

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: City of Bath College  
Date of visit: 1 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.

In January 2006 the college projected a financial out-turn deficit for 2005/06 of over £1,000,000 and has a history of operating deficits. The local LSC placed the college in recovery and are providing financial support of £1,800,000 to implement a recovery plan. The principal resigned in April 2006. The college is currently led by an externally appointed acting principal and an experienced, mostly externally appointed, acting senior management team. A new chair has been appointed to the corporation as well as a new clerk.

### Achievements and standards

Have improvements in success rates been maintained in 2005/06 and where are the main areas of weakness?

- The college acknowledges in its self assessment that, despite areas of good or better performance, achievements and standards are inadequate overall. There is considerable variation across age groups, levels of work and both within and between sector subject areas. The overall success rate for all ages and programmes is improving slowly but, at 67%, remains low in comparison with the national average for similar colleges. The increase in the overall rate between 2004/05 and 2005/06 was mainly due to a modest improvement in pass rates. At 84%, students' attendance rate is high.
- Most students attending the college enrol on level 3 programmes. The overall success rate for 16 to 18 year olds at this level declined between 2004/05 and 2005/06 and is well below the national average for similar colleges. Contrastingly, the overall rate for adults on advanced programmes improved over the same period, due to an increase in both retention and pass rates, and the overall rate is good.

- The overall success rate for students aged 16 to 18 following long courses at level 2 also fell in 2005/06 due to a decline in both retention and pass rates and is below average. For adults following these programmes, the overall success rate is at the national average but did not improve in 2005/06 because of compensating increases and decreases in pass and retention rates.
- Provision at level 1 is a relatively minor part of the college's offer. In 2005/06, the overall success rate for 16 to 18 year olds on these programmes improved by 12 percentage points and is good. This was due to a significant improvement in the overall pass rate. The success rate for adults declined in 2005/06, however, and is below average despite an improvement in retention which is now above the national average.
- Some 40% of college enrolments are on short courses. The overall success rate for both age groups improved in 2005/06 but remains significantly below average. This increase was mostly due to improved success rates for adults. The pass rate for students aged 16 to 18 on short courses is also below average.
- The overall pass rate for 16 to 18 year olds following long programmes remained static between 2004/05 and 2005/06 and, in comparison with similar colleges, the overall pass rate is just below average. At level 1, the overall pass rate for this age group is good and is satisfactory at level 2. For advanced programmes, the overall pass rate is low. The overall retention rate for 16 to 18 year olds is also low.
- There has been a slight drop in the overall pass rate for adults following long programmes between 2004/05 and 2005/06 and the rate is just below the national average. Overall pass rates for adults are low at level 1, in line with similar colleges at level 2 and good at level 3. Retention rates for adults are low overall.

To what extent have key skills achievements improved in 2005/06?

- Integrating key skills into full-time courses has not yet succeeded in bring about the necessary improvements in all curriculum areas. Key skills success rates improved in 2005/06 but continue to be unacceptably low. At the time of the visit an appeal was outstanding concerning the external moderation of portfolios.

To what extent have framework achievement rates improved in 2005/06?

- Success rates and timely completion of apprenticeships have improved and good practice is being shared across sector subject areas. Success rates for frameworks or NVQs rose from 23 percentage points below the national average in 2003/04 to 2 percentage points below that year's national rate in 2005/06. Timely success rates are high. Improvement has been greatest in apprenticeships in refrigeration and air-conditioning but success rates for advanced apprenticeships in electrical engineering continue to be low. In wood trades and stonemasonry, learners achieve well with NVQ and full framework rates at 75% and 59% respectively.

## Quality of education and training

What actions are being taken to improve the rigour of lesson observation?

- The college self-assessment report for 2005/06 rightly questions the rigour of the procedures adopted for judging the quality of teaching and learning. Lesson observation procedures have subsequently been revised following consultation with staff and their representatives. Teachers are now supportive of the new approach. Teachers and observers have been trained and a process of joint observation implemented to standardise judgements. Limited notice ensures more realistic assessment of teaching and learning. Continuous moderation of judgements is achieved through involving independent external observers and collaboration with other colleges. Observations conducted to date provide an assessment of the quality of teaching and learning that is more reconcilable with the college's overall success rates than the level of good or better teaching of 81% stated in the 2005/06 self-assessment report. The observations have also identified key areas for development.

What is being done to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

- An acting assistant principal (teaching and learning) has been appointed. Staff development has been targeted to those teachers who lack teaching qualifications and 95% of full-time teachers and 72% of part-time teachers are now qualified or undertaking training. The college recognises that staff development had been cut back too far and opportunities for staff development are being improved. Teachers confirm that priority is given to those requiring teaching qualifications and that the need for more comprehensive staff development to support improvement has been recognised by managers.

- A professional practice mentor has been supporting teachers. Two advanced practitioner posts have been created and a further two advertised. On the basis of the weaknesses identified through the amended lesson observation procedures, a draft staff development programme has been prepared and the college is negotiating with external consultants to implement the necessary training. Consultants have also been approached to provide a programme of accredited training for curriculum managers commencing in April 2007.
- Schemes of work and lesson plans are now monitored to promote better integration of teaching and assessment and more effective use of differentiation to meet the learning needs of individual students and ensure successful outcomes. Good practice in areas such as that identified in the performing arts is being replicated in other areas of the curriculum.

