

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Harlow College  
Date of visit: 28 September 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

#### Current achievement and standards

- With the exception of retention rates for adults studying level 2 courses, success, retention and achievement rates in 2004/05 were broadly at or above national averages. Level 1 outcomes were particularly good for both age groups, with all rates significantly above national averages and a trend of improvement from the previous year. Level 2 results in 2004/05 were, in the main, around the national average, but for learners aged 16 to 18 there was a slight decline in success, retention and pass rates. Adult retention declined very sharply to 65% (national average 73%) from 80% in 2003/04. However, pass rates improved significantly from 70% to 84% leading to a broadly similar success rate of 55% as compared to 56% in 2003/04 (national average 59%). Level 3 success rates in 2004/05 for learners aged 16 to 18 were above the national average at 72%. For adults, the overall success rate declined from 62% the previous year to 55%, which is in line with the national average.
- It is not possible to judge with confidence standards and achievement for 2005/06 due to the data being, in many cases, incomplete. The completed data for A/AS levels shows the college performing broadly at the national average for further education colleges but significantly below the appropriate sixth form college averages. Learners' performance against their prior attainment is variable, but there are more courses where learners make poorer progress than their previous results suggest.
- The current retention rates as supplied by the college show some areas of improvement, particularly for learners aged 16-18 studying level 1 and 3 courses. The previously poor retention of adults on level 2 courses has been improved slightly. However, level 2 retention, is still too low. College data show success rates for learners aged 16-18 have fallen slightly to 71%.
- Integration and embedding of key skills delivery has continued in most subject areas. Good guidance and support is provided to subject teams.

Overall achievement rates have risen for all levels and the college overall. Centre accreditation for the college has resulted in more timely portfolio submission and verification. A draft skills for life strategy is awaiting approval, which aims to combine with the key skills strategy, improving advice and guidance for level 1 learners.

- The management of work-based learning has continued to be strengthened, with improvements in framework completion rates. The college's overall framework success rate is 55% (national average 50%), showing a 20% rise over outcomes for 2004/05. Framework achievement in construction is currently around 62%, and in retail and commercial enterprise is currently 60%. Wide variations between subject area achievement rates have been considerably reduced. Reporting to, and communication with, employers and parents/carers have improved. The college has dealt successfully with enlargement of the Essex work-based learning consortium which it leads. Links with industry are strong and have led to a number of developments in level 2 workforce training.

#### Timely and accurate data

- The college has recognised the need for significant improvements to the production of accurate and timely data both for the purposes of monitoring and evaluating improvements and in encouraging college staff to use effectively the information available. Vigorous and appropriate action is planned to address the issue but it is too early to judge their impact.

## Quality of education and training

#### The effectiveness of lesson observation

- The college lesson observation system is comprehensive and linked well to staff development and appraisal. The database of information provides useful details on the quality of teaching and learning but is currently underused to analyse particular strengths and areas for improvement. The few instances of unsatisfactory teaching are followed up promptly with support and training that has been effective in securing improvements. Training has been targeted effectively and the impact of staff development is monitored. The college observation team has received appropriate training in grading and recognising excellence in teaching. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this training.
- At present, the small sample of written records examined have insufficient focus on the learning and progress of students. There is no clear moderation process and insufficient alignment of the timings of observation and appraisal.

## Guidance and support for part-time learners and the impact of additional learning support

- The college has introduced comprehensive screening for adult, part-time learners after piloting the system in one curriculum area. There has been good liaison with schools to support vulnerable young people in their transition to post-16 education and the college. Tutorials have integrated the five Every Child Matters themes. All learning support assistants have been separately observed to establish both the quality and instances of good practice; however, the college systems do not produce helpful data to measure accurately the impact of additional learning support.

## Leadership and management

### Equality and diversity

- A good range of equality and diversity monitoring measures are in place. Learners' achievements by ethnic group, gender and age are closely monitored. The corporation is kept well informed about equality and diversity developments. A series of productive and positive consultations have taken place during the past year, supported by the local LSC.

### Rigour and accuracy of the SAR

- The recent revisions to the SAR have created an improved and significantly more rigorous evaluation of the college's position on major areas. The principal and senior managers demonstrate a clear determination and understanding of the strategies needed to improve the learners' experience and raise standards.

### Introduction of the teaching and learning strategy

- Under the leadership of the new principal, the teaching and learning strategy is being introduced through thorough consultation and communication with staff. The college has begun a process of focusing appropriately on the quality of teaching and learning and the learners' experience as the main strategy to raise standards and secure improvements.