

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Plumpton College  
Date of visit: 24 January 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

Are high overall success rates being maintained?

- Overall success rates continue to be well above the average for similar colleges and are particularly high for 16 to 18 year olds. Success rates for young people following long programmes are outstanding at levels 1 and 2 and good at level 3. Both retention and pass rates declined at level 3 in 2005/06. Most students are supported well and overall retention rates for 16 to 18 year olds are high.
- Progress made by students with low achievements at enrolment is often very good. At level 3 for example, young people achieve good pass rates whilst, on average, making outstanding progress.
- Overall success rates in 2005/06 were not as high for adults as they were for 16 to 18 year olds and are at the national average for similar colleges. Rates declined by some 10 percentage points due to a fall in both retention and pass rates. Success rates for adults are satisfactory for level 1 long programmes, good for level 2 but below the average for similar colleges at level 3. The college has used data well to identify the reasons for the overall decline, which relate to the personal circumstances of individual students and the assessment requirements of particular programmes. Appropriate action is being taken to remedy the weaknesses.

Has the college identified the reasons for the decline in work-based learning (WBL) full framework achievement in 2005/06?

- Full framework achievement fell in 2005/06 from a high level of 60% the previous year to 40%. Detailed analysis by the college has shown the reduction to be mostly due to learners losing their employment. The college is implementing a well considered strategy of working predominantly with employers who are committed to ensuring learners

succeed. Although this approach renders recruitment more problematic it provides more secure learning opportunities for young people. On the basis of progress learners were making at the time of the visit, full framework completion rates in 2006/07 are likely to be closer to the 2004/05 rates.

What progress has the college made in the use of value added measures since the last AAV?

- The college is involved in piloting the use of contextual value added data which is confirming many of the college's students with low prior attainment to be making good progress. At the time of the visit, the college was reviewing how best to use the data that have recently become available to support quality improvement at department and programme level.

## Quality of education and training

The last inspection report (LIR) identified the quality of teaching and learning as a key area for improvement. The self-assessment report (SAR) recognises that there is insufficient teaching and learning that is outstanding but states that the proportion of grade 1 lessons has increased since the last inspection and the number of grade 3 lessons has reduced. What action has been taken since the last AAV? Is the college's internal lesson observation showing improvement and is improvement consistent across the college?

- A new post of Quality Development Manager reporting to the Deputy Principal (Academic and Quality) has been created as part of the new management structure established in September 2006. The existing lesson observation scheme has been reviewed and new procedures introduced after careful consideration of options. New arrangements have been piloted and appropriate procedures introduced for moderating judgements. At the time of the visit the procedures were being implemented in stages across the college with a completion date of May 2007.
- The new lesson observation procedures are well considered and rigorous. Subjective aspects of the previous approach have been replaced with clearer criteria for judging quality and for driving up standards. Teachers are very supportive of the changes, feel ownership of the developments and are committed to improvement. On the basis of the observations to date, the college has identified that too much teaching is aimed at the lower ability range within teaching groups. This is ensuring good

achievement but failing to be sufficiently challenging for the more able. The college has not yet formulated specific staff development strategies for implementing change and sharing good practice. The enthusiasm and commitment of staff to improving teaching and learning is clearly evident as is their willingness to be self critical, share ideas and support each other. The attitude of staff and the standards already achieved by the college are an excellent basis for achieving further improvement.

How effective is the development of provision for students aged 14 to 16 and the introduction of specialised diplomas progressing?

- The college is continuing to provide a broad range of land based opportunities for 14 to 16 year olds and is working well in partnership with other providers in leading developments in this area. The college has good systems and resources for supporting this age group and an excellent foundation has been laid for developing new qualifications and progression routes for the locality.

How much progress has been made since the last AAV in addressing the weakness in the LIR around the quality of action planning and target setting in tutorials?

