

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Winstanley College
Date of visit: 21 March 2007

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

- College data for 2006 show that achievement and standards are outstanding. The pass rate for GCE A levels in 2006 was 99.4%, and for GCE AS levels it was 95.4%. These figures are far higher than the national averages for sixth form colleges. Retention rates are also very high. The proportion of the highest grades at GCE A level, at 62.3% is extremely high. At GCE AS level there were 48.7% high grades, which again is well above the sixth form college national average. Value added analyses show that students do extremely well overall at both GCE AS and A level, achieving better grades than would be expected given their GCSE results.

What action is being taken to improve the performance of the small minority of courses where value added data suggest students are not achieving as well as they could?

- There is a clear management focus on the small minority of courses where value added scores are lower. In almost all of these cases retention rates and pass rates are very high. Internal reviews were conducted for these areas in the Autumn term 2006. Heads of department and heads of division have identified actions to address weaknesses. In many instances the January 2007 module examination results show improvement over the previous year, suggesting that the action taken is proving effective.

Quality of education and training

How is the college ensuring that the outstanding quality of provision is maintained?

- The self-assessment report grades the quality of education and training as outstanding and the evidence from the annual assessment visit supports this judgement. Lesson observation data from internal reviews shows a

very high proportion of good and outstanding lessons, and no unsatisfactory lessons. Individual subject reviews help students identify their own strengths and weaknesses and set targets for improvement. Student feedback to the inspector was extremely positive and emphasised the high quality of teaching and support from teachers. Students commented on the very good relationships with teachers, the adult environment, good learning resources, and the variety of techniques used by teachers. They like the studious atmosphere of the college and the opportunity to express their own opinions and discuss issues. Plenty of homework is set; it is marked and returned promptly with helpful comments. Teachers are available for individual help and support outside lessons. Access to information technology (IT) is excellent. Students also value the huge range of enrichment opportunities on offer including study visits abroad to places such as the USA, Australia, Belgium, France and Spain.

- The college operating statement, detailing actions to further improve provision, has a strong emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Specific actions include management observations of tutorials, and observations of new teachers by the principal. Internal inspections have been re-introduced to monitor the quality of provision in different areas, prioritising those areas where there are concerns. Much staff development time is devoted to improving teaching and learning, including an end of year event at which teachers from different curriculum areas share good practice. Departmental events also focus on teaching and learning. Developmental observations are carried out by heads of department, with particular emphasis on feedback which helps teachers to further improve their skills.

To what extent is there a specific focus on improving teaching and learning and support for subjects/courses where performance is not quite as good as elsewhere? What professional development and other improvement strategies are focused on these courses?

- While staff development planning has not specifically targeted these areas, many teachers from these areas have attended relevant training events. In one area the teacher concerned has visited several other colleges where the subject is offered to gain ideas and network with fellow specialists. Teachers of vocational subjects, such as health and social care, do short industry placements every two years to keep up to date with current industry practice. Links with another sixth form college have provided one area with new ideas about a particular course. In another area more sharing of learning materials and resources is being encouraged. At departmental meetings staff have discussed issues arising

in particular courses and exchanged ideas about how to tackle these. Good use is made of external courses, including those offered by awarding bodies. Where staff have experience as examiners this is readily shared with others.

Leadership and management

The self-assessment report judges leadership and management to be outstanding, and the evidence from the annual assessment visit supports this.

How are leaders and managers leading improvements in the few curriculum areas which the self-assessment report judged to be good rather than outstanding?

- Managers have carried out careful and thorough analyses of available evidence and data including results. Particularly good use is made of value added data in discriminating between the relative performance of courses where retention rates, pass rates and high grades are all high. Managers display a willingness to examine critically their own work and that of their teams. The internal review process in the Autumn term prioritised curriculum areas judged to be good, and those not included in the last Ofsted inspection. In all cases teaching and learning were found to be of high quality and improvement strategies were in place. In some cases there have been staff changes. Careful attention is given to teacher recruitment and induction. Senior managers are leading the development of links with another high performing sixth form college, including joint training events and involvement in the validation of self-assessment.

What actions are leaders and managers taking to improve the performance of individual subjects/courses judged by the college to be good rather than outstanding?

- Heads of department are very thorough in their approach, and decisions about action needed are based on a scrupulous assessment of all the available information. Examples of specific actions taken include: changing syllabus, different teachers, changing options offered, adaptations to the sequence of modules taught, and the timing of coursework. It is characteristic of staff at the college that they constantly strive to improve their own teaching and do everything possible to enable their students to get the best possible results. Analyses of module results are extremely thorough and heads of department carefully adapt schemes of work to give more time to areas where module results show students have more difficulty. Where particular groups of students have underachieved in the past, these groups are more closely monitored and supported. Very good

use is made of the feedback collected from students to inform planning for the following year.

How effective is the training of middle managers and what plans are there to improve it further?

- Heads of department are supported by heads of division, who provide individual guidance. Formal training opportunities include studying for a higher degree in educational management. A number of managers have already achieved the qualification through part-time study, and more are undertaking this. Specific staff development activities have included training in developmental lesson observations and feedback, and the use of management information and data. Divisional meetings provide opportunities for managers from different areas to discuss and share good practice and ideas. Links with another sixth form college are providing opportunities for ideas to be shared between heads of department.

Has management information improved so that managers get the data and analyses in useful formats?

- Previously management information available electronically did not include individual module examination results. Very shortly after this was identified as a problem it was addressed and resolved. Managers now have access to the full details of all the results which they can download and analyse. Training in use of this data has been given to those who need it. Managers report that this has solved the problem.

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

- Winstanley College continues to be a very popular college. Demand for places is high and the entry criteria are stringent.
- Accommodation in performing arts is not entirely fit for purpose. Shortage of space means that practical studios are cluttered and used for theory as well as practical activities. Changing facilities are very limited. There are plans to address this through the building programme.
- The college no longer offers adult provision.