

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Hadlow College
Date of visit: 7 February 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.

Achievements and standards

How is the college ensuring higher achievements in adult literacy and numeracy at level 1 and at level 2 and how successful are strategies to embed essential skills into vocational programmes?

- The college has successfully addressed the raising of achievement on key skills through the integration of key skills in course delivery. In the previous visit, it was noted that this had created greater relevance for learners and therefore greater motivation. The college is now carrying out a curriculum audit in order to ensure that students are entered for basic skills and key skills qualifications at the right levels. In 2005/06 the success rate for key skills Communications at all levels was 68%. However, scrutiny of individual learning plans (ILPs) and discussions with students reveal that some are entered for Communication Skills, Application of Number and Information and Communications Technology examinations at below the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) grade in English or mathematics they gained previously. Criteria for entering students for key skills examinations is unclear and analysis of diagnostic testing does not provide adequate information on learners' literacy and numeracy skills in relation to their vocational subjects.

How effective are the college strategies in raising success rates and, in particular, retention for adults at level 3?

- Success rates for adults on level 3 courses are at the national average and remain lower than for students aged 16 to 18. Adult retention on level 3 courses is not as high as for students aged 16 to 18. The college has made good use of focus groups to identify the factors which contribute to

adult learners leaving their courses early. These include financial hardship, lack of study skills, and unrealistic expectations. The college has implemented a number of strategies to raise retention, including placing adult learners into one residential block and separate extended inductions. The college has successfully promoted Access to higher education (HE) courses rather than 2 year national diplomas for learners who wish to progress to university.

What is the impact of the system to gather and monitor data on value added measures for students on full-time courses? Is it being used by teachers in lesson planning?

- The college has been piloting an in-house system for measuring value added in three curriculum areas using learners' entry scores to set predicted targets for achievement. Whilst tutorials are used effectively to monitor learners' progress towards their predicted targets in these pilot areas, as yet teachers are not using the information in lesson planning. All teaching staff have been given initial training on the college system and this has increased their awareness. However, it is too early to judge the impact on learners' progress and achievement.

Has the college identified strategies for developing more specific target setting in tutorials to help individual learners improve?

- Target setting and actions against targets for students in ILPs are not specific enough to subject knowledge or skills to enable learners to make significant improvements in their standards and achievements. Targets and actions are mostly related to deadlines and organisational issues. Schemes of work do not consistently reflect teaching that caters for the different abilities and skills levels of learners.

How effective is the role of the framework champion in tackling underachievement of apprentices?

- The framework champion has worked successfully with employers and has identified learners' support needs more responsively and accurately. This has contributed to reducing early leavers and increasing success rates. For 2005/06 overall success rates for work-based learning were 59%, above the national rate. Timely success rates for the same period were 36% and have shown a steady improvement over the last three years.

Quality of education and training

Is the college ensuring timely additional support for all learners and is it embedding the support more effectively and evaluating its impact?

- Through a restructure of the essential skills curriculum area, additional learning support (ALS) is managed separately from key skills and has been renamed 'Learning Advice'. One to one study skills support and help with assignments in the study centre are offered to learners. Take-up of the provision has increased since the college has restructured the service. The service is greatly valued by learners but there is little emphasis on development of independent learning strategies that will help learners improve their literacy and numeracy skills for employment and HE. The college still needs to evaluate more fully the impact of the ALS support on developing learners' economic well-being in relation to the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.

Has the college a realistic view of where good, better and unsatisfactory teaching lies within the curriculum areas and at which levels? Are there differences at level 3 for adults?

- Lesson observations and appraisals are more directly linked to continuous professional development (CPD). The college's 'Stepping Up' programme has been successful in identifying specific areas of development for staff and providing them with very good mentored support. However, the college observation format does not lend itself to observers prioritising strengths and weaknesses and standard satisfactory practices are often identified as key strengths. As a consequence, managers and teachers are not aware of the broad strengths and areas for improvement for the college as a whole or within curriculum areas. There has been insufficient emphasis in observations on additional learning support by observers who are experienced in the teaching of Skills for Life.

Leadership and management

What has been the impact of 14-19 curriculum changes in the college?

- Hadlow is being supported by Kent County Council and Kent & Medway LSC in coordinating the new specialist 14-19 land-based diploma for 2009.

- The college gained the Action for Business award in July 2006 and has now been invited to be part of the pilot for The New Standard for Employer Responsiveness and Vocational Excellence.
- Since the last visit a vice principal for curriculum and student services and a curriculum area manager for schools have been appointed. The college has had a successful focus on marketing and consolidating the 14-16 curriculum with local schools. Part of this curriculum development is the implementation of a level 2 qualification in countryside and the environment for students aged 14 to 16.

Is the college monitoring the use of ILT and the embedding of equality and diversity during lessons?

- Use of ILT by teachers and learners is assessed as part of the lesson observation system and use of ILT in lessons has increased since the last assessment visit. As part of the lesson observation process, observers are rightly expected to comment on the teaching of equality and diversity issues in lessons, such as race, gender, disability. However, observers' comments in relation to these are not routinely identified during lesson observations. The college has carried out an analysis of e-learning, established an e-learning action plan and is planning the appointment of an e-learning co-ordinator.