

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Queen Mary's
Date of visit: 1 December 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 progress has the college made to improve success rates on AS level courses? Is the college addressing the specific issues of poor retention on some courses?

- On AS level courses, the success rate rose in 2005/06 by 2 percentage points to 71%, which is 7 percentage points below the 2004/05 national average. Both the pass rate and the high grade pass rate are in line with national averages and it is clearly poorer retention that is depressing success rates. The achievement of students on AS level courses compared with their prior attainment is very good. It is good on GCE A level courses.
- The success rate on level 1 courses for learners aged 16-18 rose in 2005/06 by nearly 10 percentage points to well above the national average. The success rate on level 2 courses for learners aged 16-18 fell by 7 percentage points to some 8 percentage points below the national average. On level 3 courses, which make up by far the largest proportion of courses for learners aged 16-18, the success rate rose in 2005/06 to 78%, slightly below the national average. Success rates and higher grade pass rates on BTEC courses at level 2 and level 3 are good and significantly higher than national averages. Students on level 1 foundation courses achieve well.
- Success rates on level 1 and level 2 courses for students aged 19+ are good but are some 13 percentage points below the national average on level 3 courses.
- The college is taking appropriate action to address issues of poor retention, for example by improved guidance and earlier

identification of students at risk of leaving their courses. Whilst it is too early to judge the impact of these actions, early indications show a slight improvement in retention compared with the same time last year.

- The proportion of students who progress from level 1 courses to level 2 courses and from level 2 courses to level 3 courses at the college is high.

How is the college addressing the inconsistencies in performance amongst some subjects?

- The senior management team are aware of the courses where performance is poor and have a well defined action plan to address this. Heads of faculty now meet weekly with heads of department in order to monitor progress specifically on identified courses. They are assisted by a new on-line reporting tool which enables them to gain access to up to date key performance indicators.

Quality of education and training

How successful is the provision for 14-16 year olds? Are pupils engaged well and do the programmes have good outcomes?

- The main provision for pupils aged 14-16 is GCSEs in dance, psychology, photography and Spanish. This enables local schools to broaden the curriculum they offer and makes a contribution to improving progression and raising aspirations in Basingstoke. Pupils work hard and these courses have a high status within the college. Pupils' achievement is good. In 2005/06, 31 out of 40 grades awarded were A* to C. In psychology, the A* to C grade pass rate was 100%.
- The college also supports schools in establishing vocational provision such as BTEC courses in sport. For gifted and talented pupils in local schools, the college works with a major multinational corporation and a local university to provide challenging and

innovative science based activities. A business challenge activity is also provided for local schools.

What are the benefits of links with primary schools? Are they developing well?

- The work in the science centre for children of primary school age is outstanding. The centre provides a wide range of practical science activities based around key stages 1 and 2 of the national curriculum and has about 4,000 visits every year. Children using the centre work very hard and enjoy their learning greatly. The college has committed considerable resources to the science centre which plays a significant role in promoting science and the enjoyment of learning to young children.
- Primary schools also use the college's swimming pool and sports facilities, thereby making a useful contribution to children's healthy lifestyles.

Has the college maintained the high levels of academic and pastoral support found at the last inspection?

- Senior managers recognised that the group tutorials were not as successful as the individual tutorials, in improving students' performance. They have taken appropriate action and increased the amount of time invested in individual tutorials. Staff training has been given a high priority. The group tutorials have been largely discontinued. Individual tutorials are supported very well by an online tracking system that allows tutors to have instant access to records of students' attendance and progress on their courses. Students spoke enthusiastically about their individual tutorials and how they appreciated the "brilliant" support they had been given with their applications to higher education. Students also appreciated the help and support they get from teachers in general. The revision drop-in sessions were valued greatly and helped students to achieve their well defined targets. Work is marked thoroughly and the detailed feedback provides students with a good understanding of what they need to do to improve. Attendance is monitored very rigorously and lessons challenge students well in most cases.

How is the effectiveness of support systems and additional learning support evaluated?

- The identification of and provision for additional learning support needs is well established. For some students this begins whilst they are still at school so as to improve their transition into college. A sensible and pragmatic approach is taken to the identification of additional needs in literacy and numeracy. A free writing assessment and tests for dyslexia are carried out. The college currently supports about 150 students with dyslexia and about 30 students with autistic spectrum disorders. Additional help is provided in a number of different ways depending on the needs of the individual student. The evaluation of the effectiveness of additional learning support is thorough. In 2005/06, for example, 85% of students who attended additional support sessions in the college's skills centre either met or exceeded their minimum target grades.
- Since the new tutorial arrangements have been introduced recently, it is too early to judge their impact on improving some key performance indicators such as retention and punctuality. However, early indications are positive.

Has the college maintained its development of the "Every Child Matters" (ECM) outcomes?

- The college has made further progress in its promotion of the five ECM outcomes of being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, staying safe and economic well-being. The college has produced a formal position statement for each of the outcomes and there are detailed plans in place for future developments both across the college and within departments. The wide range of trips and visits, for example a recent trip to New York, contribute significantly to students' enjoyment of college. The sporting activities on offer make a significant contribution to helping students maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Leadership and management

What is the college's role in the local 14-19 strategy?

- The college plays a major role in the local 14-19 strategy. There is good and effective communication between the college, the local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC), the Local Authority (LA), other local colleges and primary and secondary schools. The college is working collaboratively with other organisations on the development of specialised diplomas.

How is the accommodation strategy developing?

- Queen Mary's College occupies a pleasant but very complex estate. It contains buildings that differ greatly in age and quality. The estate is exceptionally well managed and the detailed and strategic accommodation plan has been thought through imaginatively and innovatively with a strong emphasis on high quality design as illustrated by the new accommodation for art and computing.

Is the self assessment process embedded well?

- The self assessment process has been revised totally since the previous AAV. The self assessment report for 2005/06 is simple yet comprehensive and coherent. All major judgements are supported by evidence and clear data. The report is robust and self critical and is an important management tool in the drive to raise standards. The process is embedded well and managers monitor progress towards the clearly defined targets rigorously and frequently.

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

All themes were covered

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

The college arranged a meeting between the inspector and about a dozen students. As well as the points made by them and detailed above in the quality of provision section, students were very enthusiastic about their experiences at Queen Mary's College. They were very committed to the college's ethos of making everyone feel accepted, valued and welcome.