

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Portsmouth Sixth Form College
Date of visit: 7 November 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

Have improving success rates for students aged 16 to 18 been sustained in 2005/06, and has the trend of declining success rates for adults been reversed? What areas/levels/ages in particular have shown improvement and why? Have retention/success rates at level 2 (judged to be low at the last inspection) improved?

- The recent Ofsted report (April 2006) judges that success rates in 2004/05 were around national averages for both age groups. Given the low attainment on entry for students aged 16 to 18 this represents good progress for most students. Retention rates, especially at level 2, were identified as an area to improve.
- In 2005/06 overall success rates have risen, primarily as a result of improved rates of retention at all levels: retention on level 1 courses has risen by 11 percentage points; on level 2 courses by 7 points; and on level 3 courses by 3 points. These improved success rates have been achieved with a cohort of students whose average points score at GCSE was lower than the previous year's. Pass rates on A level courses also rose one percentage point to 96% for grades A-E, and the proportion of students awarded grades A-C and A-B also rose – the latter by an impressive 9 percentage points to 41%. Pass rates on AS level courses fell by 6 percentage points to 82%, and the proportion of students awarded grades A-C and A-B also fell; in particular, a few subjects had very low pass rates. On courses at levels 1 and 2 pass rates present a mixed picture: GCSE courses showed improvements overall and in particular in English and mathematics, but some GNVQ and First Diplomas had low pass rates. The college is taking specific action to try and improve success rates at AS level: more rigorous interviewing and recruitment processes are being deployed and heads of department are more directly involved; assessment is being used

more regularly to monitor students' progress through their first year; and more students are being prepared and entered for resitting some module examinations in January of the second year.

What change has there been to enrolment patterns and numbers in the last year, and how is this being reflected in the college's business focus?

- Enrolments in 2006/07 have risen at all 3 levels for both students aged 16 to 18 and for adults; the college is confident it will exceed its targets for the former by 3 to 4 percentage points, and should therefore be in a position to bid for an increased 16 to 18 enrolment target for 2007/08. The college's analysis of the prior attainment level of full-time students aged 16 to 18 also shows an improved overall picture for the 2006/07 cohort. The college is attracting more students with high grades at GCSE. Retention (to date) of students on 2-year courses through 2005 into 2006 has also improved markedly, from 72% to 86%. The college has highlighted the need to monitor adult enrolments from now on to ensure financial targets are not exceeded overall.

What do value added and distance travelled measures show about the relative progress made by students?

- Value-added data for A levels in 2005/06 as analysed by the ALPS system places the college in the top 15% of colleges in this system. Analysis by the ALIS system also demonstrates that at A level students are achieving better grades than their GCSE scores would indicate. For AS levels, the ALPS score has declined from an outstanding grade 2 but is still very good at grade 4, placing the college in the top 30% of colleges subscribing to the system.

Quality of education and training

What does the college's teaching and learning observation programme report for 2005/06?

- The college continues to operate a rigorous programme of lesson observations, effectively blending internal support and external moderation. Following a recognition that many part-time teachers lacked the confidence and teaching techniques to produce consistently good or outstanding lessons, the college has run a series of highly

successful Saturday training sessions, led by the Principal and Vice-Principal, on what constitutes good teaching and learning. The college reports that these sessions have given part-time teachers a much wider range of teaching strategies and re-galvanised them as effective teachers. This training has already led to improved success rates for adults.

Are there any new curriculum developments in 2006/07 or planned for thereafter?

- In line with the college's identity as a highly inclusive sixth form college, more courses at levels 1 and 2, as well as some at level 3, are being offered in response to demand. In particular, the offer in 2007 will include new courses in public services (at levels 2 and 3), applied science (at levels 1 and 2) and art and design (at level 2); and new national (level 3) certificate and diploma vocational courses in music technology and performing arts. The new Portsmouth City Learning Centre is due to open in 2007 and Portsmouth College will be running 2 courses there at level 1: sport and recreation and art and design.

Leadership and management

How comprehensive and effective is the college's self assessment process, and is it addressing areas to improve from the last inspection report?

- The self-assessment process is rigorously evaluative. Heads of department now have a better understanding and fuller ownership of the process. The senior management team have successfully changed the culture of self-assessment at course and curriculum level from one of adversarial defence to one of objective reflection and self-critical review. Middle managers are now more accountable for the performance of their courses but they are also more directly empowered to set and monitor targets.

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

- n/a

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

- The new student catering and social area is now open and provides an excellent, light, airy space for students to congregate, refresh and relax. Work is on schedule for the refurbished theatre and adjacent changing, green and storage rooms to be in use by January 2007.