- The college has completely overhauled its approach to providing tutor support which is now organised through teaching departments. Tutor support is now more closely integrated with teaching and tutors are clear about their role. Students have more ready access to their tutors who respond quickly to both their academic and pastoral needs. Support for part-time students has been strengthened particularly for adults who have had little recent experience of structured learning.
- Individual learning plans have been simplified and tutors and students find them easy to use. Plans are supplemented through tutorial records which include personal targets. Both tutors and managers recognise that, although good progress has been made, there is still work to be done to make target setting and action planning more effective and consistent across the college. Students are supported well through other forms of specialist support, such as such as basic skill support, provided through student services. The working relationships between tutors and specialist support staff are good. Literacy and numeracy support is helping learners achieve but the level of funding the college attracts does not fully reflect the extent of the needs of its students. The college's capacity to provide in-class support is limited.

How is the development of key skills progressing including the development of work based key skills?

- Key skills are now integrated into students' main learning programmes with some aspects provided by specialist staff. The introduction of fortnightly monitoring arrangements has improved the identification of students needing additional support. Heads of department support key skills development well through appropriate timetabling. Support provided for work-based learners is not as effective. Learners are not monitored closely enough to ensure they are achieving the necessary skills. Too much emphasis is placed on the expectation for learners to be self-motivated in an area of their work for which they show only limited enthusiasm. The reorganisation of teaching departments and introduction of new management arrangements has not yet impacted fully on key skills development.

## Leadership and management

What action has been taken since the last AAV to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

- The college has re-organised its management into 12 departments which include 8 teaching departments and the Netherfield Centre. This flatter structure provides a much clearer focus on the specialist aspects of the college's provision and enables department heads and their staff to make best use of their specialist expertise to support learning. Heads of department are supported well in their endeavours to drive up standards through the new arrangements for lesson observation. Tutor support is now provided within each teaching department. This new arrangement ensures better integration of teaching and support and enables tutors to respond quickly to the needs of individual students.
- The reorganisation has been managed well with minimal disruption and staff are supportive of the changes. The principal and senior managers provide strong leadership. They have been very successful in establishing an open, self critical culture where staff are comfortable to voice their views but also feel well supported and united in a common purpose.

What action has the college taken to improve outcomes for the small minority of under performing courses, including some short courses, identified in the SAR?

- The college is very effective at identifying areas for improvement and data are used well. Under performing courses, which are a minor element of the college's provision are monitored closely by senior managers and Governors and good support provided for improvement. Self assessment is rigorous and leads to clear identification of weaknesses and well thought out action for improvement.

What action is being taken by the college to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are appropriate?

- The college has clear procedures for child protection which are understood by staff. All staff are CRB checked and have undertaken child protection training or are waiting for the next course. The principal and senior managers are particularly mindful of their responsibilities for residential students and the 14 to 16 year olds who attend college. In addition to their academic tutor, residential students are provided with residential tutors who provide with good support outside the college day.

Have there been any developments in the management of WBL since the last AAV? The LLSC briefing mentions the need for more accurate WBL planning and forecasting.

- The college has effectively reviewed and modified its approach to managing work-based learning. Links with local employers are strong. A variety of local partnerships and networks enable the college to respond well to changing employment patterns. Alternative programmes have been developed for young people in response to the falling demand for land based apprenticeships. These include well thought out school links and work experience programmes.

There is a reference in the SAR to insufficient capacity at HoD level limiting the review and evaluation of the degree of compliance with Quality Assurance procedures across the college. How far has the review progressed and what has been achieved?

- The newly introduced management structure supports the implementation of quality assurance procedures well and heads of departments are able to focus on their areas of primary vocational expertise. Procedures are being reviewed systematically to minimise paperwork and demands on staff. Good use is made of data and, at the time of the visit, the college was reviewing the indicators and measures it uses to monitor quality in order to ensure a consistent approach across the new departments.

The SAR refers to growth in student numbers placing a strain on resources. How is this being addressed?

- The college has embarked upon ambitious improvements to its estate. A new teaching block was recently opened and further developments such as a new animal care centre and modernisation of machinery workshops are planned. A new £10 million property improvement proposal is currently under discussion with the local LSC.

- As identified by the college in its self-assessment report, students do not have sufficient access to computers for working independently outside formal lesson periods. A new library and resources centre is being planned but will not be available for at least two years. Although all teachers have laptops, the number of computers available for teaching is sometimes insufficient for the size of groups. The college only has a limited number of electronic whiteboards which limits the teaching strategies that can be adopted.