

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Warrington Collegiate
Date of visit: 19 October 2006

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

In 2004/5 success rates for adults improved and remain good. However for 16-18 yr olds at all levels success rates had declined. Retention rates were declining and were very low at level 3 and low at other levels. Pass rates were also very low at level 3 and around national average at levels 1 & 2. Why were the success rates so low particularly in some areas which recruit substantial numbers of students? Why has the retention rate on AS and A2 courses fallen sharply? What are the developments in 2005/6?

- The decline in outcomes for learners aged 16-19 year in 2004/5 represents the lowest point reflecting previous shortcomings which the college has taken some clear and decisive action to address over the past 2 years. In particular, the trend of declining success rates has been sharply reversed in 2005/6. Provisional figures indicate that without the inclusion of data for GCE A/AS courses, which have been discontinued, the success rates for 16-19 year olds at level 3 are similar to the national average. At levels 1 and 2, there were also significant improvements in 2005/6. Success rates for adults remain good with some general improvement.
- The college is now on track with its plans to achieve excellent standards and outcomes by 2008/09. It has a realistic view of the action which will be needed to achieve this.

Have the previous improvements in achievement in work based learning been maintained?

- Framework achievement is now 64% which is well above the national average. A number of initiatives have been introduced which have

served to ensure the good performance in WBL continues to be maintained. These include: clear targets set for staff and students to achieve; more rigorous selection and interview arrangements to ensure students are on the right programme at the right level; a focus on improving student attendance; more effective monitoring of student progress; more frequent student reviews and the implementation of more standardised quality procedures.

Quality of education and training

What steps have been taken to reduce the apparent over-grading of lessons in internal observations and what is the college's current evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning? What has now been the impact of the learning coach system?

- There have been fundamental changes in the college's approach to lesson observations. This has led to a much more robust and reliable picture of the grades and qualities of teaching and learning. A programme of internal reviews and inspections has been carried out for all areas of the college during 2005/6. The reviews have resulted in an extensive grade profile and a very useful indication of the qualities of teaching and learning in each curriculum area.
- The outcomes of the internal reviews show that the college had previously been substantially over-stating the quality of teaching and learning for 16-19 year olds. Whilst the overall college profile is now similar to other FE colleges, teaching and learning for 16-19 year olds is much weaker than for adults. Some 13% of lessons for 16-19 year olds were judged by the college to be less than satisfactory.
- There are strong indications that the changes to admissions with more rigorous matching of students to programmes, and the role of Learning Coaches have contributed significantly to improving retention rates. Students who met with inspectors were very clear and positive about the tutoring role of Learning Coaches and the new framework of expectations for attendance and progress.

What improvements have been made to the learning environment through the opening of the new college building?

- The college has begun to occupy its newly built replacement accommodation. Where departments have moved to the new building, the benefits identified by staff and students include: an environment for staff and students which is encouraging and motivating, and which raises expectations; more appropriate facilities for enhancing employer engagement such as syndicate rooms and incubation units supporting new businesses; the enhanced recruitment and the profile of the college in its community; the professional environment that matches or better industry standards, for example in hairdressing and the good resources to support learning, for example, interactive white boards, IT facilities and specialist equipment.

Leadership and management

Why has the disparity in performance between 16-18 year olds and adults persisted and what impact has management action had at all levels to address this, including the application of quality assurance systems and the use of robust improvement plans? How does the improvement of teaching and learning feature in the drive towards excellence?

- The programme of annual internal reviews is providing managers at all levels with accurate and useful evidence of the overall performance of courses and a clear indication of key areas for improvement. They have contributed to a sharpening up of SAR evaluations. As a result of the internal reviews two curriculum areas previously judged by the college to be satisfactory, were re-graded as unsatisfactory. Timely and effective action has been taken to address weaknesses in one area, but not the other. Further urgent action is planned. The use of action plans and management information on a continuous basis by managers is strengthening and contributing to improvements.
- There is now a much more accurate and well informed picture of teaching and learning. This includes a clear indication of the work needed to improve teaching for 16-18 year olds. The reports arising from internal reviews provide much useful information. Good use is made of the outcomes of observations to support individual teachers.

However there is not sufficient prioritisation by course teams or curriculum areas of those aspects of teaching and learning which need developing. The contribution of advanced teacher practitioners in responding to such priorities is not yet fully developed.

- Self assessment is continuing to increase in robustness. The timeliness of SAR cycle is greatly improved with student achievement data available much earlier. This is enabling managers to make an earlier evaluation of what action is needed. Assessment boards have also been useful in highlighting achievement issues.

What action is being taken to develop stronger links with employers?

- An employer engagement strategy has been developed and an Employer Services Department created in August 2006 as a means of better meeting the needs of local employers. This service has yet to be fully established, but focuses on developing long term relationships with employers through an individualised approach.
- Through the apprentice department and Train to Gain, the college is working with employers to promote their greater engagement in the learning process.

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

- A new forum is being developed for students to have a voice in aspects of college life. This is not yet well established or working effectively
- The college has been working, with some success, to reduce the number of young people who apply to the college very late. There is clear evidence of the link between late application and poor retention. This remains an important issue for the college and its partners in Warrington to consider expeditiously at a strategic level.