# ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Barking College
Date of visit: 16 January 2007

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit (AAV). 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

Have students' achievements continued to rise in 2006?

- Overall success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on levels 1 and 2 long qualifications show a steady rate of improvement and are similar to or above the national averages for similar colleges, but they are below the national averages at level 3. Success rates for adult learners at level 3 are similar to the national average, but they are below average at levels 1 and 2.

- Retention rates for adult learners at levels 1, 2 and 3 declined in 2005/06. College managers are not able to identify any significant reasons for this fall in retention. Currently in-year retention rates for adults at levels 1, 2 and 3 are 94%, compared to 86% in 2005/06.

Have pass rates in key skills improved?

- Key skills pass rates increased dramatically in 2005/06 and the overall success rate was 64%. This rise in pass rates was accompanied by a significant drop in the number of learners taking the qualifications. This is partly attributable to staff applying stricter criteria before learners are enrolled onto key skills, ensuring that the course is appropriate for the learner. The delivery of key skills is now fully integrated into mainstream programmes.

Have work-based learning achievements risen?

- Framework achievement of 57% in 2005/06 represents a significant improvement and is above the national rate. In 2005/06, 66% of work-based learners achieved either the framework or an NVQ qualification. The number of apprentices in the college has also increased from 150 in 2005/06 to 185 this year.

At the time of the previous AAV, students' intended destinations and progression rates were not being collated systematically. Is the college doing so now?

▪ Students' destinations are now being collated and entered onto the college's management information system (MIS). The destinations of 3,345 students are currently held for 2005/06 from the 7,730 learners that completed their course, amounting to 43% of leavers. College managers recognise that this is an area of work where good practice has not yet become established in all areas of the college. There is good progression to employment and high internal progression rates in some curriculum areas.

What actions are being taken to improve learners' attendance and punctuality?

▪ The new "course dashboard" MIS contains current data on students' attendance and punctuality and this information is used to support the wide range of actions taken by college staff to improve attendance and punctuality. These actions are not uniformly successful across the college. Although attendance rates are improving, they are still low in some curriculum areas.

## Quality of education and training

The self-assessment report (SAR) indicates that there is still too much satisfactory teaching. What actions are being taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

▪ The college continues to maintain a high focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Lesson observations were carried out with over 95% of teachers during the previous year, about half of them by external consultants. The teaching profile for 2005/06 showed 58% good or better, 36% satisfactory and 6% inadequate lessons. Teachers of lessons graded as inadequate are monitored closely and agree an improvement plan. This process is having a positive impact and only 2% of lessons were judged to be inadequate in the 150 lesson observations that have taken place so far in the current year. Managers focussed these observations primarily on new teachers and those identified as having problems. Nonetheless, the proportion of these lessons currently judged to be satisfactory is still high, at 38%, and concerted actions are planned to increase the proportion of good or better teaching. The overall quality of education and training is graded as good in the SAR, but there is some discrepancy between this and the current teaching profile.

A key area for improvement cited in the SAR is the effectiveness of in-class support for learners. What progress has been made to improve this?

- Learning support staff now attend course team meetings more frequently. Staff development and training is planned between curriculum and support staff to improve communication. A recent "mini-inspection" of this area of work identified much good practice, although managers accept that more joint lesson planning between teaching and support staff is required in some curriculum areas.

Tracking of learners in work-based learning

- The college has effective tracking procedures to monitor the progress of learners. A traffic-light system is used to alert staff to problems, which are then discussed at regular team meetings. This system also enables the effective recording of learners' achievements.

## Leadership and management

The previous AAV reported that the use of value-added information was under-developed. Is this still the case?

- Students' entry qualifications are now being collated during enrolment and this information is being used to set targets for individual learners. Value-added information is not being used to monitor or evaluate the performance of subject areas.

The SAR evaluates provision in science and maths as unsatisfactory. What are the reasons for this judgement?

- The self-assessment process is carried out in a self-critical way and involves all business support staff, teachers and managers. Judgements are clearly not ducked when it is felt that provision is failing. The key weaknesses in science and maths provision are the low pass rates and poor course management. A comprehensive action plan is in place, designed to raise the quality of the provision. Actions are being monitored regularly by senior managers.

How is the college taking forward the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda?

- The college is making effective progress in raising the profile of the ECM agenda. An ECM audit identifies and cross-references relevant activities currently taking place throughout the college. An ECM action plan has just been written that seeks to extend the range of these activities. Child

protection procedures are given a suitably high priority and the college has carried out a number of events to promote diversity and racial equality. Course team meetings discuss ECM themes and the SAR covers the main ECM outcomes.

## How effective are the methods by which the college captures the learner voice?

- Student surveys are carried out regularly and the results of these surveys are well-publicised, for example by posters. The impact of the student voice in all programme areas is not consistent and a key response from students, when asked what they did not like about the college, was the lack of opportunities for them to express their views about their course.

## How effective is the management of work-based learning (WBL)?

- A WBL manager was appointed in 2005 and the teams for WBL and construction now work closely alongside each another, sharing information and objectives. Communication is good and the teams meet weekly to address action points about learners' performance. The staff in both teams are clear about their responsibilities. They work hard to engage employers and a dedicated member of the administrative support staff ensures that they are kept regularly informed about learners' attendance and performance. The quality assurance system has been revised to ensure all aspects of the learners' journey in WBL are covered.