

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Bracknell and Wokingham College

Date of visit: 2 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

Success rates, achievement and retention overall are consistently above benchmark for all long courses, both 16-18 and 19+. Has the college identified variation between curriculum areas, levels of qualification or between student groups?

- The college recognises differences in performance between curriculum areas, levels of qualification and between student groups. Except for minor variations year on year where for example group sizes might be small, weaker areas are identified and action taken. However, although level 3 provision for 16-18 year olds has remained broadly satisfactory, a few subject areas remain weak. Notably, science and mathematics was 14 percentage points below national averages in 2005/06. The college has already moved to address this issue. The overall achievements of different genders are the same. Females are in the majority.

What patterns are emerging from preliminary data in 2005/06?

- College data for 2005/06 indicates that for long courses at most levels success rates have improved and are now well above the national averages for further education colleges. For example, for students aged 16-18 at levels 1 and 2 they are at least 14 percentage points better and for adults (at all levels) success rates are at least 14 percentage points better. Retention and pass rates are generally good. Attendances rates are good at 85%, but average actual class sizes at 9.5 are low. ACL provision has satisfactory retention rates at 85% and the recognition and recording of progression and achievement (RARPA) is in place.

Value-added and distance travelled data in 2004/05 indicates that students generally make at least the progress expected of them, with some variations between curriculum areas. What does the 2005/06 analysis show?

- The college uses ALIS, ALPS and a local model devised for Berkshire schools and colleges to calculate value added. The Berkshire model indicates that college performs very well, ALPS indicates progress at the 73 percentile and ALIS indicates that on average successful GCE and AS students gain half a grade higher than expected from their prior attainment

Work-Based Learning (WBL) qualification rates are generally satisfactory and improving. How timely is completion and how effective are target setting arrangements?

- In 2005/06 WBL overall success rates for apprenticeship framework completion were satisfactory at 52%. However, performance below the headline figure was very varied. For example, only 19% of advanced apprentices were successful compared to 66% for apprentices. Timely success rates were low at 9% for advanced apprenticeships and 21% for apprenticeships; however, there are mitigating reasons for some of this slow progress. To address these issues the college has introduced a new learner tracking system and a much more informed learner target setting process. However, it is too early to judge their effectiveness.

Key skill achievements are apparently good and improving. Is this a consistent picture, including WBL?

Key skills results have remained at around 50% for the second year running. This is well above the low 2004/05 national average of 32%. The college strongly promotes contextualisation in taught classes rather than an integrative model. Historically the poorest outcomes are at level 3.

Quality of Provision

How are any variations in success rates identified by the college being addressed through the quality of provision?

- The college has developed a thorough QA process to identify and address variations in success rates and improve consistency of quality. A new system of performance monitoring is establishing a baseline for exception

reporting across all curriculum areas in future. Line management processes are used effectively to address issues of non-compliance. Senior managers meet with all section heads 2-3 times per term where the focus is on quality improvement. Staff appraisal and quality assessment informs the staff development programme. While whole college staff development days are used to address both curriculum area and college wide issues, attendance is not targeted. There are a number of informal mechanisms for the sharing of good practice both within sections and across the college.

The previous annual assessment visit indicated that target setting for full-time students was too general, lacking short term targets to guide students. What action has been taken by the college to address this?

- The college has put in place a number of improvements to the tutorial system for September 2006 including better tutor access to information and procedures, to improve consistency. Guidance on the college intranet has been improved. Personal tutors speak highly of this.
- The issue of specificity of targets to help students improve their performance was identified both during the annual assessment visit in February 2006 and also through the college's own QA process of peer review. A working group has developed new procedures which have been disseminated to the whole college and new guidance, including exemplar short term targets, is available on the staff intranet. Targets have been agreed with students earlier this academic year and are reviewed three times per annum. These early targets are based on information known at enrolment, including initial assessment of language, literacy and numeracy skills. It is too early to judge either the quality of target setting or assess the extent to which language, literacy and numeracy targets are incorporated into short term targets, if appropriate, following diagnostic assessment.

During the previous annual assessment visit differentiation based on initial assessment was recognised as a development point. What action has been taken by the college to address this?

- As a result of both the AAV and internal review the need for further development of lesson planning has been recognised. The process of group profiling has been extended from pilot stage in one curriculum area to a cross college development. Lesson planning processes and paperwork

have been reviewed and their application is subject to internal audit plus review through peer assessment.

What progress has been made since the previous annual assessment visit in implementing the ILT strategy?

- The college devised a new ILT strategy in May 2006, with ILT implementation plan through to September 2007. There are two foci: teaching and learning, and developments towards the new building. Two new working groups have been formed to propose and agree strategies on IT standards for the college and current and future requirements for the software environment. To increase the use of ILT in the curriculum, two whole college staff development days have been set up in October and December based on staff self-assessment of skills. The college has made significant investment in ICT and continues to invest in portable technology in the existing building, which will be demolished in three years. In the last annual assessment visit one curriculum area was identified as having a shortfall in ICT investment, and equipment has now been upgraded.

What first impressions do current new students have of the quality of provision at the college?

- New adult students are very positive about their experience to date. They find the college friendly, induction good and teaching is generally at a high standard. Many spoke of the college as providing a real second chance or providing them with first rate professional updating. The availability of additional support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs is good. Those that travelled from outside the Bracknell and Wokingham area felt the college did not promote its good provision as effectively as it could.
- New 16-18 year old students speak confidently about their initial experiences at the college. They value the adult environment and strong work ethic. Most students have submitted and had marked work returned very early in their course. Induction is good, incorporating interesting team building opportunities, good course information and assessment of need. Students know their targets and how to access study support. Parents have been invited to an orientation evening early in September. Students give examples of participative lessons. Some do not have further key skill development on their timetable because they have GCSE equivalent qualifications.

Leadership and Management

At the previous annual assessment visit strong QA and self-assessment procedures were evidenced and inconsistency in application was being addressed the college. What progress has been made?

- The college has developed thorough QA processes which are well known and understood throughout the college, including the self-assessment process. Any inconsistency in standards and college wide issues are identified and development plans agreed. The peer review process links college staff to external curriculum specialists, often part-time inspectors, to look in depth at all key questions in the CIF to validate self-assessment. This process is used well to identify college wide issues and agree an improvement plan. The college is developing a number of informal internal processes for the sharing of good practice and these are further assuring consistency. There is effective electronic monitoring of compliance to the quality system.

The college lesson observation scheme was subject to review in 2005/06 because it was over generous in its grading. How has consistency been assured?

- The peer review process is used to validate the quality of teaching and learning and self-assessment grading. College managers who regularly observe lessons have jointly observed with the external specialist to assess the accuracy of observations and agree developmental advice to staff. The moderated college lesson observation profile judges around 70% of lessons good or outstanding. All observers have received significant training to support them in observation and as managers they also have coaching support.

The college is active in 14-19 developments with 14-16 work being a growth area, including the young apprenticeship scheme. What developments have taken place in this field?

- The college works effectively with three partners. They are responsible for arranging for over 500 pupils to attend vocational training at the college. The number is split evenly between years 10 and 11. Areas offered include hair and beauty (largest area), childcare, motor vehicle, construction, engineering and business administration. In addition 40 pupils are following a young apprentice's award. The first group will

complete in 2006/07. In 2005/06 success rates for pupils completing a NVQ level 1 was excellent at 98%.

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 principal updated inspectors on advanced plans for new build on the campus anticipated to start September 2007. Until the new build takes place, growth is constrained by existing resources.