

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Itchen SF
Date of visit: 30 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 do enrolment and results data show for 2005/06?

- Student enrolments rose by about 40% between 2002 and 2005 but declined in 2005/06 because of a planned reduction in adult enrolments. The numbers of students aged 16 to 18 continues to rise and was 1,212 in 2005/06; the numbers of adult students fell significantly in 2005/06 to 622.
- The college has made a significant contribution to the steady increase in those young people from Southampton who stay in education or training at age 16: this rate increased from 72% in 2004/05 to 79% in 2005/06. The number of young people not in structured education, employment or training fell by two percentage points in 2005/06.
- Overall, achievements and standards are satisfactory and improving, although for adults they are largely unsatisfactory. For students aged 16 to 18, the success rate improved from 66% in 2004/05 to 71% in 2005/06. This places the college in the bottom quartile of sixth form colleges by this measure. The gap has narrowed between the success rates of boys and the success rates of girls at levels 2 and 3, and at level 1 boys now outperform girls. Some specific minority ethnic groups show improved success rates in 2005/06: at level 2, those of Black African heritage improved by 10 percentage points and at level 3 those of other Asian and mixed white/Asian heritage improved by 28 and 14 points respectively. The performance of those of Chinese heritage declined slightly at levels 2 and 3. These improvements for specific groups have been made as a result of particular intervention strategies by the college.

For students aged 16 to 18 on long courses (the large majority), at level 1 retention, pass and success rates all improved dramatically from very low bases in 2005/06 and are now at or above the national averages for 2004/05; at level 2 pass rates have continued to improve, but although retention and success rates also improved in 2005/06 they remain below the national averages for 2004/05; at level 3, which represent by far the biggest volume of students, the success rate improved two percentage points in 2005/06 but it remains well below the national average for 2004/05. Previously declining trends have been reversed and all measures are now rising at all levels except for retention rates at level 3.

The average general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) points scores of students entering the college at age 16 fell slightly in 2005/06 and has fallen further in 2006/07, against the national trend. In 2005/06 nearly half the students aged 16 to 18 enrolled in the college had an average GCSE points score of less than five, which is well below the national average.

- For adult students, the success rate improved from 46% in 2004/05 to 50% in 2005/06. This keeps the college in the bottom 10% of sixth form colleges by this measure. However, the college has a pattern of enrolling adult students throughout the year and the final achievements of some students are not fully reflected in the data that the college reports; adult success rates are thereby artificially depressed. The college recognises this problem and is seeking to rectify it for 2006/07.

For adult students on long courses, success rates are well below the national averages for 2004/05 at all three levels: at level 1 the retention rate improved further in 2005/06 and is high, but pass and success rates are still well below the national averages for 2004/05; at level 2 pass and success rates fell further in 2005/06 and remain well below the national averages for 2004/05; at level 3 success rates, which were around average, fell six percentage points in 2005/06 and are now well below the national average for 2004/05. Trends are now almost all downwards except at level 1 where high retention has improved success rates slightly.

What do value added data show about how much progress is made by students on level 3 courses?

- The college subscribes to two methods of analysis of how much progress is made by students at the college from their starting points, and reports for 2005/06 show that on advanced supplementary (AS) and advanced (A) level courses students make satisfactory progress. About half of the subjects contained students whose low GCSE score on entry meant that they were predicted to fail their AS or A level. Such students, despite working to prediction, in fact show a negative progress score. However, reports also show that in almost all subjects more students attain high grades (grades A or B) at AS and A level than is predicted by their GCSE scores on entry.
- The college is part of a pilot study in analysing contextual value-added data that has been run by the department for education and skills (DfES). In 2005/06 these data showed that students at the college made average progress on their level 3 courses.

What success has the college had in trying to improve students' attendance?

