

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Varndean College  
Date of visit: 9 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

How is improving retention being addressed as a whole college issue?

- Though pass rates are high with good value added data, the college has recognised that it needs to improve retention. Some impact of the measures introduced is immediately apparent because retention is better at this stage of the year than at the same point in previous years. However, the overall approach to improving retention is still not consistent across the college. The establishment of a register of students at risk of leaving early, the introduction of review days with students and the work being done by the recently appointed attendance administrator are some positive measures which are having an impact.

Though retention is a regular agenda item at team meetings, there is no formal strategy for improving retention across the college. Reasons why students leave are being investigated but suitable follow up actions have been limited to date.

What actions are being taken to address success rates for learners aged 19 and above?

- Success rates for learners aged 19 and above have risen slowly but on level 1 and 2 long courses and some short courses they are still below national averages. The re-organisation of the Adult Education team with more clearly defined roles, as well as the appointment of a new Registry manager, have had a positive impact in ensuring that data is now complete and correct. Roles of staff are now clearer. More staff who teach level 1 and 2 courses are taking part in staff training. The impact of the changes on success rates at this stage is yet to be seen.

What impact have the changes, introduced last year, had on improving attendance?

- Staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to punctuality, attendance and absence but the approaches in implementing these are inconsistent.

## Quality of education and training

How is the college securing greater consistency in evaluation and setting effective targets across the college?

- The introduction of formal monitoring meetings with the senior management team (SMT) has ensured more consistency in target setting, analysis of data and course review. The use of the external quality review (EQR) system has also been successful in developing staff skills and their ability to monitor and review their courses more effectively.

Is the college able to demonstrate impact of changes made to improve key skills?

- Several suitable measures have been taken to improve key skills, including getting students onto the right level, more support for portfolios, more workshop support and better tracking. It is too early to assess the success of these improvements at this stage as students take the tests at the end of year. Raising the profile and ensuring students, parents and all staff see the value of key skills is still an area for further development.

How is the use of e-learning being developed to improve teaching and learning?

- E-learning is being developed well through the information learning technology (ILT) champions and use of Moodle, the college's virtual learning environment (VLE). Sharing of good practice across the college is not exploited as fully as possible, even though subject learning coaches have effectively raised awareness of good teaching and learning strategies in their own areas. There is an appropriate focus on improving teaching and learning in the staff development plan.

## Leadership and management

What actions are being taken to support managers in the areas of adult education, computing and ICT, social sciences, and business to improve their courses?

- There is effective ongoing monitoring of courses for concern by the SMT with curriculum managers and regular review of action plans. Appropriate

actions are being taken to tackle the identified difficulties and those courses performing more poorly.

- Middle managers say that the closer monitoring by the SMT (as previously mentioned) and some good staff development have supported them to plan improvements some of which are too recent to enable proper judgements on impact to be made. They comment that they feel well supported and accountable for their area's performance. Course reviews have improved with suitable action plans produced as a result of the self-assessment review process though timescales and success criteria are not consistently used.

What training has taken place to improve understanding of the Equality and Diversity policy? What has been the impact?

- The recording of data on ethnicity has improved since the last AAV and there has been some good training on the Disability Discrimination Act with further training on equality and diversity planned.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

- All themes were followed up.

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

- Students say they like the college, feel secure and there is no bullying. They also consider that teaching is good. However, the student voice and ways of using their views to make improvements is underdeveloped at present.
- Students interviewed were not sure of how and where they can get help if there were problems other than through their teachers. They also reported that though tutorials were a good chance to meet their tutor, get information and talk to other students the purpose of tutorial sessions was not always clear.