

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: City College Plymouth  
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 actions have been taken to improve performance particularly for adult learners who represent about two thirds of all full-time equivalent (FTE) students? What improvements have there been in retention and pass rates for all learners in comparison with national rates?

- According to the college performance report (CPR) for 2004/05 overall success rates on all long courses for 16-18 year olds, whilst improved, have remained broadly in line with the improved national average rate. Retention and achievement were broadly in line with national averages. Success rates for adult learners improved slightly in 2004/05 but have remained below the national average. Retention improved significantly for these learners to around the national rate but pass rates were significantly below.
- Since 2004/05 the college has a generally improving trend on retention and pass rates. Actions taken to improve success rates are beginning to be effective. These actions include increased scrutiny of teaching and learning, improved monitoring of attendance, greater emphasis on retention and targeted support for poorly performing areas. According to college data for 2005/06, success rates on long courses for all age groups rose from 55% to 62% in 2005/06. However, as recognised in the self-assessment report, this is unlikely to be above a rising national average. Success rates on short courses for all age groups in 2005/06, whilst declining slightly, remain high at 91%. The biggest improvement is on long courses at level one for adult learners where success rates improved by around 10 percentage points in 2005/06. However, success rates at level one for 16-19 year olds fell slightly, from 75% in 2004/05 to 73% in 2005/06. Retention rates in 2005/06 improved across all levels and both

age groups. Pass rates improved across most levels except at level three for adult learners on long courses and at level one for 16-18 year olds where it fell slightly. Retention rates in the current year for July show further improvement from 2005/06 of around 5 percentage points on all levels and both age groups.

Have there been any improvements to success rates in 2005/06 for science and maths and how effective are the measures taken to rectify the underperformance?

- Overall success rates on long courses in science and maths remained low in 2005/06 at 56%. According to college data, success rates in many subjects rose slightly in 2005/06. For example, AS levels in psychology and AS and A2 in biology all improved. However, success rates in physics, and chemistry AS fell over a three-year period. Success rates in mathematics at A level fell slightly from 59% to 52% and in GNVQ intermediate science fell significantly from 73% in 2004/05 to 57% in 2005/06. The college has taken actions to rectify the underperformance of this area since the last AAV. Teaching and learning has been monitored closely; action plans put in place, and specific support provided to teachers. An existing teacher has left and new teachers have been appointed this year, supported with mentoring from experienced local subject teachers. Current retention in July is showing a mixed picture across courses with some rates falling and others improving. Significantly, retention rates for access to higher education in science have improved from 63% in 2005/06 to 82% in July 2006/07.

What actions have been taken to improve the low success rates in key skills and are they effective?

- The college's key skills success rates show slight improvement on 2004/05 but remain low at 19% for core key skills except in work-based learning where they were 65%. The college has noted that the relevance of core key skills is not well established with all learners yet and considers this an area for development in 2007/08.

Has the improvement to overall success rates on work-based learning continued and are apprentices and learners on Entry to Employment making good progress?

- The provider performance report (PPR) shows a continuing upward trend for work based learning overall framework success rates. Overall success

rates for advanced apprenticeships improved from 49% in 2004/05 to 59% in 2005/06, higher than national rates. Overall success rates for apprentices also improved from 46% in 2004/05 to 55% in 2005/06, higher than national rates. Overall, timely framework success rates for both are higher than the national average and have improved from 2004/05 to 2005/06. Within these rates, three of the programmes have improved with only the engineering programme showing a decline. The rate for advanced apprentices in engineering has declined but is still above the national average, while for apprentices it has improved but is still below the national average. The college is currently predicting further improvement to overall framework success rates to 65% for all apprentices in 2006/07.

- Progression from level two to level three has improved as has key skills completion with the provision of key skills more deeply embedded in the vocational area.
- Learners on entry to employment courses continue to make very good progress with success rates at the end of June 2007 at 61% with 22% progressing into work based learning. Qualification achievement has improved by 33 percentage points.

## Quality of education and training

What is the impact of the strategies mentioned during the last AAV to improve the quality of teaching and learning? Does the system focus appropriately on the impact of teaching on learning?

