

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Wiltshire College

Date of visit: 17 January 2007

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit (AAV). 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 long level success rates continued to improve in 2005/06?

- The improving trend in success rates has continued. Long course success rates improved at all levels for both age groups in 2005/6. For students aged 16 to 18, success rates at levels 1 and 2 are now above the national averages; the success rate at level 3 improved by 7 percentage points but is still below the national average. For adult students, long course success rates are now at or above the national averages at all levels, with level 1 showing the largest increase over the previous year.

Good framework completion in work-based learning (WBL) is identified as a strength in the college's self-assessment report (SAR). How has this been achieved?

- The college's apprenticeship success rate is 61%. Out of the eight curriculum areas which provide work-based learning programmes, only three – land-based studies, construction and hairdressing - have poor success rates. The other five areas have success rates at or above the national rates. In two of the three areas where success rates are poor overall, there are also some very good success rates. For example, in the construction area the furniture programme has a 100% success rate.
- There are good management systems for WBL. Information on each learner is disseminated to all training co-ordinators and teachers. All staff know when learners are expected to achieve and their progress is carefully tracked. The main reason for non-completion of the full framework is the failure of some learners to achieve the application of number (AoN) key skill at levels 2 and 3. The college now provides evening and holiday workshops to support learners in completing their portfolios as well as taught sessions for AoN in which learners also take practice exam papers.

Quality of education and training

The college's internal lesson observation profile for 2005/06 indicates that 2% of lessons observed were less than satisfactory and 24% were satisfactory. Some curriculum areas have a high proportion of satisfactory teaching. How is the college raising the standard of teaching within these areas? Is a profile showing 74% of lessons graded good or better realistic?

- The college has recognised that the overall grade profile for lessons observed in 2005/06 was not a realistic assessment because some grades were over-generous. Changes have been made to the internal observation scheme for 2006/07. There has been a reduction in the number of observers and improvements in the training provided to them to ensure a more consistent approach to evaluating lessons. Observers with appropriate subject knowledge are assigned to curriculum areas. The college is currently completing paired observations with support from external consultants to help standardise grading. Senior tutors have a central role in the internal observation scheme. They observe group and individual tutorials and offer mentoring support. Teachers feel the new scheme is better structured. Action plans are put in place for teachers whose lessons receive a grade 4. There is now a strong college focus on improving teaching and learning through development days and team meetings. The college also intends to moderate lesson observation outcomes through the quality group, which will include members of the senior management team. It is too early to assess the impact of these changes.

In view of the variations in success rates for students aged 16 to 18 and adult students, has the college analysed lesson observation outcomes by learner age?

- The college undertakes informal analysis of the results of observations by age. This analysis has led to some targeted strategies to improve teaching and learning. For example, the college has devised a joint observation project with its school partners for students aged 14 to 16. Staff development on managing disruptive behaviour has also been provided. Advanced practitioners work alongside curriculum staff to improve the learner experience in practical areas of equine studies and also support teaching in agricultural engineering. It is too early to assess the impact of these strategies.

Good support for learners is cited as a key strength in the SAR. Support for part-time learners was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. The last AAV identified "...better induction arrangements and an increase in initial advice and guidance

services. The college has increased the number of student counsellors and broadened the liaison between student services and personal tutors. Management arrangements for support are more coherent, with the same range of support now available on all main sites". Is this support effective?

- The college provides a range of learner support facilities. A booklet describing support services is now available on the three main sites and is distributed to all learners at induction. Part-time learners report that they are fully aware of all services available within the college and how to access them.
- Part-time learners have received an induction which included diagnostic assessments for literacy and numeracy needs. Results of their diagnostic assessments have been used to identify and provide appropriate support. Learners are aware of how to access counselling and financial services. Initial guidance and support has been particularly helpful for learners enrolled on the college's New Start programme by enabling them to make more informed choices about the occupations they wish to pursue. All learners have access to tutor support, however there are variations in the type of support available.

Leadership and management

Has the college employed particular strategies to raise success rates of 16 to 18 learners?