How is employer engagement being strengthened?

- The college has developed a clear strategy for improving engagement with both employers and the community. The management of employer engagement has been re-organised and activities integrated across curriculum areas. This is encouraging subject sectors to be more proactive in establishing links with employers and in developing programmes that more closely meet local employment needs.
- The college recovery plan requires each department to establish employer advisory committees. An employer liaison officer has been appointed and curriculum managers are encouraged and supported to conduct training needs analyses and develop training and updating courses in their specialist areas. A data base of around 400 employers has been established and the college is successfully building a client base of both large and small employers. The college is working well with the Construction Industry Training Board and has also secured a new Train to Gain contract.

Are any steps being taken to improve individual tutorial support and specialist support for learners?

- The college has recognised that tutorial support needs to be developed to focus more strongly on helping individual students to succeed and is taking appropriate steps to improve. Monitoring of tutor support by lead tutors has improved but there is much to be done to ensure consistency of purpose and practice across sector subject areas. A strategy of 'tutoring for achievement' is to be introduced in March. Additional advanced practitioners, to be appointed in February, will help support implementation.

- A system of setting improvement targets for individual students has been established but the college has recognised that the rigour and impact of target setting is too variable within and across sector subject areas. Target setting is not sufficiently integrated with teaching and the assessment of students' work. Students do not view tutorials as an important element of their programmes. Individual learning agreements, which are in paper form, are not immediately accessible to teachers and tutors, limiting their impact.

## Leadership and management

Have the actions taken to reduce expenditure had any impact on teaching, learning and achievement?

- The college has been very mindful of the need to improve student success rates whilst at the same time reducing expenditure. Much has been achieved in resolving the financial difficulties of the college and in developing a robust approach to financial control and forecasting income and expenditure. In developing the recovery plan, careful consideration has been given to matching teaching hours to guided learning hours, to reducing over-teaching and to cutting excessive management costs. Expenditure in these areas is now in line with that of the sector in general.
- The college recognises that staff development expenditure was cut too far in 2005/06 and has increased the allocated budget for 2006/07. Expenditure on resources has also been increased in 2006/07 partly to improve information technology and students' access to computers in classrooms. Teachers report that, whilst students have appropriate access to computers to conduct research and work on assignments outside teaching periods, access to computers and electronic white boards limits teaching options during lessons.
- Recovery plan funding is primarily focused on improving learning through broadening learning opportunities and teaching styles, improving pre-entry information and guidance and restructuring the curriculum in line with local needs and LLSC priorities.

What is the college strategy for improving retention and is it having an impact?

- The college has introduced new procedures for early identification of programmes that are at risk of underperforming and for intervention. Actions to bring about improvement are now monitored by department heads and senior managers. Procedures for monitoring individual students

who are at risk of failure have also been introduced. Students' progress and achievements on short courses are now monitored more closely. Work-based learning reviews are carried out every eight weeks.

- Students are encouraged to attend regularly and attendance rates overall are good. Attendance is monitored although practices adopted for following up student absences vary across the college. Paper-based registers are scanned into an electronic data base which delays tutors' access to attendance data and their response to absenteeism.
- Actions to improve retention are having an impact. In-year retention has improved and the numbers of withdrawals have decreased. The drop in retention in arts subjects caused by building works has been addressed and rates are improving. Retention on very short courses for 16 to 18 year olds is improving.

How are quality assurance arrangements being improved?

- Managers are now placing much more emphasis on the effective implementation of quality assurance systems and on consistency across the college. Courses and individual students at risk of underperforming are now monitored more closely and support provided as required. Course reviews focus more closely on the planning of teaching and learning. This involves closer examination of teaching strategies, assignments and the assessment of students' progress. Although quality assurance procedures are beginning to have more impact and staff recognise their importance, there is still much to be done to ensure systematic and consistent implementation across the college.

What steps are being taken to improve health and safety arrangements?

- A health and safety officer has been appointed and an action plan prepared. The Joint Consultative Committee has been strengthened through the appointment of new members to ensure appropriate coverage of the college's work. Expenditure on planned maintenance has also been increased.

How is the college developing and improving provision for students aged 14 to 16?

- In accordance with its recovery plan, the college is restructuring its curriculum and broadening the provision at levels 1 and 2. Restructuring the curriculum is also helping to improve opportunities for 14 to 16 year olds and build on the work of the college's New Start Centre which caters for this age group. Some 82% of young people studying at the centre are

successful and, of these, 98% continue in education, training or employment. The college is planning to develop the centre further as a full college department. In partnership with local schools the college is planning to provide specialist diplomas and strengthen initial advice and guidance. Collaboration with schools is improving and a broader range of courses is being planned for 2007/08. As part of its overall strategy to develop this area in response to local needs, a head teacher and the Director of Children's Services will be joining the corporation.

Other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

- Since the appointment of the acting principal, the college has analysed its position well. Self assessment is self critical and accurate in its conclusions about the challenges facing the college. Senior managers have a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve. Winning staff over to recognising and accepting that things need to improve has been a significant achievement. Staff recognise that communication within the college has improved considerably. They are now consulted about developments and listened to. The progress that has been made is in no small measure due to the management style adopted by the acting principal and his acting senior management team. Effective succession planning is critical to maintaining the progress that has been made and in securing staff commitment to further improvement.