

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Hartlepool Sixth Form College
Date of visit: 15 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

Success and pass rates for GCE A level courses have improved to above national averages and are good. What action is being taken to continue to improve success rates?

- Data supplied by the college at the time of the AAV shows that in 2006 the success rate on long level 3 courses for learners aged 16 to 18 improved by 5% to 82%. The rate on GCE A level courses improved by 3% to 97% which is above the 2005 national average for similar colleges. The AS level rate improved by 7% to around the national average for 2005. The college has taken a range of appropriate actions to continue to improve success rates. The curriculum has been reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of the learners. Applied advanced level courses and alternative modules have been introduced, and where appropriate delivery methods changed. For example, in chemistry a practical module has replaced the coursework option and in health and social care work placement is being used to link the teaching of theory and practice.

AS general studies has low retention and pass rates which have a very significant impact on overall success rates, resulting in a figure for all level 3 courses that is below national average and well below that achieved in 2004. What action is the college taking to address this issue?

- The college has taken the decision to reduce the time for the AS general studies course from eighteen months to a year to address drop out over the summer period. The co-ordinator for the programme has changed and the scheme of work is being reviewed to ensure greater links with the tutorial programme.

Value added analysis shows that for most subjects, learners who complete their courses gain grades at least in line with those which would be expected given their prior attainment, and in several subjects, grades are significantly better than this. In a few subjects learners tend to achieve significantly lower grades than would be expected and these very few subjects skew the overall result. How is the college using this data to raise standards in underperforming subjects?

- The college is making effective use of value added data to help learners to achieve higher grades. Learner's target grades are now circulated to personal tutors much earlier in the year. A new electronic format for recording the targets and monitoring learners' progress was introduced at the start of this academic year. This system allows learners to enter their assignment grades and track their progress regularly.
- A number of key appointments have been made including a head of department and teachers for underperforming subjects. Support for new teachers from mentors and subject learning coaches helps them to quickly settle into the college and to further develop their skills as a teacher.
- In the information technology (IT) area a 24 hour web site allows learners to access on-line course materials, to submit assignments and to receive assessment feedback. Parents also have access to this site.
- An additional member for the learning support team has been appointed. This has increased the amount of literacy and numeracy support provided for learners identified to be in need of additional help.

Leadership and management

What action has the college taken to address areas for improvement identified at the last inspection?

- The college has made good progress in addressing areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Courses with poor retention are being regularly monitored. Data shows that rates have improved and that the overall college retention rate has improved by 4% compared with the same time last year.
- Issues relating to the promotion of equality and diversity have been addressed effectively. The college now has a race equality implementation plan which is monitored by the corporation. Training has been provided for staff and governors on race equality and diversity issues. All specialist areas and most classrooms are now accessible to people with mobility

difficulties. A lift has been installed and the main entrances to the college have been fitted with doors which open automatically.

- High priority has been placed on improving the quality of teaching and learning through increased investment in the sharing of good practice and staff development. The outcomes from observation of teaching and learning have been analysed to inform the college action plan to improve teaching and external consultants have been used to provide whole college training events. The college is a lead member of a consortium of local sixth form colleges which come together for an annual teaching and learning conference. Arrangements for carrying out the observation of teaching and learning have been strengthened to include an action plan that helps teachers to know what they need to do to improve. The opportunity to shadow more experienced teachers is used to help teachers use a wider range of teaching strategies.
- The self-assessment process is being more rigorously carried out. The number of quality team leaders has been increased to provide extra support for heads of department to accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement in their provision. The college self-assessment report is moderated by the quality team leaders before presentation to a panel made up of senior managers, governors and external representatives from local colleges. The heads of department receive regular support from the quality team leaders to implement course action plans. Formal monitoring of progress takes place biannually.

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:

- In 2006, the overall success rate on long level 2 courses for learners aged 16 to 18 fell by 11%. This was largely due to very poor success rates on an IT course which has been replaced for this academic year with a qualification at a more appropriate level.