- As reported above, long course success rates have improved at all levels for students aged 16 to 18 and level 1 success rates have shown the most improvement. The college attributes this rise to better results for learners on entry level qualifications and more effective additional learning support. Weaknesses in data recording have also been resolved, as the last group of learners enrolled on three-year programmes completed their qualification in 2004/05.

What strategies have college managers put in place to improve the performance of ICT, performing arts and skills for life?

- In order to improve ICT managers have focused strongly on improving teaching and learning; including introducing a series of staff development events as well as using an external ICT consultant to observe the quality of lessons. A learner tracking system has been developed across the curriculum area to provide detailed data on learners' progress. Course teams meet regularly to discuss learners' progress. Managers have also reviewed the curriculum offer and subsequently reduced the level 2 courses available at the Trowbridge site. Attendance has improved on two-thirds of courses and

retention has improved from 80% to 88%. It is too early to assess the full impact of these measures, particularly on success rates.

- In performing arts and media, success rates at all levels are below national averages. In 2004/05, for 16 to 18 year olds, success rates were 59 percentage points below the national rate at level 1, 9 percentage points below the national rate at level 2, and 12 percentage points below the national rate at level 3. For students aged over 19, the curriculum area success rate was 68 percentage points below the national average at level 1, 2 percentage points above the national rate at level 2, and 9 percentage points below at level 3. College managers claim that students are gaining their main qualification, but failing to complete the additional qualifications that they take alongside it.
- To help improve the success rates a full review of all additional qualifications has been carried out and those with poor success rates or not adding value to students' programmes have been removed. There has also been a consolidation of two part-time teaching posts into associate positions; one has become programme leader and both are now available to offer student support on a more frequent basis. It is too early to judge the impact of these actions.
- Course teams in this curriculum area have worked closely with senior tutors to improve the tutorial system. Tutorial support is now more structured and the whole system is more tightly managed. There has been a complete review of the tutorial scheme of work and teachers feel students are now more purposefully engaged in tutorials. The curriculum area has also focused strongly on student management issues such as the work ethos and the culture of the area. Teachers are now being very clear at the start of courses about work expectations and the level of commitment needed from students. One of the poorer performing courses is music practice. The college has made changes to the way this course is delivered. A detailed action plan is being carefully monitored. The course team has been extended and roles revised, but, again, it is too early to judge the impact of these measures.
- The skills for life curriculum area has been faced with rising numbers of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students over the last two years; many of eastern European origin. Between 2004/05 and 2005/06 there was a 20% increase in eastern European ESOL students and there has been a further increase in 2006/07. The college contends that many of these students are more interested in gaining the rudiments of the English language than gaining a qualification and coupled with their transient nature this has a negative impact on the success rates of the area as a whole.
- The college has put a variety of measures in place to improve success rates. Instead of all learners being enrolled for the three qualification components of reading, speaking and listening and writing, they are now enrolled for the

component that most meets their immediate needs and at the level best matched to those needs. This approach is designed to be more motivational and provide a better experience for students in learning for only a short period of time. As students can achieve full qualifications in any of the three components, managers believe this approach will result in improved success rates. The area has a detailed and measurable action plan. Teaching and learning observations are now taking place and there is a systematic approach to sharing good practice. There are good links between the outcomes of the observations and staff development and training.

- Changes have been made to the staffing mix and the high reliance on part-time teachers has been reduced. Teachers are well qualified, 10 out of 13 have level 4 qualifications and the remainder are working towards appropriate qualifications. The curriculum area is training staff in vocational areas in providing literacy and numeracy support. At the time of the AAV it was too early to judge the effectiveness of the measures taken.

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

- The college has a clear system for identifying learners at risk of not achieving, but monitoring these learners and assessing the effectiveness of intervention strategies are not always done in timely fashion.
- The student council play an active role in the lives of students at the college. It organises events which are well attended. Decisions made by the council are distributed to the college's senior management team. Relevant points are discussed and appropriate actions identified. The council has been successful in recommending improvements to recreational facilities at the college's Chippenham site.