

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Southport College

Date of visit: 30 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

What have been the overall trends in achievement and standards? What has been the impact of the actions that the college has taken to improve success rates, particularly for learners aged 16-18 at level 2 and female learners? What has been the impact of the action the college has taken to improve Key Skills success rates?

- The headline long course success rate has improved consistently over the last three years and the 2005/06 rate is nine percentage points above the national average for 2004/05.

Level 1

- Success rates for 16-18 year olds are in the top quartile and are improving against the national average. Success rates for learners aged 19+ are also in the top quartile.

Level 2

- Success rates for 16-18 year olds are tracking around the national average. Achievement rates fell in 2004/05 but rose again in 2005/2006 but are still below the average. Low success rates in literacy and numeracy programmes have had a significant impact on these trends. The college has recognised this in the self-assessment report (SAR). Better initial assessment processes have been introduced that have resulted in a higher proportion of learners being enrolled on the appropriate level of key or basic skill programme. There is an improving trend of success on literacy and numeracy programmes. Success rates for learners aged 19+ are in the top quartile.

Level 3

- Success rates for 16-18 year olds are in the top quartile and improving against the national average. Success rates for learners aged 19+ are also in the top quartile.
- The college has taken appropriate action to improve courses that have persistently under-performed and there is a trend of improvement across most courses. The provision for adults has been appropriately rationalised in line with LSC priorities. Many courses, including some community provision, have now closed. Adult learner enrolments and the proportion of guided learning hours for adults have reduced.

Gender issues

- Although the success rate for female learners aged 16-18 at level two has improved and is around the national average, the pass rate is significantly below the national average. The college's analysis of this issue concludes that significantly more females than males are enrolled on low performing literacy and numeracy courses and that there are no other issues that are specifically disadvantaging female learners. A change in the initial assessment process this year means that a smaller proportion of learners overall are enrolled on literacy and numeracy courses and a larger proportion are enrolled on key skills. The college is closely monitoring the effect this change has on female pass rates.

Key skills

- After a general decline in retention rates on key skill programmes between 2002/03 to 2004/05, retention rates improved significantly in 2005/06. Level 1 success rates over this period improved to 50% and level 2 success rates improved to 44%. The college has high retention rates and a clear trend of improving success rates. It recognises a key challenge is to improve key skills achievement rates further.

Quality of education and training

What has been the impact of measures taken to improve the system used to observe teaching and learning? How are teaching and learning observations being used to inform the self assessment process and drive up achievement?

- Since the last AAV the number of teaching and learning observations has increased to provide a more solid evidence base. Consultants carried out a programme of around 140 observations in November 2006. Some of these observations were joint observations made with college staff to validate and moderate judgements. The college applies a carefully considered risk assessment approach to each observation and further observations are planned for staff judged to be less than good. The college uses appropriate criteria in its evaluation of teaching and learning. The outcome of observations is linked to a focussed staff development programme and the appraisal system. The performance enhancement team frequently reviews underperforming programmes and, where necessary, considers this alongside the quality of teaching. Teaching and learning advisors and subject learning coaches provide valuable support for staff.
- The college has developed a range of strategies to improve key skills teaching, assessment and management. For example, the location of specialist key skill tutors within each faculty and designating 'lead tutors' responsible for the general co-ordination and planning of key skills. A senior manager has now taken responsibility for key skills. Key skills are more effectively integrated into curriculum areas. For example, in some areas, assessment criteria are integrated into curriculum area assignments. However, the college recognises practice is not consistent, and acknowledges the need to refine its approach to the teaching and integration of key skills in some areas.

How are tutorials being used to monitor the performance of learners on full time programmes? How are tutorials being used to meet the outcomes of Every Child Matters?

- The college maintains an effective tutorial system for full time learners. All learners are entitled to at least four individual tutorials a year and many receive more than this. The individual tutorials focus on learners progression towards agreed targets based on prior achievements. Any

issues regarding attendance, punctuality or misbehaviour are dealt with very effectively through a series of case conferences. A high proportion of learners who have case conferences continue at college and achieve their qualifications. There is a comprehensive group tutorial curriculum which covers all the outcomes of Every Child Matters agenda. Group tutorials are observed frequently and where necessary staff are supported to improve their practice. Pastoral tutors attend useful meetings each week and good practice is shared very effectively.

Leadership and management

What has been the impact of the college actions to engage with employers and build partnerships?

- There are effective arrangements for engaging with employers which have been much improved. An Employer Services Unit has been established to better coordinate engagement activities. It has carefully reviewed the local labour market and the college's current levels of responsiveness to employer needs. The college has increased its range of contacts with employers and now carefully monitors this activity at faculty level setting challenging employer engagement targets. It also carefully monitors the performance of its franchised programmes.
- The college has restructured its curriculum offer and its mission to become more vocationally and business focused. It is actively involved in a range of local initiatives to widen participation, including a 14 to 16 year old increased flexibility programme, and it leads a consortium of schools developing vocational diplomas. There is very flexible provision in care and hospitality but the college recognizes that there is still work to be done to develop suitably flexible provision in every area.