

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Paston Sixth Form College
Date of visit: 13 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

Students aged 16-18; In 2004/05, success rates for long courses at levels 1, 2, and were all below the national average for colleges of this type. In the case of level 1 and 2 provision the rate is very low and has declined. Though retention rates have improved at level 2, they have declined for level 1 and 3 provision and in all cases they are significantly below the national average. How is the college addressing these issues and what happened in 2005/06?

- Much of the apparent poor performance in success rates for 2004/05 was due to proxy key skills qualifications being included in the data for this year. The college has now discontinued much of this provision with a consequent improvement in rates. The underlying success rates have also improved. For 16-18 year old students at levels 1 and 2, retention improved in 2005/6, in the case of level 2 provision from 47% to 79%, 6% above the national figure. GCSE provision showed a marked improvement for these students to just above the national figure. Retention rates improved in 2005/06. For levels 1,2 and 3, these increases were 10%, 10% and 4% respectively. Retention is now at or close to the national figure for levels 2 and 3 courses, below for level 1. The college has introduced a number of measures to improve retention (see below).

Students aged 19+; in 2004/05 retention for the significant number of these students on level 3 courses was poor. How is the college addressing these issues and what happened in 2005/06?

- The college has introduced a number of measures designed to improve the support of all students, some of which has been targeted specifically at mature students. As a result, overall retention of these students

improved by 8% in 2005/06 and is now close to the national average for colleges of this type. Mid – year retention figures indicate a similar picture for this year.

Success rates for 16-18 year-olds on long level 2 courses have declined and were 26% below the national figure last year. Within this figure, they were around 6% below the national average for GCSEs, and around 9% below for key skills. This was an issue at the last AAV visit. How is the college addressing this and what happened in 2005/06?

- Much of the poor performance at level 2 was due to the inclusion of proxy key skills qualifications. These have been discontinued, and the success of students aged 16-18 on level 2 long courses has improved markedly as a result. In 2005/06, overall success rate improved from 26% below the national figure to 6% above (increase apart from proxy key skills changes).

At the last AAV value-added data indicated some improvement over the previous year. However value added and distance travelled data from the learner achievement tracker indicate a very variable picture for both A and AS provision. To what extent did all students achieve better than expected last year and to what extent did they achieve high grade passes?

- Overall, students achieved well last year. The advanced level performance system (ALPS) data indicates overall the college is in the top 6% nationally for AS courses, 12% nationally for A level courses. Students perform significantly better than would be expected on the basis of GCSE results alone. The proportion of high grade passes remains very variable between courses however. Some of the more popular subjects have very good high grade pass rates. For example A level sociology had a high grade pass rate of 79% in 2005/06. Overall, the proportion of students achieving high grade passes has improved steadily over the last 3 years.

Many AS and A2 courses, particularly in science, mathematics and information technology (IT), performed badly in 2004/05. What happened in 2006/06?

- Of the 10 worst performing AS and A2 subjects in 2004/05, all except one improved their success rates, in many cases markedly so. For example AS biology improved from 53% to 73%.

How did short courses and level 1 provision perform in 2005/06

- Success rates for level 1 long courses improved slightly, to just above the national figure for students aged 19+, but remained below the national figure for students aged 16-18. Success rates for short courses improved for students aged 16-18, with a mixed picture for students aged 19+ due to the restructuring of provision.

Quality of education and training

Retention is clearly an issue, both for 16-18 and 19+ students. How are college systems addressing this, particularly with regard to attendance, advice and guidance, and student perception evaluation?

- Much of the poor data for retention has been due to the inclusion of proxy key skills. The college is now addressing this and a much clearer and better picture is emerging. A number of other changes have also been made aimed specifically at improving retention. Better attention is now paid to student perception, attendance is more closely monitored, and a system of students contracts has been introduced aimed at those at risk of failing. This is now in widespread use and is proving successful in improving achievement.

The last AAV identified that student progress reviews were not always sufficiently detailed, and did not always relate well to target grades. Is this still the case?

- Student monitoring, review and target setting have improved markedly since the last AAV, and this is confirmed by the students. A well designed and effective networked computer system is used throughout the college,

and both staff and students have access to it. Targets, including aspirational targets, are clear. Actions to achieve targets are precise and measurable as well as being subject specific. Early indications are that the system is effective in improving standards. The system could usefully be extended to include aspects of assessment for learning and the monitoring of coursework and homework.

Has the provision of social accommodation improved?

- The college is taking steps to improve the provision of social space, particularly during inclement weather. Whilst it recognises the need to improve provision, the college is constrained by the nature of the listed buildings which it occupies.

The last AAV identified that issues of race relations and equality of opportunity were not well developed within the curriculum. Has this changed?

- Recent staff development has focussed on this issue. Whole college training has looked at the college's obligations for race relations. Opportunities for discussion of equality of opportunity are now identified in schemes of work and lesson plans, and dealt with in a structured way during group tutorials.

The spreading of good practice across the college was not well developed at the last AAV. Has this changed?

- The identification and spreading of good practice has improved because the lesson observation process has improved. In a few examples, examples of good practice have been used as exemplars in cross-college events. Exchanges of good practice regularly happens within related subject areas. The college recognises the benefits of extending this further across the college and is taking steps to facilitate this.

How effectively does the college evaluate the success of the support it provides?

- The college evaluates the effectiveness of the support it provides well. Detailed evaluations are available and are used effectively to evaluate aspects of provision.

Leadership and management

The last AAV identified that quality assurance (QA) procedures remain good, and that underperforming areas have recovery plans. Yet college performance record data indicate some AS courses, for example mathematics, computing and biology, performed badly in 2004/05. How is this being addressed?

- QA systems remain good. Recovery and improvement plans are in place for areas which need them, and performance in these areas improved in 2005/06. In addition, the lesson observation system has been effective in the identification of aspects of teaching and learning which could be improved in underperforming areas. However, actions in improvement plans are rarely ascribed to individuals and not always effectively monitored.

The last AAV identified the need to moderate lesson observations, and to improve the extent to which the observation process evaluates learning rather than teaching. What developments have occurred?

- The college has undertaken many improvements to the lesson observation system since the last AAV. Observations are moderated in collaboration with a nearby sixth form college, and a number of useful peer observations have served to moderate grades and developmental issues identified by the two processes. The college's lesson plan format has been amended to pay greater attention to learning rather than teaching. In addition, greater attention is paid to the evaluation of learning in the documentation used to the observation of teaching and learning.

Priorities for improvement were not always reflected in the quality of documentation at the last AAV visit. Has the precision of actions and deadlines improved?

- The precision of action planning has improved in those areas which are in need of improvement. However actions are not always ascribed to individuals. In general, minutes of meetings are now more focussed than at the last AAV with better consideration of actions which are carried forward.

To what extent has leadership and management, at all levels, introduced changes that will effectively deal with retention, and hence success rate issues. Has the college set itself, at all levels, appropriate targets?

- The college has successfully undertaken measures to improve retention, and this is clear in the data for 2005/06. In addition to clarification of the situation with proxy key skills qualifications, there have also been real underlying improvements, in some cases to above national averages. The targets which the college has set itself are appropriate.