

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Alton College
Date of visit: 12 July 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 2005/06 data tell us about students' outcomes (and Value Added) overall, and in different sector subject areas and are any improvements in adult level 3 success rates likely in 2006/07 for those courses identified as underperforming?

- College data for success rates on long courses in 2005/06 show that learners' outcomes have slightly improved. There has been particularly good improvement on level 3 courses which have not performed well over the last two years. These include the Access programme and courses in Health and Social Care. The college has maintained or improved its high pass rates on most courses, although there has been a small decline in value added on AS level courses. The college is cautiously optimistic that its high level success rates will be maintained in 2006/07.

What has been done to maintain and improve retention (particularly at levels 1 & 3) overall and have actions taken been effective?

- Provisional college data for 2006/07 show a general improvement in retention rates, especially for adult learners, and strategies to improve retention rates are beginning to have an impact. Good attendance has been maintained, and continued rigorous monitoring has shown a slight improvement since the inspection of May 2006. For those aged 16-18 on long courses, college data indicates generally good improvements overall to retention at level 1 which the college expects to be at or marginally above National averages for this year. College data indicates a small improvement to retention on level 3 courses. Although good, retention on level 2 courses has however slightly declined.

- Retention across all levels for those aged 19 and over has shown improvements and this has been particularly good at level 3. The college is clearly aware of the need to continuously monitor its retention across all programmes.

Quality of education and training

What is being done to continuously improve the quality of teaching (and learning) in those areas where it is satisfactory or below, and what is the impact?

- College observations of teaching and learning this year indicate a slight improvement to the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning from 2005/06. However, although it only represents a small number of lessons, the proportion of lessons observed as satisfactory and inadequate has generally stayed the same. Graded observations of teaching and learning continue to be thoroughly checked and monitored.
- Since the inspection, the college has put in place an innovative approach to un-graded peer observations in one faculty. This has led to good sharing of best practices, and the college has plans to implement this across the college in September. Staff training events have been held throughout the past year where there has been a sustained emphasis on continual improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. However, senior managers do not expect the full impact of recent changes and staff training to show through until 2007/08.

What progress has been made in monitoring classroom learning support following any observations of learning support assistants? How is best practice of learning support shared across the college, and what impact is this having?

- The impact of learning support assistants (LSAs) in-class support is now more thoroughly monitored. Where observed as part of the college observations of teaching and learning, clear feedback is given and action points are identified to aid improvement and highlight good practice. A thorough overall analysis of these observations has been made and actions for improvement are in place across the college. Following inspection, individual learning plans now contain more detailed information about the support students receive.

Recent analysis of this information indicates improved retention for those in receipt of additional learning support.

Leadership and management

The SAR indicates that there are insufficient opportunities for teams to share good practice. What is being done to improve this? The SAR also refers to leadership skills being under developed in some areas. What impact is this having and what is being done to improve it?

- The sharing of best practice amongst staff is clearly encouraged. Curriculum managers in particular have good opportunities to develop and implement ideas for improving their provision. Since the inspection the college has restructured its middle management. Although the college has yet to see the full impact of these changes, an external programme of learning and development for managers has been particularly useful in helping to improve their leadership skills.
- A well planned programme of staff training has been developed which has included an informative and well attended training day in February of this year. Good use is made of the Hampshire sixth form college partnership to further improve staff skills and knowledge.

How rigorous are the processes for judging the grades to be awarded in the SAR?

- The college SAR gives a clear and evaluative picture of the college. The process of self-assessment is thorough and well informed. Grades awarded are rigorously monitored and checked by senior staff and governors, as well as through external validation. Quality reviews are also undertaken by staff from other colleges to help in the process of self-assessment.