

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Richmond upon Thames College
Date of visit: 6 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

Progress made with issues raised at the last AAV, focussing in particular on success rates for adults at levels 1 and 2, achievements in work-based learning and key skills.

- There have been no significant improvements in the success rates for adults on level 1 and 2 courses in 2004/05. Work is on-going to identify courses that are not performing satisfactorily and retention is being monitored termly. It is too early to assess the impact of these actions.
- The combined overall success rate in work-based learning has improved from a very low level in 2003/04. The 2004/05 framework success rate, at 37%, is still well below the national rate of 50%, but college data indicates that the rate will eventually improve to around 55%. There have been some appropriate changes to the management of the programme. In particular, the responsibility for delivery lies with the relevant departments rather than centrally. As a result, the monitoring of learners' progress and assessor activity is more complex, but revised systems have been introduced and are working effectively. There has been some good work to improve timely achievement. In construction, framework success rates have increased to 67% and are satisfactory.
- Success rates for key skills at level 1 and level 3 for 16-18 year olds have been improving since 2003/04 and are now above national averages. At level 2, results for some 3,000 16-18 year old learners, although improving, remain below national averages. Success rates for ICT, particularly at level 3, are lower than for other key skills. The college's approach to key skills has been revised and has been incorporated into a broader 'Skills for Life' strategy. Communications are well embedded within all level 1 and 2 courses. The college has useful data on the performance in different faculties, which has only recently been used to promote improvements.

Quality of education and training

Strategies to improve the effectiveness of ILPs and action plans, including progress made since the last AAV with the use of value added to set targets for learners.

- Work is continuing on the use of 'minimum acceptable grades' (MAGs) to inform learners' action planning and review at level 3, and for course quality reviews. MAGs are based on value added data which puts learners' progress into an appropriate context. As they are minimum, rather than aspirational targets, learners whose progress falls below the expected level are properly considered as causes for concern and are reviewed. MAGs, and other value added indicators are used appropriately to review courses, but they are not used fully in all areas of the college. Action planning has been improved over the past year. Parents and carers are more involved and tutors have more time for formal reviews; although the extra time partly reflects the reduction in the time available for informal tutorial reviews. There are good examples of student support and action planning, such as for those with additional learning needs. However, the formal sharing of this information is inconsistent. ILPs for entry and foundation level learners have remained largely unchanged. Although the individual ILPs are fit for purpose, there are practical difficulties in sharing information between potentially interested parties. Electronic ILPs are being developed.

Strategies to improve attendance and punctuality

- New systems are in place to monitor attendance and punctuality. Registers are scanned and the information is made available quickly. Monitoring has been improved through a re-structuring of responsibilities that has included the appointment of a student monitoring officer, and through improved policies that define actions when a concern is identified. It is too early to assess the impact of these changes. Attendance in 2005/06 was around 80%, which is slightly below the national average for similar colleges.

The effectiveness of the increased flexibility programme

- Students from local schools following these courses are well motivated to achieve. A good range of options are provided that are responsive to the needs of the learners. Learners feel well supported academically and receive good pastoral care. Overall learners' achievements are good, although the college recognises that performance at level 2, particularly in

engineering and health and social care, needs to improve. Progression rates on to other courses at the college are good.

- The programme is well organised and managed. Some minor issues around timetabling, which are out of the college's control, mean that learners miss some lessons at school to attend college. However, learners are able to catch up with the work missed in their own time.

Leadership and management

Progress made since the last AAV with the lesson observation scheme, the use of data in quality assurance and self-assessment.

- Lesson observation is becoming part of the culture of the college. All senior and middle managers have received external training and have, in turn, trained their staff in a follow-up staff development programme. The total number of graded observations has risen to 270 in 2005/06 compared to 160 in the previous year. A realistic baseline has been established that can be used to measure future improvements in teaching and learning. 63% of the lessons observed in 2005/06 were judged to be good or better and 4% were judged to be less than satisfactory. A programme of internal inspection has been introduced designed to have an impact on learners' achievement by identifying issues and by sharing good practice.
- Performance data remain inconsistent and not comparable with externally generated data such as the College Performance Report (CPR). The result is that self-assessment does not always identify clearly courses that need to improve.
- The use of value added information to inform self-assessment is improving but is not used consistently and does not always identify clearly strengths and weaknesses.

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

- It is too early to make judgements about the overall performance of learners who completed their courses in July 2006.