

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Brockenhurst
Date of visit: 11 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

Have improving success rates been sustained in 2004/05? What areas/levels/ages in particular have shown improvement and why?

- Success rates remained well above national averages in 2004/05 although the difference between the college and national rates reduced as national rates continued to improve. Five out of the six main retention, achievement and success rate categories covering both age groups were at least 10 percentage points above the national average; the retention rate for adults was around the national average. Success rates on long courses at most levels were well above average; the success rate for adults at level 2 was around the national average, and the retention rate for these students was in the bottom 25% nationally. There were many courses with very good achievements. A few courses showed under-achievement, for example on some IT courses for adults and on AVCE media and GCE A-level theatre studies for learners aged 16-18. The pass rate on GCSE courses declined by 5 points to 52% but rose again in 2005/06 to 59%. The SAR commented that performance data was insufficiently accessible for some adult provision; such data are now available at course level, reported on monthly, and are much more accessible to managers.

What change has there been to enrolment patterns and numbers in the last year, and how is this being reflected in the college's business focus?

- Despite funding and priority changes, the college has continued to increase the numbers of students on roll. Although many adults now pay substantially more for their courses, their numbers have been sustained. In 2005/06 the college exceeded its target for full-time students aged 16-18 by over 90; as a result, funding and targets for these students have

been increased by some 22% this year, and the college expects to meet its target.

What do value-added, distance travelled and high grade measures show about the relative progress made by students?

- Students make good progress. The college subscribes to both ALIS and ALPS value-added schemes and in 2004/05 these indicated just above average progress by the majority of students. In 2005/06 the ALPS score for GCE A-level qualifications improved and showed that learners on these qualifications made excellent progress; on GCE AS courses progress was above average; the ALIS score also showed that progress made by learners was the best ever achieved at the college. In 2004/05 the proportion of students achieving high grades on GCE A-level courses rose to 46%; the proportion of students achieving high grades on GCE AS courses also increased. On national diploma courses the proportion achieving high grades rose by 12 points to 22%. In 2005/06 the proportion of students gaining high grades on all of these qualifications continued to rise. In 2004/05, 33 out of 35 students achieved the full international baccalaureate diploma and the average score increased.

Quality of education and training

What does the college's teaching and learning observation programme report for 2005/06?

- The college has taken steps to add rigour to the lesson observation programme and to tackle acknowledged inflation in the previous grading of observed lessons: observations are now unannounced (although within a designated week for each curriculum area) and the findings more rigorously moderated. The seven advanced practitioners are very closely involved in the programme and a number of joint observations now take place. The subsequent training and support of teachers, and the dissemination of best practice, are thorough and effective. All records from the observation programme are detailed and helpful. All adult and community venues continue to be included in the programme. In 2005/06, some 79% of observed lessons were judged to be good or outstanding. The programme and its results are rigorous and credible.

Are there any new curriculum and/accommodation developments?

- Several new courses have been introduced: in construction, there is an introductory certificate (at level 1) and a first diploma (at level 2); in sports there is a fitness instructor qualification at level 2 and a personal trainer qualification at level 3. Following a review of the curriculum in hospitality, new courses are available at levels 1 and 2. A number of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) are newly available to employees at levels 2 to 4 in sector priority areas, such as playwork and children's services. The college is no longer franchising provision to external providers, and is offering some of these courses directly. An imaginative innovation for level 2 courses is the addition of two extra timetabled lessons, taught by vocational teachers and/or advanced practitioners, to integrate literacy and numeracy into the vocational curriculum. This strategy to improve the basic skills of students by teaching them within a vocational context but without demanding of them a separate procedure to collate and assess evidence is being operated in 2006/07 as a voluntary pilot scheme; it has been well devised and will be carefully monitored and evaluated.
- A new technology block is now open, housing photography, information and communication technology, media and film. This reconfiguration has created an additional space for performing arts. The teaching restaurant has been refurbished. A purpose-built CoVE building is currently nearing completion, and will be dedicated specifically to employer-related work.

How successful are the two skills centres at New Milton and Hardley?

- The college has established vocational provision for construction and for beauty and complementary therapy at two skills centres in New Milton and Hardley. Courses are offered at entry level and levels 1 to 3 for complementary therapies, to students aged 14-16 and 16-18. Progression routes at level 3 in construction are being made available in response to demand. Numbers of students are increasing and links with employers are good and becoming even stronger. Some 250 employees and adults also attend the centres at other times for a range of courses.

How successful are the four CoVEs and what is their impact locally?

- Considerable investment has been made by the college to broaden provision and improve its services to employers. The college has full CoVE status in applied ICT for business and in early years, playwork and children's services; it has interim status in leadership and management and tourism. Recruitment is good as are links with businesses who use the college for training. Partnerships with a number of employer networks

have a good impact on the sharing of good practice and industrial updating for lecturers.

Leadership and management

The college has a new principal. What direction is she setting for the college and what are the college's priorities for the immediate future?

- The principal has undertaken a very open consultation with all staff on the future direction of the college. As a result of this, and of the principal's own vision for the future, the college is developing a more explicit customer focus: several staff have been given a specific role to work more directly with employers. The open, consultative management style of the college is being extended, and the principal has a highly visible presence across all aspects of the college's work. The academic board is being reviewed and its representation revised in order to represent teaching staff more widely. The college's committee structure is also being revised so that the business of committees is fed more directly into the senior management team and there is a wider spread of representation and accountability.

Some areas to improve are identified in the SAR. What developments have there been in the writing of the self-assessment report and what has been their impact? Did the college achieve Action for Business accreditation in April 2006?

- The self-assessment report process is already comprehensive. It is being revised for 2005/06 in order to direct more challenging questions to each contributing area, under the 5 key questions of the inspection framework. All courses are expected to report their results against the national averages of both further education and sixth form colleges. Curriculum reviews are more precise and staff are fully accountable for their performance.
- The college achieved Action for Business accreditation in May 2006.

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

- the collation and reporting of students' destinations

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

- The voice of students is currently heard through the Student's Union, although a number of focus groups have been consulted and contributed to improvements on specific matters such as induction. The student

council is being re-launched to provide a more formal means of engaging students comprehensively in the operational management of many aspects of college life.