

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: College of North West London
Date of visit: 10 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

Where success rates are known for 2005/06, are they showing an improving trend? What is the picture across different curriculum areas?

- Overall, the college's success rates have shown a slow upward trend, from 55% in 2002/03, to 57% in 2003/04 and 58% in 2004/05. At the time of the visit, data for 2005/06 were yet to be finalised. For the sector subject areas (SSAs) where there are near final figures, overall success rates are higher than the previous year, averaging around 77%. These areas include science and maths, social sciences and business. However, finalised success rates were not yet available for the areas of learning with the largest numbers of students, such as foundation studies, construction, ICT, engineering and ESOL.
- Over the three-year period up to 2004/05, long level 1 qualifications improved by around 10 percentage points. Short qualifications remained stable in terms of success, although falling below national averages. Success rates for students aged 16-18 at level 3 improved significantly from 43% in 2002/03 to 69% in 2004/05 but success rates on long level 2 courses for this age group have been an area for concern for the college.
- Success rates for those aged 19 or above are broadly around national averages. More 19+ learners are enrolled on entry or level 1 courses than on levels 2 or 3. Success rates for entry and level 1 have improved steadily over a three-year period but were still below national averages in 2004/05.
- The college's overall retention rate increased from 79% in 2004/05 to 83% in 2005/06. While this reflects an improvement in retention for both

16-18 year olds and adult learners, it does not form part of a long term trend.

- Actions to bring about improvements in retention and pass rates include more effective initial assessment, increased levels of tutorial support and an extended and better integrated induction. Staff and students are positive about the effects of these measures, though it is too early to judge their full impact on success rates for 2005/06.
- Several staff development sessions have focused on target setting, with the college adopting a generic target to retain and pass two more students, per course, over previous years. Managers across the college have been trained on value-added and distance travelled measures. Staff now have better access to attendance, retention and achievement data than in previous years, and are better able to identify and support students who are at risk of withdrawal from courses. They are well supported by management information services. Monitoring of poorly performing courses is effective and some consistently under-performing programmes have been removed from the curriculum offer.
- The self-assessment report (SAR) analyses success rates in a number of ways, including by age, gender and ethnicity, and useful reports are available to staff teams to prepare SSA sections of the SAR.

Has the improvement in work-based learning achievement, identified in the AAV in March 2006, been maintained? Has timely completion of frameworks improved?

- Work-based learning (WBL) is offered in construction and engineering, technology and manufacturing, with the vast majority of learners in construction and engineering. In 2003/04 and 2004/05, overall success rates were low and significantly below national averages. There has been a significant improvement in 2005/06. Overall, achievement of advanced apprenticeships has increased from 23% in 2004/05 to 75% in 2005/06 and achievement of apprenticeships from 19% in 2004/05 to 66% in 2005/06.
- The timely completion of frameworks continues to be low, but has risen from 13% in 2004/05 to 28% in 2005/06. The college is aware of the need to improve timely completion rates, and has introduced a range of measures to address the weakness, including staff development to

promote understanding of framework elements. The employer review process has also been improved, with clearer expectations and recording of outcomes.

Quality of provision

What evidence is there at this stage in the academic year that the improved profile of good or better teaching has had an impact on students' achievement? What actions are being taken to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

- As noted above, at the time of the visit, validated data for 2005/06 were not available but there is evidence to suggest an upward trend in success rates in several subject sector areas. Retention improved in 2005/06 to rates that are around the national average.
- The college is making a considerable investment in improving the quality of teaching and learning, with a significant number of people involved in the drive to raise standards. These include subject learning coaches (SLCs), advanced practitioners (APs) and 'champions' in areas such as key skills, ILT, 16 – 18 year olds and 14-16 year olds. In addition, staff benefit from a wide range of development opportunities.
- The college has continued to improve the rigour of its lesson observation system. The college's analysis of the quality of teaching and learning indicates that in 2005/06 around 47% was good or better, 50% was satisfactory and 3% was unsatisfactory. When comparing this to previous years, the college has adjusted grades to take into account the change from a 7 point scale to a 4 point scale and some initial grade inflation at the time of changeover. Taking this into account, the proportion of good or better teaching and learning has improved and the proportion of unsatisfactory has reduced. The college has analysed the data in terms of different faculties and SSAs to identify trends. This analysis has been used to inform planning for the current academic year. This year, in addition to graded observations and staff development activities, SLCs, APs and champions are planning to focus on coaching and providing teachers with individualised help and guidance within a supportive environment. Curriculum managers and teaching staff interviewed highlight the changing culture of the college and the fact that teachers are keen to further their knowledge and practical skills. They acknowledge that the main challenge now is to improve satisfactory teaching.

To what extent has initial assessment been conducted more consistently across curriculum and vocational areas this academic year (2006/07)?

- Staff are confident that students across all curriculum areas are on the right courses. They report on a more rigorous college-wide initial assessment process for all students this year, successfully completed within a tight timeframe. Literacy, language and numeracy support is being provided where appropriate. Those students who are 16-18 years old are starting to use a new electronic individual learning plan to bring together information about their diagnostic test and any additional support, along with specific learning targets and milestones. The system is being piloted this year with a view to using it with all learners at a later stage. In use for only one week, it is too early to judge its impact. Early indications are that students like using it but, as staff acknowledge, the challenge is for staff and students to become increasingly skilled in the use of 'smart' targets that identify those falling behind but also challenge the highest achieving learners. At the time of the visit, it was too early in the academic year for statistics on in-year retention. However, staff suggest that retention so far has been good and that this is linked to the well-organised initial assessment arrangements, better teaching and a very focused drive to improve punctuality. Staff and students interviewed are very clear about the expectation to arrive to all classes on time and they are aware that any concerns about punctuality are followed up quickly.

Leadership and management

To what extent has the process of self-assessment improved? In March, the AAV identified 'insufficient trend analysis in the subject area sections of the SAR and some fail to identify poor, declining or fluctuating success rates as key areas for development'

- The self-assessment process is clearly understood by staff and there is a good awareness by managers of the use of data to support judgements. At the time of the visit, internal draft self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans for 2005/06 for each SSA were available. These are working documents and, as such, they reflect different levels of detail and quality. The college plans to complete a thorough internal and external moderation process by November with a view to the college's 2005/06 overall SAR being ready for governors in December.

What impact has the reduction of funding for part-time adult provision had on the college's financial situation and accommodation plans?

- The reduction of funding for part-time adult provision has had a significant but contained impact on the college's finances and activities. Approximately 350 full-time equivalent places have been lost, and the college has withdrawn from an external contract to achieve around 80% of the reduction. The college's accommodation strategy has not been affected by loss of the external contract.
- The college currently has category B financial status, and has forecast a move to category C+ status during 2008/09. During the past three years the college exceeded its funding allocation for adult learners, funding the excess provision from reserves. During 2005/06, un-funded enrolment has been considerably reduced. To achieve operating efficiencies, the college has rationalised a number of administrative functions, concentrating them on the main site. Further efficiencies have been achieved through more effective management of maintenance budgets and, in curriculum areas, by improving initial assessment and operating a more thorough enrolment review process.
- A new building for the Kilburn site is due for completion in February 2007. The building will provide a good working environment and well-equipped teaching accommodation. Developments for the Willesden site include plans for a construction, engineering and technology centre to open in March 2008. Teaching staff and managers value the good level of consultation about the design and fitting of the new buildings.