

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Harrow College
Date of visit: 13 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

What does the college's internal data on achievement reveal about success rates for 2005/06? Have overall success rates continued to improve? Have pass rates at level 1 for learners aged 16-18 improved?

- Overall success rates between 2002/03 and 2004/05 improved but, at the time of the visit, it was too early to comment on overall success rates for 2005/06, as the college had yet to complete the processing of examination results. Success rates for GCE AS provision in 2005/06 have declined, while GCE A level results show an improvement on the previous year. A key weakness at the last inspection was the decline in success rates at level 1 for 2004/05 for learners aged 16-18 to well below the national average. Using the college's data, early results for the group of learners at this level indicate that for all results, with the exception of English as a second language (ESOL), success rates have improved by around five percentage points. The college is still processing ESOL results. The overall success rate for work-based learning has improved significantly between 2003/04 and 2005/06 from 17% to 60%, now above the national average.

At this early stage of the academic year, to what extent, if any, is attendance and punctuality a problem?

- To improve attendance and punctuality, both of which were identified as areas for concern at the last inspection, the college has taken a series of actions. Managers have conducted a research project to find out why students were regularly late or absent and they have visited a college with a good record for learners' attendance and punctuality. Existing procedures for lateness and punctuality have been reviewed and new arrangements are now in place. These include a contract between students and the college and a clear introduction to learners on the need

for good punctuality and attendance. Students who are regularly late or absent discuss the matter with their tutor. In some cases, learners are asked to leave a course or, if appropriate, part of the education maintenance allowance is not paid. Early indications indicate that so far in 2006/07 attendance over the same period for 2005/06 has improved. Those students interviewed by inspectors had a clear understanding of the new procedures for attendance and punctuality.

Quality of provision

What action is the college taking to continue to improve the quality of teaching, particularly for those teachers who work with level 1 learners?

- College managers judge teaching and learning to be gradually improving. In 2005/06, around 2% of teaching was outstanding, 56% good, 31% satisfactory and around 11% unsatisfactory.
- This year, four advanced practitioners (APs), each linked to a faculty, have been allocated 100 hours each to contribute to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Priorities for APs are identified within faculties and, as such, they vary. For example, in some cases, a proportion of the time is allocated to mentoring new staff. In one curriculum area, where teaching is good, the emphasis is on looking at what constitutes a grade one lesson. Improving teaching and learning is the focus of the 'faculty days' due to take place this year in addition to college-wide staff development days. Also new this year is an emphasis on peer observation, with a view to giving teachers the opportunity to learn from each other in a safe and confidential environment. The impact of these initiatives is yet to be measured.
- As part of the formal lesson observation system, staff are observed teaching and graded usually once a year and issues arising from observations inform staff development activities. These activities have mostly been generic, with a view to being applied to all levels of learner and all types of teaching. The last inspection report highlighted the fact that weaker teaching tended to be concentrated particularly on entry and level 1 courses. Teachers who teach on these programmes have not been meeting routinely as a group to share ideas or to observe each other teaching. However, this year, entry programmes have been brought together into one faculty and a new curriculum manager post for these

courses has been created. Managers and teachers believe that this, along with a tighter policy on attendance and punctuality, will contribute to improving success rates. Other initiatives include the use of mentors and the introduction of subject specific 'aptitude' tests in three vocational areas, in addition to interviews, to ensure that students are on the most appropriate course. Many of the teachers, though, remain concerned about retention on entry programmes.

Are mathematics learners and staff using information and learning technology (ILT) facilities effectively? This issue was highlighted in both of the last two inspection reports.

- Mathematics teachers make limited use of ILT in their teaching. For GCSE they use a programme called Headstart and many students use this very effectively in their own time. At the college, maths teachers do not have access within their teaching rooms to any interactive whiteboards to enliven their teaching. On GCSE AS and A2 courses, staff rarely use ILT to support students' learning. These students have longer lessons this year, of two and a half hours, in order to accommodate the need to fit into timetabling arrangements with the schools which, along with the college, form the Harrow Collegiate. While students on these courses speak very positively about the quality of teaching, they say that it is sometimes hard to maintain momentum for this length of time and that they would welcome more variety in teaching and learning methods. Many of the students say that they benefited from a wider range of ILT facilities at their schools before coming to the college.

Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to improve the consistency and use of course reviews, which were identified as a weakness in the last inspection?

- At the time of the visit, course co-ordinators had attended training on how to write evidence-based and evaluative course reviews. Draft course reviews had very recently been quality assured by curriculum managers. Managers will use these course reviews to support their section of the self-assessment report.
- Curriculum course review reports for 2005/06 reviewed by inspectors are consistent across the college in terms of layout, content and level of detail. The evidence base for strengths and weaknesses is explicit and, in

most cases, the proposed actions are appropriate. In some cases, though, proposed actions are vague and not easily measurable. It is not possible to judge, at this stage, the extent to which these course reviews will be used by course managers and curriculum teams to improve provision.

To what extent is the college building on its good practice in health and social care, developing better links for other curriculum areas with employers and providing students with work experience opportunities?

- Employer engagement at the college was identified as an area for concern at the last inspection. Actions have been taken to attempt to improve this aspect of the college's provision. College managers set targets for the number of engagements with employers. These targets are challenging and realistic and form part of the three-year development plan. In 2005/06, the college exceeded these targets. Senior managers now have 'employer engagement' as a standard agenda item at meetings. The arrangements for work experience were reviewed and many students now have a wider range of work-related opportunities. Each curriculum area has targets for visiting speakers to talk to learners and for employers to contribute to curriculum design. Managers from the college talk regularly to employers to canvas their views about the courses offered. The college is in a position to assist employers in their training needs analysis and also offers employers a recruitment service. The impact of these measures is to be reviewed.