

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Abingdon & Witney College
Date of visit: 4 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 impact has the change in curriculum provision for LDD students had on Level 1 success rates?

- In 2004/05 success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on L1 programmes were well below average and the college identified that many learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did not achieve full qualifications. The curriculum has been reviewed and amended to better meet the needs of these learners. Some changes were implemented in 2005/06, with the implementation of a fully revised 8-step curriculum in September 2006. This has been developed in consultation with other colleges and special schools in the area, all of whom are adopting the same curriculum. Data analysis for 2005/06 was not yet complete at the time of the AAV. Achievements recorded so far provide an early indication that success rates have improved from last year, but it is too early to determine the overall success rate for 2005/06.

What does college data for 2005/06 indicate about learners' performance?

- As data analysis is not complete, it is not possible to make a direct comparison with previous years. The college measures performance by subject sector area and level of course, and trends over three years. In some areas examination results are known. For example, overall pass rates in AS examinations show a small improvement since 2004/05, although there is considerable variation in performance across subjects. Pass rates in individual subjects vary from 33% to 100%. One-third of subjects demonstrated significant improvement on the previous year, one-third remained the same and one-third showed a marked drop in pass rates. Performance in A2 subjects is more consistent, with most pass rates being around the national averages. College analysis of retention data for 2005/06 indicates some improvement at levels 1, 2 and 3.

The impact of actions to improve key skills outcomes, especially at level 3

- Key skills success rates were low at level 3 in 2004/05. The college has reviewed its policy on key skills and changed the criteria for determining which level students are entered for. Initial assessment for key skills is now being used more effectively to determine learners' actual level of skills and, consequently, more are being entered at a lower level, more closely related to individual needs. Complete data for key skills qualifications were not available at the time of the visit, so it is too early to determine the impact of actions taken.

Achievement of WBL in agriculture/land based sector, E2E programmes and other adult provision

- Work-based learning success rates have improved in 2005/06 in most curriculum areas and are at least satisfactory. More specifically, success rates for apprenticeships in horticulture, the only programmes still being offered, improved significantly from 26% in 2003/04 to 59%. However, timely success rates, although above national averages were still low. The college no longer offers E2E provision and current learners have transferred to foundation training programmes.

Progress made in collecting and analysing learner destination data

- In 2005/06 the college has made a full college analysis of learners' destinations, by different types and levels of courses. As this was not done previously, there is no direct comparison with previous years, but data for 2005/06 show that progression rates to further and higher education, employment and training are good.

Quality of education and training

Internal lesson observation grade profile for 2005/06, sample of observation records and any external judgments on teaching and learning

- The college has revised its system for internal observations of lessons, in response to concerns that the grading in 2004/05 may have been over generous. Training in observing lessons has been provided for all observers and teachers. The college now has systems for internal and external moderation of grades, and the process is more robust, with an increased focus on learning. While the proportion of good or better grades has reduced in 2005/06, it is in line with averages for similar colleges. Strategies are now in place to improve teaching judged satisfactory or unsatisfactory, through re-observation, training and mentoring.
- Key themes have been identified in teaching and learning and core standards developed against each of these. All staff have received these and they form part of

the observation checklist. Feedback from observations identifies strengths and areas for further development are set out in a development plan. Programme area managers collate findings of observations in their areas, identifying key strengths and weaknesses, which inform staff development priorities.

Impact of actions taken by the college to improve the consistency of assessment practice, including the use of individual target setting for learners

- In September 2006, the college implemented new policies for standards in attendance, punctuality, and meeting deadlines for assignments. Tutorials are also used to monitor learners' performance against these standards. It is too early to determine the impact of this initiative. External moderator reports are reviewed by an assistant director of curriculum who discusses any issues raised with relevant programme area managers and teams share good practice identified.
- The college has improved assessment practices in work-based learning. Assessment in the workplace has been given a higher profile. Success rates on apprenticeships have improved. Tutors make better use of tutorials to monitor learners' progress towards individual targets to help them achieve the qualifications.

The development of the cross college enrichment programme and learner participation

- The college identified that the previous system of lunchtime slots for enrichment activities did not have sufficient take-up and has restructured its enrichment programme at the beginning of this academic year. All learners on full-time courses now have access to a varied programme of enrichment activities on Tuesday afternoons. Take-up has been mixed so far this term. Sessions for language workshops, running a radio station and the college football team have been very well attended. The college recognises the need to implement more systems for monitoring the effectiveness of this programme.

