have the new tutor group arrangements been successful?

- A new total skills strategy for the college is currently under discussion. This followed on from a skills audit which revealed deficits in students' library skills, time management and understanding of learning to learn. The strategy will continue to be developed this year and will be introduced for the next academic year. This year student groups in the first year have been allocated (wherever practicable) to tutors who teach them. In addition new profiling procedures have been implemented. Again, it is too early to assess the success of these interesting developments.

Leadership and management

What developments are taking place to the college accommodation and what plans are being developed?

- The £500,000 extension to the LRC and nearby fashion/design accommodation is very nearly complete. These developments mark the completion of an accommodation plan started five years ago. Much of the college accommodation is good and well maintained, but growth in student numbers over the past years still means that the site is crowded. Plans are being developed for two new extensions – one for film and media and the other for performing arts. In addition the college has recently installed SharePoint on the college network and a new database, designed in-house, gives better access to student data. A detailed survey, including photographic recording, of the college accommodation is underway in order to inform maintenance and developments. An energy survey by the Carbon trust has been completed also and an action plan is being developed to reduce the carbon budget. In addition, the college is involved with the LLSC in promoting environmental sustainability through the college's transport and recycling policies.

What part is the college playing in the 14 - 19 developments locally?

- The college plays an active part in local educational developments. The principal is the chair of the local community learning partnership and the college is fully involved in both the ELM partnership and the Elmbridge 14-19 partnership. Local secondary schools and the college have submitted a joint bid for specialist diplomas. Year 10 progression and guidance events are jointly organised with local secondary schools. Changes to provision in Richmond and Ashford will inevitably have an effect on recruitment but the college has a good working relationship with Brooklands College.

What outcomes for quality assurance from the revised self-assessment report (SAR) framework?

- The college self-assessment framework has been more closely aligned with the CIF. Areas for improvement and student feedback are given more prominence. Team SARs are written earlier in the academic year and the quality assurance cycle completes earlier. The SARs are reviewed and moderated by senior managers, divisional directors and governors. As a result managers think that team SARs are more evaluative and targets more meaningful.

- A system of peer review is in place for heads of curriculum departments. Now in its second cycle, this process allows a curriculum head to review another department's examination statistics, policies and procedures and to talk to a focus group of students. Managers report that this had worked well and changes in practice have been noted in team SARs.
- Adult students, although in very small numbers, do not appear separately in the quality statistics supplied by the college. Data sets do not always contain national benchmarking comparators. The data are, however, thoroughly analysed in the college SAR.

What are the results of recent analyses in terms of extended and targeted learning support? How are the extra learning support assistants deployed?

- The college has, over the past 3 or 4 years, analysed the outcomes for students who receive learning support. The data collected show that support in a variety of setting and modes of delivery add significant value to the students' achievements. Four additional learning assistants have been employed in this academic year. This resource has been deployed across the curriculum and is used flexibly. Students on level 2/3 programmes have more support, and 'hotspots' of additional need, such as coursework deadlines, can now be catered for. It will be interesting to review the outcome for students at the next AAV.

Progress with CRB checks on staff

- All teaching, support and estate staff have been either CRB or list 99 checked and the results are up to date and centrally recorded. Governors have not yet been CRB checked. A full qualifications check on all staff is nearing completion but is dogged by the time it takes for awarding bodies to respond to certificates first awarded twenty or thirty years ago. The college is currently registering with the CRB to carry out its own checks.