

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Farnborough College of Technology
Date of visit: 23 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. Commentary on learner performance in 2005/06 is based on the college's own data. In 2004/05, college data used during the annual assessment visit proved very accurate when compared with published data in the college performance report.

Achievement and standards

Analysis of learner performance 2005/06

- Overall success rates have improved in 2005/06 but remain a little below average. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 and over 19 on long courses improved at all levels. Rates of improvement were good at level 1 and 2, where success rates are now above average for students aged 16 to 18 and around the average for adult learners. Rates of improvement at level 3 remain slower and success rates are still nine percentage points below average for 16 to 18 year olds and are at the average for adults.
- Success rates in key skills are improving and in 2005/06 were above the low national average at levels 1 and 2. Success rates at level 3 remained very low, and the college identified that learners were wrongly enrolled for level 3 key skills qualifications which they did not actually take.
- Success rates in work based learning are generally improving and most learners complete their qualifications in the time expected. Overall success rates are above the national average.

Have there been any improvements achievement rates for adult learners and retention and pass rates for 16 to 18 year olds on level 3 courses?

- Achievement rates for adult learners improved in 2005/06 at all levels and are now close to the national averages. Retention and pass rates for 16 to 18 year olds on level 3 courses have improved, but remain below average. Retention and pass rates on vocational courses at level 3 are at or above average but remain well below average for A level courses and just below average for AS courses. While the overall pass rate improved, particularly on AS courses, one-third of AS courses had pass rates below or well below average. In 2005/06 the average point score per qualification for 16 to 18 year olds on level 3 courses improved and was above the national average. Many students start level 3 courses with lower than average prior attainment and value

added data indicate that students make the progress expected. Pass rates on part-time A level evening classes are very variable, ranging from very good to poor.

Any improvements in the proportion of A*-C grades in GCSE maths?

- The proportion of A*-C grades has improved from 28% to 35% in 2005/06, but remains well below average. Higher grade pass rates are better for adult learners at 43%, but remain very low for students aged 16 to 18 at 15%. The college is revising its strategies and fewer learners, particularly 16 to 18 year olds, are now re-taking GCSE maths.

Quality of education and training

What impact has the "think learn" initiative had on raising the quality of teaching and learning?

- The staff development programme has a strong focus on teaching and learning. The college's internal lesson observation grade profile indicates improvements in teaching and learning but managers acknowledge that too little is outstanding. Observations carried out by external observers in 2005/06 and autumn 2006 indicate a higher proportion of good teaching than the college's observations in 2005/06. Strengths and areas for improvement are identified to inform cross college staff development and to focus on particular priorities in curriculum areas.

What does the college's analysis of its lesson observations indicate about the quality of teaching for different groups of learners or different levels of courses or in different curriculum areas?

- The college has identified areas with the highest proportion of good or better teaching and those with a significant proportion of unsatisfactory teaching, for example, in media, engineering and business. The analysis of strengths and areas for improvement at school level provides a clear agenda for specific areas of improvement. The highest proportion of good or better teaching was observed at level 1 and the lowest at level 2.

How well are individual learning plans (ILPs) used to set realistic and challenging targets for students and monitor their progress towards them?

- Although the college still recognises some variable practice, the use of ILPs throughout the college has improved, particularly with students aged 16 to 18. Staff have received training and targets are now discussed and agreed with students. ILPs are used in tutorials and full-time learners are given student diaries which are used for weekly target setting. The college is working to increase standardisation of ILPs across all programmes whilst still allowing appropriate flexibility for different types or levels of courses.

How well and consistently is the tutorial programme implemented and monitored to ensure good support for students and good coverage of the Every Child Matters (ECM) framework?

- The college has extended the observation of teaching and learning to include tutorials. Tutors have received training in providing individual support and group tutorials. The revised tutorial programme includes aspects of the ECM framework related to healthy lifestyles and staying safe. The college's working relationship with Connexions is now good. Senior college staff have a wide range of links with appropriate agencies, strategic and working groups which have improved joint agency working to support young people in the college.

To what extent has the electronic registration system been spread across the college? Has its introduction had any impact on attendance or retention rates and improved follow up of absences?

- Further advances have been made in introducing electronic registration, and this work should be complete by the end of the academic year 2006/07 for all full-time students. Feedback so far has been positive. While it is too early to determine the impact on attendance or retention rates, absence monitoring has improved.

Leadership and management

How is the college addressing any areas of underperformance in different curriculum or subject sector areas (SSAs)?

- Strategies used to bring about improvements in areas judged unsatisfactory at the last full inspection, and judged good at re-inspection, are being applied to other areas causing concern, for example in creative arts and media. Senior managers are monitoring these areas very closely through weekly meetings with the heads of school and close analysis of performance data, the quality of teaching and learning, ILPs and tutorial provision.

What impact has the project to improve success rates for young male learners had?

- The college's analysis of performance data indicate that success rates for male and female learners aged 16 to 18 are now similar. In the few curriculum areas where significant differences have been noted, for example, performing arts, creative arts and media, managers are monitoring the performance of different groups as part of the overall improvement strategy.
- The whole college level of analysis of achievements of minority ethnic learners does not indicate any significant variation in performance. The college is aware of a

significant increase in the numbers of Nepalese students in the college and in local schools and is beginning to build in additional learning support for these students.

- The college has recently analysed the performance of learners in receipt of educational maintenance allowances (EMAs), after the first full year of implementing this programme. Retention rates are high and well above the college average, but success rates are often well below the college average. Work has started this year to identify the causes and provide appropriate support for these learners.

What impact is the Action for Business (A4B) award having on learners' experience in the college and employer engagement? What progress has been made in finalising the arrangements for the centre for vocational excellence (CoVE) in business, accounting & financial services?

- The college received the Action for Business award in June 2006. The additional resources have been deployed to increase employer engagement through a newly formed college sales team. The college has developed close links with many local and national employers. Employers' evaluations are well analysed and feedback is good and improving.
- The college now has CoVEs in ICT, aerospace and business, accounting and financial services. The CoVE in business, accounting and financial services has now started following a delay beyond the college's control. CoVE status is improving learners' experience through improved facilities and resources.
- Many young people who wish to become apprentices have to join full-time courses because too few employers, for example, in the construction sector, are willing to take apprentices aged 16 to 18. The college is recruiting a full-time member of staff to engage potential employers for apprentices.
- Recruitment to the new Train to Gain contract has been very slow. The college is exploring the use of a direct recruitment agency. Recruiting skilled staff has been difficult and the college is examining a range of strategies to attract and retain good quality tutors.

Are the two curriculum areas re-inspected in 2006 continuing to maintain progress and improve standards?

- The college has maintained good success rates in hair and beauty and work-based learning in hairdressing. Many literacy and numeracy programmes have high success rates. Good progress has been made in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the re-inspection. Staff in essential skills and hair and beauty are leading developments in the college, for example, improving teaching and learning, the use of ILPs and teaching key skills.

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:

- The Regional Development Agency has recently awarded the college the regional resource centre for advanced manufacturing in aerospace and space industries in partnership with the University of Surrey.