

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Notre Dame  
Date of visit: 26 June 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

College data indicate that success rates have risen at all levels. Where are the areas of consistently high performance? Success rates in GCE AS computing and AS media continue to be significantly below national average. How is the college addressing this?

- Success rates at level 3, which represents the majority of provision at the college, have risen since the last inspection, from 79% to 84%. Success rates on level 1 and level 2 courses are high with most students achieving merits or distinctions.
- Performance is consistently good or outstanding in GCE A level science, English and business and at all levels in health and social care. GCE A level psychology and sociology, taken by large number of students, also perform consistently well.
- Strategies to improve success rates in AS computing are having an impact. Results from the January module examination indicate a 92% pass rate with 49% of students achieving high grades of A or B. Current retention rates for 2006/07 are 89% which is above the national average. In AS media, retention has improved from 81% in 2005/06 to 85% in 2006/07 but still remains below the national average. In other areas of underperformance, including history, changes in staffing and timetabling have not yet had a significant impact on student performance but the college is confident that improvements will be seen.

Has there been an increase in the proportion of high grades in GCSE mathematics and English in 2005/06?

- Changes to provision in English and mathematics at level 2 appear to have been successful and the proportion of high grades of A\* to C have risen in 2005/06:

	03/04	04/05	05/06
Mathematics	34%	37%	54%
English	71%	53%	61%
All GCSE	46%	46%	59%

What do value added data tell us about the progress of students?

- The college subscribes to the advanced level performance system (ALPS) value added analysis. The college is placed at grade 3 on the ALPS index, which indicates that many students achieve examination grades well above those expected of them. However, the college acknowledges that there remain variations in performance across different subjects and some students do not perform as well as they should. Actions are in place to address this underperformance.

What is attendance like? How is it monitored?

- Overall attendance for the current year 2006/07 is 86.4%. Attendance levels by type of course in 2006/07 are as follows:

AS students	89%.
A-level students	87%
Level 2 students	83.3%

- The college monitors attendance closely. Tutors receive weekly attendance reports and any issues are followed up by the divisional leaders. The current system of attendance monitoring is being further strengthened by the appointment of an attendance officer for the next academic year.

What actions have been taken to improve the performance of Black Afro-Caribbean students? How effective have these actions been?

- The low performance of black Afro-Caribbean students in 2005/06 does not reflect a trend of underperformance from previous years. In 2004/05 black Afro Caribbean students performed as well as other students in the college. Success rates for Pakistani students in 2005/06 were 11% above the college average. The college monitors the performance of all minority ethnic groups.

## Quality of education and training

What does the college consider to be the key strengths of teaching and learning and what does it need to improve on? How well does the college use information provided by lesson observations to inform practice? Have the opportunities to share best practice been improved?

- The outcomes of teaching and learning observations are collated and the grades are analysed. However, the college does not analyse routinely the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning for the college as a whole. Nevertheless, improving the quality of teaching, and especially learning, is at the heart of the college's work. There are opportunities for sharing good practice formally at college level and informally within and across departments. The college has recently introduced teaching and learning bursaries for individual members of staff to focus on specific topics. Examples include: student peer mentoring in psychology; how to improve support for international students; and the development and use of video techniques in leisure studies and physical education.

How is the virtual learning environment (VLE), 'Moodle', used to enhance learning? What do students think of Moodle?

- Good progress has been made by some departments in developing e-learning materials for 'Moodle'. Many students have easy access to a range of materials including class notes, videos, discussion forums, revision briefs, examination questions and interactive tests. In a few departments, including product design, students submit their assignment work electronically: teachers annotate the assignments and provide on-line feedback quickly and effectively. Students spoken to during the visit to the college commented that they frequently use 'Moodle' and found it extremely helpful. However, there is inconsistency in the amount of learning materials available across departments.

Initial diagnostic assessment has been introduced for all students. How many students took up the offer of additional support? Has the college monitored the progress of those students who did not take up support as well as those who have?

- Approximately 296 students accessed additional learning support in 2005/06. College monitoring of students who receive additional learning support indicates that these students perform well and achieve grades higher than predicted by their GCSE scores. The college does not currently monitor those students who have declined support.

The college judges its responsiveness in meeting the needs and interests of learners as outstanding. However, some of the 2005/06 curriculum self-assessment reports indicate the unsuitability of some students on their courses and varying degrees of dissatisfaction with entry requirements, reduction in teaching time for individual subjects and increase in class sizes. How is the college monitoring the impact of these issues?

- The college does not monitor systematically the impact of the above issues. However, they are aware that the self assessment process has highlighted concerns amongst teachers about the impact of increasing numbers of students with low GCSE scores, especially where they are being taught in large classes. The college is addressing these concerns by focussing much staff development on teaching and learning strategies to meet the wide variations in students' abilities. Good practice in meeting individual student needs, for example peer mentoring in psychology and personalised learning in classical studies is being disseminated to other areas of the college.

What are current student numbers on level 1 and level 2 courses?

- The college initially introduced courses at level 1 and level 2 to meet the needs of young people from Catholic partner schools. However, the courses are open to all students who are not ready to study at level 3. Student numbers on these courses are low but increasing: from 50 in 2005/06 to 70 in 2006/07. There is good progression to higher level courses at the college and other further education establishments.

## Leadership and management

The 2005/06 self assessment report varies in the extent to which data are used to inform decisions and set targets. Some strengths are overstated, e.g. 'learners are guided and supported', 'choice of courses'. It is not clear how areas of improvement will be addressed and outcomes measured. How is the college addressing this? In general: how does the college use self assessment to effect improvement in performance and eradicate weaker performance?

- The college is aware of shortcomings in the current self assessment report. Changes at senior management level and a middle management restructure are beginning to address some of the weaknesses. For example, a quality assurance manager has been appointed at senior level and divisional leaders, who hold responsibility for groups of curriculum areas, are being held more accountable for monitoring and evaluating performance. A revised quality cycle has been introduced in the current academic year and all staff are much clearer about the importance of honest self evaluation, setting precise targets and reviewing performance regularly. The use of data to inform decisions and set targets is improving. Monitoring of departmental action plans is becoming more robust. However, the impact of the recent revisions to the self assessment process is yet to be fully realised.

The college judges teaching and learning to be good: 90% of teaching and learning observations were judged to be good or better in 2005/06. What improvements have been made to the observation of teaching and learning? How does the college reconcile its view that teaching and learning are good or better in over 90% of lessons with its judgement that nearly a quarter of its provision is judged to be satisfactory?

- The process of observation of teaching and learning has been strengthened. All observers have undergone training and moderation of grades takes place. There is a closer match between the written records of lesson observations and the grades awarded. The college has worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning and considers that the impact of this work is yet to show through fully in examination results.

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

Good progress has been made in identifying the evidence for Every Child Matters (ECM) and linking this into the cross college SAR.