- Since the last AAV the procedures for observing teaching and learning have been strengthened further. Unannounced observations are carried out during an identified three week window and include all activities such as induction, tutorials and assessment sessions. Records are comprehensive and usefully include learners' comments on teaching and learning and management issues such as the impact of resources, or timetabling. Observations are carried out by a team of trained advanced teaching practitioners (ATPs) who mentor teachers in their own areas, and observe outside their curriculum area. Teachers receive detailed action plans and if judged a grade three have an automatic mentor assigned and observed again within 2 months. Good practice is shared extensively. Faculty managers produce reports for their areas that contribute to a whole college report reviewed by senior managers about how good practice is shared. This report is also reviewed by governors. Teachers who gain a grade one are congratulated formally and publicised on the

staff intranet for other teachers to contact and either observe their teaching or gain helpful advice. Teachers who act as peers are eligible to apply for an ATP post. ATPs are then eligible to apply for management positions and many have successfully done so. Underperformance is tackled rigorously with intervention and support provided through a range of strategies. The number of inadequate grades has reduced since 2004/05 from 21 to 9. Of the nine inadequate grades, seven are now considered satisfactory and two other teachers have left. Outcomes of teaching and learning form an important part of the appraisal system. Greater emphasis has been placed on the impact of teaching on learning in the revised paperwork. Records reviewed showed prompts that encourage the observer to focus on the effectiveness of the learning and comments on the sample reviewed were detailed and extensive.

How effectively do the strengthened arrangements improve the quality of the tutorials for all learners including part-time and work-based learners?

- There has been extensive further development of the tutorial processes. A staff survey of existing tutorial practice was completed and identified that as well as many inconsistent practices there was also some good material supporting tutorial support. The cross college tutorial development group built upon this material and through smaller working groups has reviewed tutorial recording systems, induction policy and procedures, progression action plans and group tutorial content. A revised tutorial policy standardises all the recording systems and a single individual learning plan with standardised review documentation is being introduced in September 2007.
- The very comprehensive tutor handbook contains guidance and examples of all tutorial issues. Tutors also have suggested content for group tutorials and contact lists of outside speakers available on the college's virtual learning environment. The tutor system for the A level learners has been modified so that a number of full-time staff share the tutor responsibilities from the same office.
- The team responsible for additional learning support has been restructured to provide a more focussed service. This has involved the merging of responsibilities of some support staff to enable greater flexibility.

How does the college use the feedback gained to improve the quality of the learners' experience? What views do current learners have about the college?

- The college gathers feedback from students through the student council, student representatives on programme meetings, focus groups, on-line surveys and questionnaires. The student union president is on a sabbatical year and with other union executive members is involved in governors' meetings and academic board meetings. Students have met as working groups to look at equality and diversity impact measures as well as issues on discipline, bullying, smoking and the constitution of the student union.
- The feedback is used for the self-assessment process and some of the feedback has resulted in changes, such as more disabled car parking on one of the sites, price changes in the canteen, reminding staff to issue reading lists in good time. Fliers and notices are widely used to demonstrate to learners that their views are taken seriously.
- Learners' comments are recorded on the observations of teaching and learning and these are fed back to teachers. Feedback obtained from the parents and guardians of full time 16-18 year old learners is collated and shared with course staff and is mostly favourable.
- Learner surveys have now been amended to include LSC questions and appropriate benchmarking. The latest survey achieved a response rate of 35%. Ratings for pre-entry advice, quality of teaching and learning were similar to LSC benchmarks. Learners noted fewer problems in general, except for money pressures and travel. Ratings for induction were good.

## Leadership and management

What steps have been taken to improve the performance of managers and have these had any impact of learner outcomes?

- The college has undergone significant restructuring and has developed a comprehensive system of management training and staff appraisal. All managers are required to complete the management development programme. To date 53% of all managers have completed the programme which started in February 2006 and the next two cohorts have been identified. Of the 64 managers who have completed the programme

34% have progressed to undertake a master's degree. Graduates from this programme are increasingly being used to teach on the programme ensuring it remains relevant to college issues. Masters degree project work is all college focussed.

- All new staff are assigned a college mentor to encourage professional development. Heads of faculty have external mentors. A useful regional network shadowing project has been set up with the Devon and Cornwall FE college principals group.
- The principal briefs the college staff each term as well as chairing a staff forum each term attended by about 20 staff across the college. The principal also holds focus groups to improve communication.
- A new staff appraisal system has been implemented which pays closer attention to target setting. It meets both the needs of the individual and the college and is well received by staff who view it as a collaborative exercise. It is focussed on improving the learners' experience through the continuing professional development of the staff. The system has been well researched and customised to meet the needs of the college. All staff have been trained in the new appraisal procedures.

How is the promotion of equality and diversity being developed within the teaching curriculum? How does the college ensure it is done effectively?

- The college considers equality and diversity to be fully embedded in the curriculum. Teachers and managers can sight examples of how recruitment practices have been amended to recruit learners from those groups traditionally under-represented in further education.
- Teachers focus on aspects of equality and diversity during tutorials and have a range of guest speakers to cover particular topics. It was not possible to judge how effectively teachers have embedded equality and diversity within the curriculum. However, teachers are encouraged to use materials widely available to aid development of schemes of work and lesson planning. The teaching and learning observations records are highlighted to show where equality and diversity issues have been

addressed and this is shared at focus group meetings with staff at faculty level.

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

None

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

None