

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Uxbridge College
 Date of visit: 4 October 2006

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the issues identified in the pre-visit analysis and explored during the visit. It does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

Is the improving trend in success rates evident in all curriculum areas, including work-based learning?

- Based on college data, overall success rates for 2005/06 continued to improve and for long courses were significantly above the national averages for further education and tertiary colleges. At level one they are 7% above, at level two 12% above and at level three 12% above. Short course provision is also good. In 2005/06 the number of students aged 16-18 who completed individual level 3 qualifications dropped significantly due to a reduction in the AS/A level offer. Below these headline figures there remain some areas for improvement, for example, in business at level 1 and in engineering where success rates are at or just above national averages. Attendance rates at 83% are satisfactory. College data indicate good key skills achievement.
- Overall success rates for work-based learning are satisfactory. Some areas are strong, for example, apprenticeships in hairdressing, but others like engineering are weaker. Timely success rates have improved and at 33% in 2005/06 are above low national averages. The college is beginning to use and understand the new measures of success methodology, but their application is underdeveloped.

To what extent is the college adding value in terms of students' progress while they are studying at Uxbridge? In which curriculum and/or sector skills areas is value-added most successful and why?

- In 2004/05 the college's added value outcomes were satisfactory. Although the college compared three different methodologies the outcomes were relatively consistent. For A level subjects 12 of the 16 subjects offered by the college were within or slightly above the norm. The weaker areas included media, history, English language and business studies, but none were statistically significant. The AS value-added picture

was balanced and within acceptable norms. Distance travelled measures are developing and students following vocational qualifications are routinely set minimum expected targets for performance. Students interviewed by inspectors were fully aware of their targets. Although the annual assessment visit took place in October the college could not produce value added data for 2005/06.

Do 2005/06 A level results indicate an improvement in the percentage of students gaining A-B grades?

- The proportion of level 3 students that achieve high grades (A or B) is below national averages for further education and tertiary colleges. In 2004/05, the proportion of A level students that gained a grade A or B was 22%, some 10% below national averages. In 2005/06 the gap remained the same. Similarly for AS provision, although the proportion of high grades rose in 2005/06 to 17%, this was still 7% below the 2004/05 national average. However, the proportion of students gaining A/AS grades A, B or C rose significantly.

Quality of education and training

How is the college using its recently revised observation proforma and associated database to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

- The college has a rigorous internal observation system, as identified in the last annual assessment visit. In 2005/06 the college judged some 70% lessons to be good or better, 26% satisfactory and 4% unsatisfactory. Around 14% of lesson observed were outstanding. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has reduced to 4% from 12% at the time of the last full inspection in February 2004. With its lesson observation database, the college is now able to analyse the data in a way that highlights comparisons between different lesson or teacher types. For example, the grades are generally higher for those teaching on Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national award than AS/A2. Also, the quality of teaching is higher for permanent staff than it is for agency teachers. The college aims to maintain a proportion of 90% permanent staff.
- The challenge for the college is to improve satisfactory teaching. The factors that contribute to lessons being satisfactory, rather than good, vary depending on the curriculum area and/or teacher. Some schools have identified the need to ensure teachers meet individual students' needs more consistently, while others are focusing on challenging the more able learners. The college is continuing to use advanced

practitioners and subject learning coaches, along with senior managers, to drive forward improvements in teaching and learning. In the light of the college's findings from their observation system and to support individuals, greater use is being made of individual coaching and peer observation, with an increased focus on subject specific pedagogy.

What impact has the Skills for Life training had on improving students' literacy and numeracy skills?

- Teaching staff have undertaken training in Skills for Life. They report that they have been putting into practice teaching and learning strategies identified at the training and that these help them to support students who have language, literacy or numeracy needs. This is in addition to the specialist support students receive. It is not possible to make a direct correlation between this training and its impact on students' literacy, language and numeracy skills. However, staff are able to identify specific courses where success rates improved in 2005/06 and where improved literacy skills were likely to have been a contributory factor. Students interviewed by inspectors speak very positively about the quality of teaching and specialist support.

What progress has been made in the use by staff and students of the college's virtual learning environment (VLE)?

- Work on the college's virtual learning environment, and other technologies, has moved on since last year. Staff have benefited from training in its use and are now much more knowledgeable about how the VLE can be used to support and monitor students' learning and they are confident in using the technology. Teachers from several different curriculum areas have developed subject-specific interactive materials for their students. Other generic resources, such as those relating to induction and tutorials, are used by students from a range of curriculum areas. This year, students have begun to use the college's newly developed electronic individual learning plan (ILP). Of the four groups of students inspectors spoke to, three spoke very positively about the VLE. They use it at home and at college to access schemes of work and resources, as well as check on their grades. However, students in one second year group were not familiar with the VLE.
- Accommodation has been significantly enhanced and almost all classrooms, at both sites, now have smartboards. Staff are using these with confidence and enthusiasm.

- In trying to identify the impact of the IT strategy policy, managers have undertaken some analysis that shows that, in general, students on those courses with a significant e-learning element, achieved well in 2005/06.
- College managers are keen to further embed e-learning into all curriculum areas and to continue to develop the VLE.

Leadership and management

With all curriculum areas now judged to be at least satisfactory and greater consistency in the quality of curriculum management, how is the momentum to continue to make improvements being maintained?

- The college is continuing to improve. College managers understand and collectively own the challenges that face the college and are taking actions to address them. The strong focus on lesson observations has impacted positively on unsatisfactory teaching, success rates are good and well above national averages, and the new buildings provide some excellent facilities. There is an increased emphasis on 'getting students on the right course', initial assessment and supporting learners with literacy and numeracy needs in the classroom. Managers trust the college's management information system. The college is strongly developing its capacity in relation to employer responsiveness through a range of project and partnership initiatives. However, opportunities for students to undertake work experience are weak in some curriculum areas. The overriding challenge is not only to maintain good aspects of provision, but to increasingly achieve outstanding outcomes for students in all curriculum areas.