

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Newbury College

Date of visit: 3 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

Student success rates were an issue at the last inspection, especially at level 1. End of year data for 2004/05 also indicates issues at level 3. Have success rates for 2005/06 improved at levels 1 and 3?

- As the annual assessment visit took place early in October and data was not finalised, no judgement could be made on trends.

How successful are measures taken to improve retention, especially at levels 1 and 3?

- The measures taken to improve retention have had little time to have an impact since the last inspection of March 2006. The college has devised a retention improvement plan. Through its revised tutorial system, the college has focussed on retention especially at levels 1 and 2. It has introduced clearer entry requirements for all levels of courses. It has established clear coherent progression routes from level 1 to level 2 for most courses. It has reduced the number of courses on which learners aged 16 to 18 enrol. According to the college's own data for 2005/06, at levels 1 and 3 for learners aged 16 to 18, retention rates remain below national averages and have fallen substantially further for level 3. At level 1, despite a small rise, they remain at least four percentage points below the rising national average for 2004/05. At level 2, for this age group, they have risen to the national average. For learners aged 19 and over, retention rates have risen on level 1 courses and are now at the national average for 2004/05. For levels 2 and 3, they have fallen and are at least five percentage points below the national averages. The college acknowledges that it failed to ensure that learners on some distance learning courses were receiving sufficient levels of support. On longer short courses, retention rates for learners aged 19 and over continue to

fall and are seven percentage points below the national average for 2004/05.

What is the trend for achievement rates for 2005/06 especially at levels 1 and 3?

- At the time of the visit, complete achievement data were unavailable for 2005/06. The college predicts that they will be similar to 2004/05, with a slight fall at levels 2 and 3 and a small rise at level 1. In 2004/05, for learners aged 16 to 18, achievement rates at level 2 improved and were just above the rising national average. At level 1, they fell from significantly above in 2003/04 to at least 5% below in 2004/05. At level 3, they remain consistently below the national average, and although improving, remain at least five percentage points below. For learners aged 19 and over, achievement rates for all levels have fallen from above the national averages in 2002/03 to near the national average, except for level 1, where they are below by at least five percentage points. For very short courses, achievement rates have improved for the small number of learners aged 16 to 18 and are now above national averages. For learners aged 19 and over, they remain at the high national average. On longer short courses, they have fallen for learners aged 16 to 18 to significantly below the national average. For the many adults who take these courses, achievement rates have been consistently above the national average, although the rate of annual increase is falling behind the rising national rate.

Work-based learning appears to be satisfactory and rising in line with the improving national rates for most subject areas. How robust are the procedures for identifying end dates for timely completion?

- According to end of year data for overall success for 2005/06, overall framework completion has improved to just below the rising national average and overall framework or NVQ completion has risen to just above the rising national rate. In terms of apprenticeships, the overall success rates for framework completion have risen from 3% in 2003/04 to 51% in 2005/06, near the national average. For advanced apprenticeships, overall success rates have risen from 8% in 2003/04 to 36% in 2005/06, eight percentage points below the national average. In terms of curriculum areas, those with the best success rates for framework completion in 2005/06 are engineering, retail, and business and health. Overall timely completion has risen in line with national rates. The college

has satisfactory arrangements in place to identify and monitor work-based learners' end dates. These arrangements include agreements between the apprentice, employer and the college.

## Quality of education and training

How effective are actions to increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching and to share good practice in teaching and learning?

- The college has agreed and is implementing a range of activities to increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching. This includes an external consultant working with the lesson observation team and each curriculum area focusing on best practice in teaching and learning. These activities have the potential to improve the quality of teaching and learning but they have not been presented as a single coherent plan with measurable performance targets against which the college can measure progress. It is too early to assess the impact of these measures.
- The lesson observation team is committed to raising the standard of lessons. Their remit has been extended from September 2006 to include agreeing action plans after all lessons graded satisfactory or less than satisfactory. Their role is becoming more developmental, they are receiving training and support and they are confident in their role.
- The sharing of good practice is informal but strong in some curriculum areas. There is evidence of a growing openness towards sharing, including teaching and learning. The formalising of such arrangements across the college is recognised as a development point. The linking of strong and weak staff through improvement strands is at an early stage. The lesson observation team are, as yet, unclear on their role in this. The college has a strong commitment to staff development. Since inspection whole college staff development activities have enabled some sharing of good practice around inspection themes. In addition college staff have undertaken some joint working with a local partner college.

To what extent has the curriculum been enriched for students in 2006/07?

- The college has moved away from a system of Wednesday afternoon extra curricula activities as these were poorly attended. The revised focus

is on integrating activities into curriculum areas, whilst maintaining some cross college activities at times accessible to students. It is too early to assess the impact on students' experiences.

## Leadership and management

What quality improvement measures are in place to identify trends in student success and take action, a concern at last inspection, with so many SSAs below the national line?

- At the time of the AAV, a newly devised quality improvement strategy has been agreed. However, a coherent implementation plan is yet to be agreed. A number of structures are in place to identify quality issues, for instance the principal holds regular surgeries open to all staff. There are regular middle manager, and middle and senior management fora at which issues are raised and themes identified.
- Although a number of managers are proactive in analysing student data this is insufficiently co-ordinated. Data, including qualitative data is good. However, the college does not analyse student success data sufficiently in order to identify trends, nor has it developed a process to analyse quality evidence at a point in time, from the range of sources within the college. Quality improvement measures tend to derive from the SAR process and are therefore historic. This is resulting in a lack of timely intervention at course level and a slow strategic response to address college wide issues.

How effectively has the college improved the quality of course reviews and how effective are management processes to assess these?

- Course review is supported by a wealth of quality data readily available through the course information database (CID). For example, data are available on the quality of lesson observations, student questionnaires, course reviews and course statistics. The system of producing and monitoring course reviews has been amended following a review of self-assessment processes in which the college identified its failure to follow through action points. The relationship between the various levels of plans has been tightened to draw out themes and action points. The college has engaged the services of a consultant to support the quality improvement of course reviews with curriculum teams and managers. Staff appreciate the support provided through this measure.

What performance measures will be used to assess the impact of quality systems and action planning and are they appropriate?

- The college has agreed a range of three year quality targets, approved by governors in July 2006. As yet an implementation plan has not yet been agreed. To avoid duplication, the college anticipates that the implementation plan and the self-assessment action plan will be one and the same.
- A post inspection action plan has been produced which addresses many, but not all of the areas for improvement raised in the inspection report. College action plans do not consistently identify overarching objectives and there is a lack of quantifiable targets against which the college should assess the impact of actions.