

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Isle of Wight
Date of visit: 4 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?

- Retention, achievement and success rates all improved further in 2004/05 to levels above or well above national averages, placing the college in the top ten per cent of further education colleges by success rates for the second consecutive year. Notably, in 2005/06 the success rate for students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 courses rose to a level above average, as retention improved to meet national averages. In 2004/05 the success rates for Skills for life provision were outstanding.

Has the level of self-declared student progression (to HE and employment) been sustained in 2004/05?

- There is good progression from local schools to the college and good internal progression through course levels. High levels of progression from the college into employment or higher education were sustained in 2004/05, with a particularly high conversion rate for students completing the access to higher education course. College analysis shows that more students are going directly into employment, including self-employment, at age 18, than into higher education. This trend is of concern to the college as a leading local participant in the 'aim higher' initiative.

Quality of education and training

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

- The outcomes from the comprehensive teaching and learning programme are that 58% of lessons seen were good or outstanding. Given the very good and rising success rates, this is evidence of a rigorous system in which the college sets high expectations of its teachers. In 2005/06 a full quality review was undertaken using external consultants to moderate observations. The college acknowledges that it needs to disseminate and

celebrate good and outstanding teaching practice more actively, and that it needs to turn more plans into practice. Staff development has a strong focus on strategies and techniques in lessons and there are good opportunities for staff to focus on what and how students learn. The use of learning coaches is being revived. Students are enthusiastic about teaching in the college and appreciate the passion that teachers have for their subjects.

Are there any new curriculum developments, and how well did last year's new courses do?

- There has been a significant growth in numbers of students taking construction and fitness and exercise courses, and some growth in numbers doing art and design, performing arts, care and engineering. Enrolments overall have declined over the last three years, but most of these were planned in response to changing priorities and funding by the government. The numbers of students on roll aged 16 to 18 has grown steadily over three years. A good proportion of adults now pay the full cost of their tuition. The numbers of students taking basic skills courses has grown very significantly over the last three years.

What lies behind the success the college has had with its provision for basic skills and learndirect?

- The college has very good arrangements for providing literacy, numeracy and language support, and success rates for these courses are excellent. Learndirect provision on the island, in which the college plays a leading part, is very well managed. Courses are carefully tailored to meet needs, and provision is available in the community and on employers' premises as well as in the college itself. However, with a funding level reduction of some 70% in 2005/06 the college has had to redevelop its business model and recover the full costs from learners and employers. The provision is sustainable only if it breaks even against that model.

How successfully have the new centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs) been established?

- The college has invested highly in its four fully established CoVEs in hospitality and catering; residential and domiciliary care for adults; early years, playwork and children's services; and marine industries. Partnership working is effective and recruitment has exceeded targets. The new marine CoVE supported 464 learners at level 2 in 2005/06 against a target of 230.

Has the new tutoring model been introduced and what has been its reception and impact?

- The college operates a mixed tutorial model that has evolved naturally: there are two full-time specialist tutors who look after students from different sectors and a number of vocational teachers who act as tutors to students in their own sector. This approach seeks to make the best use of the skills of different staff to meet the tutorial needs of students and in many ways it is effective. However, there is some inconsistency in the levels of entitlement and experience enjoyed by students, and not all students are clear about the purpose or extent of all tutorial activity. Most are very satisfied with the level of individual support they get from their tutor.

Leadership and management

How good are relations with the high schools in the pursuit of a fair and transparent curriculum offer to all students at age 16?

- The college has built very successful provision for students aged 14 to 16 and the number has grown by over 300% in four years. There were 368 such students in 2005/06 taking vocational courses across 12 subject areas. Good liaison exists with three of the five high schools on the island, but although all five schools are signatories to the 14-19 strategy group, two schools failed to comply with the agreed practice to allow all year 10 students to attend vocational taster days at the college. A few students reported that their schools gave them negative or misleading advice about post-16 courses at the college.

How successful is the college in attracting international students, and what are the benefits to the college and to students?

- The college enrolled 459 international students in 2004/05, of which 57 were full-time. This provision adds income and cultural diversity to the college and to the wider island community and strengthens cross-curricular links. In 2005/06 this number declined but the college is well placed to reverse this trend in 2006 and 2007.

Did the college achieve Action for Business accreditation in March 2006 and did it secure a WBL contract from the LLSC in July 2006?

- The business development unit is well integrated in the college and doubled its business in 2005/06. The college is successfully engaging employers and responding to their requirements. It continues to add to the number of employers with whom it does direct work. Action for

Business accreditation was achieved in March 2006. The college is not yet contracted directly to provide apprenticeship training.

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:

- Value-added: the college is disappointed at the lack of accuracy and depth of analysis afforded by the national measures of value added to vocational students. The college is undertaking its own analysis and sets targets for its students based on a number of indicators. It actively seeks to set challenging targets to motivate and stretch students.
- ACL: The local authority no longer funds the college for adult and community learning. The college continued to provide the very large majority of such courses in 2004/05 at a nominal cost to learners. The exception to this was the reduction in some leisure activities which contributed to an overall reduction in enrolments. There was no significant impact on the enrolments of older students, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from the more deprived wards as concessions to fees were still provided.