- In 2005/06 there was an overall increase in attendance of about 3 percentage points, to 81%. Rates improved for both age groups and at all levels except for adults at level 1. Rates are still low for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 1 and 2, and for all adults except at level 2. The college continues its strategies to improve attendance and has set a target of at least 1 percentage point improvement for all courses for 2006/07. After one term of the academic year, in-year attendance has improved further when compared with the same period in the previous year at entry level and at levels 2 and 3, but has declined at level 1. In-year retention is also higher in 2006/07 than in 2005/06 at all levels except at entry level.

Quality of education and training

What progress has the college made in developing students' independent study skills – previously identified as an area of concern?

- Many students start courses at the college, even at level 3, with poor independent study skills. Selected students are now timetabled for supervised periods of independent study, in which teachers work with small groups to help them develop and use their study skills. Students are selected by referral from subject teachers or tutors. The college is monitoring this system in order to evaluate its effectiveness. Many subjects also run workshops and additional support sessions for students in those particular subjects, following up work set and started in lessons. At levels 1 and 2, a higher proportion of coursework is now carried out in lessons with close guidance from teachers.
- In order to improve the understanding of students' study needs, all teachers and learning support assistants now spend at least one morning in a local secondary school to see at first hand the level and range of independent study skills which students do or don't have by the time they arrive at college. This is a good, practical initiative which is improving transition for all students aged 16 to 18.

What impact have advanced skills teachers and other training initiatives had on teaching and learning?

- The college now employs five designated advanced skills teachers: two are specialists in the use of ICT in learning, two have been trained as subject learning coaches. One of their roles is to lead staff development activities on key themes; another is to moderate and quality assure the college's internal lesson observation programme, alongside members of the senior management team. Particular points of focus over the last year have included how to ensure that lessons start with an interesting, dynamic stimulus to learning, and how to ensure that all students are being appropriately stretched and supported through lessons. The effective use of ICT by teachers has also increased significantly in the past year, partly as a result of their interventions and advice. The programme of internal lesson observations is providing the college with more detailed knowledge about the particular strengths and weaknesses in lessons and an increasing proportion of lesson observations are now unannounced.

How well have links with employers been developed, particularly in curriculum areas where they were underdeveloped (for example, in information and communications technology and in business)?

- For students aged 16 to 18, those studying business courses at levels 1 and 2 all have a one week work placement, and those studying at level 3 have the option of a placement. Links with local businesses have been improved. Securing worthwhile placements in ICT has proved more difficult, although the college continues to search for them through the local vocational network. Students are given satisfactory insights to the industry through a programme of trips and visits. Health and care placements, which are integral to the courses in this area, are adequate to meet the demand. All students across the college who are entry level courses have a structured work placement as part of their course. All students have the opportunity to arrange a short work shadowing or work experience placement through the offices of the college's Connexions personal advisor.
- For adult students in health and care, a successful 'train to gain' bid has secured an additional 50 placements in residential care homes. Links with these employers are well established. Other effective links with employers exist for students in childcare and business administration and for primary school teaching assistant trainees.

Leadership and management

How rigorously evaluative is self assessment? Are movements in retention, pass and success rates given sufficient balance and prominence?

- Self-assessment is a comprehensive and fully corporate enterprise. All key functions and aspects are graded, although not separately by age group. Strengths and areas for development are clearly identified and supporting evidence offered. Some of the grades awarded in the draft self-assessment report (SAR), however, would appear to be too generous in the light of some of the outcomes for students: in particular, achievements and standards are adjudged to be good in the draft SAR whereas they are only satisfactory overall, and for adults they are largely unsatisfactory; and in the light of this, guidance and support for students cannot be endorsed as outstanding as the college claims since the net result of whatever guidance and support students receive is performance which is no better than satisfactory. Appropriate prominence is

given, in parts of the summary judgemental statements in the draft SAR, to improvements that have occurred in 2005/06, but in this part of the draft document insufficient attention is given to weaknesses that remain.

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

- N/A

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

- N/A