

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Plymouth College of Art and Design  
Date of visit: 12 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

Has the improvement in success rates been maintained in 2005/06?

To note: inspectors used unvalidated, but virtually complete, college data for 2005/06 and 2004/05 validated data and specialist college benchmarks.

- Success rates at levels 1 to 3 for learners aged 16 to 18 have improved on last year and the rise has been sharp at levels 1 and 2. Success rates at levels 2 and 3 are both above the national averages and at level 2 are high. At level 1 however, though much improved, success rates are still below the national average; but only a small number of learners is involved at this level.
- Adult learner success rates have improved at levels 1 and 2 and are well above the national average. At level 3 success rates continue to be above average but have not improved on last year.
- Pass rates are high for both adults and learners aged 16 to 18 on long courses; however, at level 1 pass rates for learners aged 16-18, though improving, is below the national average.

What has been the impact of the focus on attendance and punctuality? How are the new systems supporting this?

- Attendance and punctuality have improved over the past three years; data are timely, readily available and are used well by teachers. The impact of the focus on attendance and punctuality is apparent in improved retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18. This is particularly true at levels 1 and 2.

What has been the impact of college actions to improve key skills success rates?

- Key skills success rates at levels 1 and 2 for learners aged 16 to 18 have continued to improve and are now at the national average at level 1 and well above it for level 2. For adult learners on 1 year programmes key skills success rates at levels 1 and 2 are above the national average.

What use is the college making of value-added data?

- Eighty per cent of the college's level 3 provision is non-A level; currently the available data from the college performance report and learner achievement tracker are proving of limited value.

### Achievement in work-based learning

To note: inspectors used unvalidated data to the end of period 12 from the provider quality gateway

- There has been a sustained improvement in achievement in work-based learning over the past three years to the end of 2005/06, but the impact of the developments in the management of work-based learning are not yet fully evident in the data. Performance in overall success rates is better than in timely success rates, and not enough learners are currently achieving the full framework. 'Framework or NVQ' achievements are moving closer to the improving national averages both overall and in the timing of achievement.

### Quality of education and training

The quality and consistency of tutorials and the quality of individual learning plans

- Individual learning plans are comprehensive and key data are captured and recorded promptly and accurately to assist the monitoring and support of learners' progress. The tutorial process links well the academic and pastoral aspects of learners' experience at the college. Lecturers use formative and summative assessment feedback well to set appropriate and measurable targets for learners to improve their performance.

Has the improvement to retention rates brought about by the improved tutorial process been sustained?

- Retention rates for both 16-18 and adult learners on long courses have improved at each level and are at or above the national averages for specialist colleges.

Is the focus on improving observational drawing showing through in students' work?

- There is a comprehensive and effective approach to life and observational drawing and exploratory model. Drawing and its formal elements are taught in intensive blocks. Every element of the course is underpinned by drawing, particularly with examples of assignments such as 'drawing by numbers'. Drawing is now at the centre of delivery rather than at the fringes.

Spreading better practice in teaching and learning

- Teachers work together effectively to share better practice, to investigate and use different ways of teaching and to develop and refine assessment strategies. Learners are exposed to a very diverse range of teaching styles, materials and techniques. Teaching is well matched to assessment requirements. All staff share schemes of work and lesson plans through the college's virtual learning environment.
- The lesson observation process is developing well and appears robust, supported by thorough documentation. The formalised use of the learner voice in lesson observation is a key strength. Teachers value the feedback they receive and the opportunities to develop further their skills in teaching and learning through a variety of professional development activities.

Leadership and management

Ownership of quality issues at course level

- The allocation of more time to course managers to carry out their roles has improved their capacity to contribute to strategic developments and to

the college culture. The re-shaping of college management into a flatter structure has led to greater clarity and ownership of roles and responsibilities at course manager level. Managers are well supported with timely, accurate and easy to use data for performance monitoring and evaluation. Support for managers in carrying out self-assessment activities is very good. Self-assessment is detailed and comprehensive; the process is rigorous and timely with clear documentation.

- The monitoring of actions from the last inspection is very thorough and the college is making good progress in addressing these.

Has the improvement in the management of work-based learning been sustained?

- The management of work-based learning in general has improved and the whole delivery mechanism has been reviewed. Staff are flexible, often working to employer shift patterns, which fits in well with the needs and requirements of employers. Training is still delivered in college for key skills and technical certificates but much of the assessment is done at the placement with employers.
- The programme team is very proactive and evaluative of their practices and systems, seeking to continue to improve delivery. The team has employed a range of strategies to improve the delivery which has included working with the awarding body and other colleges to share good practice. The effectiveness of these is not yet fully evident in the achievements of work-based learners