

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Chelmsford

Date of visit: 24 January 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

What are the current levels of achievement?

- College data for 2005/06 show that the trend of improved success rates has continued. In particular, adults achieved well at levels 1 and 2 with success rates significantly above national averages. At level 1, the sharp improvement to 82% takes success rates to twenty percentage points above the 2004/05 national average. Level 2 success rates at 75%, are 15 percentage points above 2004/05 national average. At level 3, success rates have improved from 47% in 2003/04 to 63%, six percentage points above the 2004/05 national average. With the exception of pass rates at level 3, which are broadly at the national average, all other retention and pass rates are significantly above national averages;
- Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 also continued to improve. At levels 1 and 2 they are slightly above 2004/05 national averages. At level 3, success rates have been slower to improve and in 2005/06 they were 65% compared to a national average of 68%. Pass rates at all levels have improved. At levels 1 and 2 they are above national averages; however, at level 3 they remain below the national average of 84% at 79%. Retention at all levels is broadly at, or slightly above, national averages.

What do college data show is the current position on in-year retention and attendance?

- College data show high rates of retention across all areas of learning. If these levels were to be maintained, they would represent significant improvements to 2005/06 retention rates. Most attendance rates are satisfactory or good. In particular, health, public services and care continues to demonstrate high retention and attendance. However,

attendance in mathematics, science and technology and engineering has fallen sharply from November to December.

What actions have been taken to improve performance at Level 3? How effectively are under-performing courses being monitored and improved? How far is data analysed to identify and address areas of under-performance? What specific actions have been taken to address areas of concern in construction and business?

- College managers are keenly aware of the need to improve level 3 performance and have taken vigorous action to address areas where improvement is needed. The revised curriculum is relevant and poorly performing courses have been discontinued. Current retention rates have improved but it is too early to judge the full impact of actions taken;
- The college has introduced minimum target grades and evidence suggests that this is achieving its aim of supporting improvements in the tracking and monitoring of students' progress;
- The specific projects to address issues in construction and business are well planned and monitored. Of particular interest is the mentoring programme for construction students. However, it is too early to judge the full impact;
- The college has recognised the need to raise achievement by male students. Whilst this is being addressed by plans in place for those areas of learning where male students dominate, there is a need to develop further teaching and learning strategies specifically addressing gender differences.

Are the sharp improvements to key skills on-track to be maintained?

- The college is introducing successfully well conceived strategies to improve provision in key skills. Key skills success rates have risen from 8% in 2002/03 to 58% in 2004/05. The significant improvement has continued for 2005/06 and for the current academic year. Effective management and staff development have raised the status of key skills within the college, both for teachers and learners;
- Good attention is paid to meeting the different and varying needs of learners. For example, separate arrangements have been made for construction learners, where particular issues were identified, that blend effectively the expertise of subject teachers with those of key

skills specialists. New approaches to teaching key skills to GCE A level learners are being promoted. The college's scheme for lesson observation has given high priority to judging the effectiveness of teaching for key skills and identifying improvements.

## Quality of education and training

How effectively is the college addressing the need to increase the proportion of good or better teaching?

- The college has been successful in maintaining the centrality of teaching and learning to quality improvement. Lesson observation is comprehensive and well aligned to staff training and development and increasingly to appraisal processes. Staff are enthusiastic about the benefits of observation and are clear on the explicit improvements brought about through both observation and detailed feedback. Observers are well aware of the need to grade lessons on learning and progress but often fail to make this clear in written records of observations. In the small sample examined, few commented sufficiently on standards, learning or progress;
- College data show that improvements to the proportion of good or better teaching have been secured and that the college is on track to achieve their target of 60%. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has been considerably reduced as has the gap in quality between full and part-time teachers. Sharp variability in the quality of teaching and learning across areas of learning remains and is an area for improvement. Records and data of lesson observations are providing an increasingly useful tool for quality improvement through analysis of major features.

How far have Every Child Matters (ECM) been integrated into college processes and planning?

- The college has begun the process of integrating fully ECM outcomes which are now included on lesson observations. A useful audit against the 5 outcomes has been carried out. The college has provided good support for the re-establishment of the Student Union and has begun to monitor the participation in enrichment. Designated staff for both child protection and vulnerable adults are in place. ECM is not yet integrated in College planning or self assessment processes.

Do links with schools continue to be a strength of the college? Have identified improvements to employer engagement been established effectively?

- Partnerships continue to be a strength and the college values and promotes partnerships with a wide range of organisations. The college has worked hard to gain the confidence of schools and working relationships are often good. The college has worked well with schools, as part of the 14-19 Partnership and the 14-16 Mid-Essex Consortium. The latter has provided a focus for the development of many useful strands of activity, for example, vocational programmes for local special schools. Plans are well advanced to seek funding for a vocational training centre based on school and college partnerships;
- Partnerships, including those with employers, are particularly valued and developed by many areas of learning in the college, although planned work experience for learners is not comprehensive. It is for areas of learning to determine whether work experience should be arranged and some choose not to pursue this. The college is actively involved with many employer forums. It has recently established Central Essex Training, to manage all non-LSC funded work, especially in relation to programmes for employers. A sales and marketing executive has just been appointed. The intention is that the new organisation will mark a step change from the earlier, and somewhat unsuccessful, college business development unit.

What impact and outcomes have additional learning support had on the achievement and standards of learners?

- Additional learning support continues to be good. It is very much at the heart of what the college does. The infrastructure for support is good and continues to benefit from increased investment, for example, in terms of the number of learning support assistants and the specialist staffing for dyslexia. The additional learning support department works closely and well with the whole college. Teachers receive good information about their learners, to help them plan their teaching and learning. Particular initiatives follow from the determination of extra support needs in some areas of learning, such as skills development for construction learners.

- Support for learners with dyslexia continues to be strong. Additional resources have enabled a more rapid response to learners' needs and issues preventing support for learners in some areas of learning have been dealt with successfully. There is evaluation of the impact of additional learning support. College data show that for learners receiving additional learning support in 2004/05 and 2005/06, the success rate is some ten to twelve percentage points above that for all learners in the college.

## Leadership and management

### How accurate and robust is self assessment?

- The self assessment report (SAR) is accurate and self-critical. There has been satisfactory or good progress against the major issues in the College Improvement Plan. High quality data support self assessment which managers use with confidence. Middle managers demonstrate a good understanding of the key priorities and objectives for the college. They are keen to bring about improvement and work well together in a number of forums, to implement change. Their development and promotion of the college's new e-learning strategy is a particularly good example of this.