ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Warwickshire College
Date of visit: 23 May 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

How well do learners achieve?
College data 2005/06

- Overall long success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 has risen to above the national average. Retention and achievement are both above national averages and there has been significant improvement in achievement.
- Overall long success rates for adult learners have risen to above the national rate. There has been a slight decline in retention to the national average and a significant improvement in achievement.
- Success rates on short courses are well above national average for all ages.
- Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on level 1 courses have fallen to around the national average, because of declining retention and achievement; on level 2 courses they have risen to well above national average mainly because of improvements in achievement; on level 3 courses they have risen to well above national average because of improvements in both retention and achievement.
- Success rates for adult learners remain well above national average with both retention and achievement being above national average; at level 2, although still above national average there has been a slight decline, with retention falling significantly and achievement rising significantly; at level 3 the rate is above the average and there has been a slight improvement because of improvements in retention.
- Success rates on long courses are at or above national rates in all subject sector areas other than agriculture, horticulture and animal care. There is greater variability when short courses are included.

Provider performance review data 2005/6
- The advanced apprenticeship overall NVQ success rates are satisfactory at 57% and in line with national averages. However, only 29% of learners complete within the expected time. The overall framework success rates are low at 49% and are also not completed within the expected time.
- The apprenticeship overall NVQ success rates have improved for the last three years and are good though not timely. The apprenticeship overall framework completion rates are satisfactory at 62 per cent however, also not timely.
- Overall success rates for NVQ courses are good at 72 per cent and are also not timely.
- Apprenticeship and NVQ timely success rates in health, public services and care are good.
- Advanced and apprentice success rates in construction and business administration and law are good.
- Advanced and apprentice success rates in engineering are poor and not timely.

The college has made significant progress in improving initial assessment, tracking of learner progress and matching learners and employers to suitable work based learning (WBL) courses. The WBL programmes in engineering have been significantly affected by local industry changes which include supply chain closures of major manufacturers. The college acknowledges that timely success across most courses is a weakness and is confident that the above improvement measures will increase timeliness.

What does the college's value added data indicate?
- College data is broadly in line with value added pilot data 2005/6.
- Pilot value added data at level 3 shows that learners achieve broadly in line with expectations with some variation between sector subject areas (SSA) and qualification types.
- Pilot distance travelled data at levels 1 and 2 shows that learners achieve broadly in line with expectations with some variation by type of qualification and SSA.

Quality of education and training

What is the impact of 14-19 partnership plans on college provision?
- The college has a mature partnership with the agencies and schools responsible for the Coventry and Warwickshire 14 -19 strategy. Currently,

the college has a large programme for 14 to 16 year olds. There are good levels of participation and the offer and partnership working is valued by schools. A county wide course prospectus is in the final stages of development and will shortly be available to partners and prospective learners and their parents/guardians. Courses include those for the gifted and talented. However, the college has only been successful in securing partnership funding to develop the specialist diplomas in one curriculum area in 2009. Plans are in place in order to address this and to resubmit tenders and proposals in order to improve the course offer.

What is the impact of improvements to key skill processes?

- The college recognises that key skills achievements have been too low and is half way through a two year improvement plan introduced to rectify this weakness. It is making good progress and success rates each year are improving. Several subject areas have good levels of key skill achievement for example hair and beauty and equine studies. Improvements include changes to initial assessment, agreement on the most appropriate level of key skill for the learner and cross college support from advanced practitioners in the fields of literacy and numeracy. The college closely monitors key skills success rates and is confident that in 2006/07 they will be satisfactory.

How is information and communication technology (ICT) in the community organised and what is its success?

- The college has redefined the community it serves for ICT courses. Much work has been undertaken to offer accredited courses and courses in the work-place. Sub-contracts with community based providers who were not achieving good success rates have been discontinued. The personal, community and development learning (PCDL) provision has also been moved to the local authority (LA), however, the college continues to work closely with the LA in order to continue to offer courses that are easily accessible to local communities.

How does the college use value added/distance travelled information to raise standards?

- The college has used the Greenhead college value added system with GCE AS and A-level learners on main programmes for a number of years. Minimum target grades are reviewed regularly in tutorials and re-negotiated with learners to ensure sufficient challenge. The college

analyses the value added to assess quality at the subject level each year and to assess the appropriateness of entry requirements.

- On level 3 vocational programmes a pilot study in business has established a methodology for agreeing minimum target grades based on learner achievement tracker (LAT) national regression data. This will increase the degree of challenge built into targets set on vocational courses. Managers have been trained in the proposed system and a plan agreed to disseminate to tutors.

- The implementation group have identified examples of good practice from within the level 3 team and intend to share these more widely with other teams delivering level 3 courses.

How effective is target setting in improving the value added for learners?
- Target setting with learners takes place through a well established tutorial system. The college issues comprehensive tutorial guidelines each year and has improved the programme of ongoing staff development for tutors to increase the focus on action planning. Tutorial practice is audited and evaluated each year and the system changed if required. Instances of non-compliance are addressed. The delivery of the 'every learner matters' agenda is also audited through group tutorials.

- The college has evaluated the effectiveness of target setting with learners and has found a direct correlation between the rigour of target setting and value added.

Leadership and management

Plans to merge with Pershore College are well advanced. How will the college continue to raise standards overall especially in key skills and work based learning?
- Warwickshire College has received Secretary of State approval for a merger with the Avon Bank campus of Pershore College with effect from 1 August 2007. Warwickshire College managers will have an interim management role from late May 2007. The principal of Warwickshire College intends to play a prominent role in the day to day organisation of the Pershore College within Warwickshire College. College governors are

active in negotiations to secure satisfactory terms and conditions so that the new organisation is not overly burdened.

- The college has recent experience of merging with other colleges including Moreton Morrel in 1996 and Rugby College in 2003. It has developed a model of consultation and consolidation. Warwickshire College has strong quality assurance, marketing and financial systems which are expected to be adapted and adopted across the new organisation.

- Curriculum managers recognise the need for networks of practitioners to be formed across the whole organisation, for example, by course level as is currently developing within the land based section. Such networks are currently under developed.

There has been an improvement in success rates overall with some variation by level and sector subject area (SSA). How does the college account for this variation and what measures are in place to raise standards consistently?

- The college is able to account for much of the variation by level and sector subject areas, including the poor timely achievement of distance learning units and programmes, especially for adults on level 1 programmes. For learners aged 16 to 19 curriculum changes have taken place at level 1 in engineering and across the college there has been further staff development and sharing of good practice for staff new to delivering level 1 courses.

- The quality improvement process has been made more rigorous this year, with the introduction of termly reviews of programme areas involving middle and senior managers and the quality team. One outcome valued by staff has been the publication of sharing of good practice found in each area. A further outcome of this review process is the identification of barriers to quality improvement which form an agenda for management action. These are monitored through senior management and governors' quality committees. This process is new and while it is too early to assess the impact on learner achievement, middle managers find it a helpful in establishing standards and good practice across the college.

- Additionally, a middle manager reporting framework guides middle managers towards compliance and good practice in their own six weekly quality review. Also in the same timeframe, the progress of each individual learner, including apprentices, is evaluated and those at risk of non completion or success are identified and support needs established.
- Since the last annual assessment visit the college has reviewed and amended the lesson observation process to ensure better analysis of data to identify issues, address them and to share good practice.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:
- N/A

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:
- The college has developed a set of core values in consultation with staff and learners. These put the learner at the heart of the college. The core values are assessed during programme review meetings.

- During the annual assessment visit there was significant evidence of learner involvement in college decision making processes.