Range and effectiveness of employer engagement across the college

- The college achieved the Action4Business award in April 2006. This recognised the good quality of the provision developed with employers. Some curriculum managers use employer forums well in curriculum design. The college has improved its co-ordination of work with employers through the development and use of a central database of employers. However, some curriculum areas have still not sufficiently developed links with employers.

The impact of actions to improve the consistency of the tutorial programme and its implementation

- The college has successfully raised the profile of the tutorial programme, which is supported well through staff development, weekly timetabled sessions and revised

systems and documentation. Learners value the individual support they receive and most tutors use these meetings well to monitor learners' progress. Senior managers have recently introduced a target for the number of tutorial to be observed. Other aspects of the tutorial system are not routinely monitored and it is too early to evaluate the impact these new initiatives.

How well has the college responded to the Every child Matters (ECM) agenda through curriculum and tutorial planning, student support and staff training?

- The integration of ECM into the curriculum is in development. Staff have a good awareness of the requirements of the Children's Act 2004. The enrichment and tutorial programmes include topics that are relevant to the ECM agenda. However, some learners interviewed were unaware of any initiatives to raise awareness of healthy eating throughout the college. The revised lesson plan template encourages teachers to reflect on how the ECM outcomes for learners are addressed through the curriculum and lessons. Revised course review and SAR documentation requires teams to evaluate ECM outcomes for learners.

How does the college evaluate the impact of additional support on learners' performance?

- The college has improved its procedures for initial assessment. Most initial screening now takes place prior to the start of the new academic year. Additional support needs are now identified approximately 4 to 6 weeks earlier than in previous years. Learners requiring support now receive it soon after the start of the new term and teaching staff and tutors monitor learners' take-up of this support more effectively. The college is waiting for its complete analysis of performance data for 2005/06 and the self-assessment process to evaluate the effectiveness of additional support.

Leadership and management

The impact of new structure on the monitoring and evaluation of quality of provision and raising standards.

- The revised management and curriculum structure has been in place for two terms. Senior and middle managers are very positive about the changes, and the focus on smaller curriculum and management teams has increased their ability to monitor performance at curriculum area level. There is a clear schedule of regular meetings between the curriculum director, assistant directors and programme area managers, with clear agendas focussed on teaching and learning and quality improvement.

The effectiveness of training and support for managers in new roles.

- The college has invested in a wide range of support and training for senior and middle managers, to enable them to carry out new roles effectively. Since the last AAV the college has been re-accredited for the Investors in People award. The report acknowledged the good quality of support and training for new managers. Programme area managers feel well supported, through formal and informal support and training networks, and regular meetings within their team and with senior managers.

The analysis of data for underperforming groups and impact of actions taken to improve success rates

- The college has used data analysis to identify areas of underperformance, and reasons for this. Actions taken to improve low success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on level 1 courses show early signs of securing improvement. The college is working with its local school partners to improve the consistency of AS performance. A quality improvement group, with representatives from all the partner institutions, has been set up and is working on specific areas for improvement. The impact will only be measurable at the end of the academic year.
- The college has revised its curriculum offer in construction, which was graded inadequate in the 2004/05 SAR. The new curriculum focuses on college strengths in staff expertise and facilities, and on meeting continued demand from local schools for courses for learners aged 14 to 16. The number of learners in this area is small. While data analysis for 2005/06 is not yet complete, there are some early signs of improvement.

How well are the areas for improvement identified in course reviews and curriculum area SARs linked to actions plans, and how is progress against actions monitored?

- In the 2004/05 summary SAR and curriculum area summary quality improvement plans, it is not always clear that weaknesses identified are clearly addressed through action plans. The quality of action plans is not consistent, and in many, targets for improvement are imprecise. Documentation for course reviews has been revised and provides for thorough coverage of the common inspection framework, including ECM and equal opportunity and diversity issues. Programme area managers are responsible for monitoring progress against actions with course teams and assistant directors have regular meetings with programme area managers to review progress.

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

- None

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

- The college has recently started Train2Gain provision, in partnership with Oxford and Cherwell Valley College, which holds the contract. The college is piloting franchising arrangements on behalf of the LLSC, working with a commercial provider to provide work-based assessment. This work is at an early stage of development with a target to recruit approximately 120 learners.