

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Exeter College  
Date of visit: 19 June 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

What do college data show for achievements and standards in 2005/06?

- For students aged 16 to 18, success rates at level 1 rose 12 percentage points in 2005/06 to around the national average for 2004/05; at level 2 they have remained static for three years and are just below the national average for 2004/05; at level 3 (which represents by far the largest volume of enrolments for this age group) they declined 2 percentage points but are still 6 percentage points above the national average for 2004/05. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 on substantial short courses rose 7 percentage points but remain 10 points below the national average for 2004/05. Overall success rates on long courses for students aged 16 to 18 are 4 percentage points above the national average for 2004/05, but they have been static for the last three years and so the differential between the college's rate and the national rate has steadily reduced. The college adjudges the provision for students aged 16 to 18 to be good. The achievements and standards data support this grade, although other aspects of the provision were not scrutinised on this visit.
- For adult students, success rates at level 1 (which represents the largest volume of enrolments for this age group) rose 5 percentage points in 2005/06 but they are still 11 points below the national average for 2004/05; at level 2 they declined 2 points to a rate 5 points below the national average for 2004/05; at level 3 they rose 1 point and are 4 points above the national average for 2004/05. Success rates for adult students on substantial short courses declined 10 percentage points to a level 20 points below the national average for 2004/05. Overall success rates on long courses for adult students are 6 percentage points below the national average for 2004/05, although they have improved by 4 points per year

for the last three years. The college asserts that the choice of curriculum it offers to adults, including the deliberate retention of some provision with relatively low success rates in order to meet demand from students, has had a negative bearing on overall success rates. The college also submits that only 14% of adult students are enrolled on qualifications whose pass rate is below the national average, but that their outcomes disproportionately depress the overall success rates for this age group. The college adjudges the provision for adult students to be good. The achievements and standards data do not support this grade, although other aspects of the provision were not scrutinised on this visit.

What were work-based learning framework achievements in 2005/06, and how does the 2006/07 picture to date compare?

- The college data for 2005/06 show overall success rates for apprenticeships rose and are now at the national average. In some curriculum areas, such as engineering, success rates are significantly above average. Overall success rates have risen steadily over the last three years
- Timely success rates, although rising slowly, are still just below the national averages. This is acknowledged by the college in its self-assessment report.

What impact has the planned quality improvement of key skills had on student's achievements of these qualifications at levels 1 and 2?

- Key skills success rates in 2005/06 for students aged 16 to 18 rose six percentage points to 20%, a rate still well below the low national average for 2004/05. For adults they rose three points to 10%, a rate that is also still well below the low national average for 2004/05.
- The college has made significant changes in 2006/07 to how key skills are offered, taught and assessed. From September 2006 all key skills evidence has been designed to be generated from within assignments undertaken by students on their main programme of study. All three main key skills are offered in this way to all students following courses at levels 1 and 2, according to need. All students on AS courses undertake information and communications technology at level 2 through at least one integrated assignment. On-line testing is more efficient. The numbers of students enrolled on key skills has increased by some 35% in 2006/07. The college

has invested heavily in staff training: 21 teachers across all departments have completed or are undertaking training in literacy and numeracy at levels 3 and 4. In each department a key skills 'champion' is responsible for implementing the new key skills strategy, which has been developed to embrace the changes that may come about when key skills evolve into functional skills. It is not yet possible to judge the impact of these initiatives on outcomes for students.

The college missed its targets for enrolments of students aged 16 to 18 in 2005/06. What do enrolments for 2006/07 show, and were targets met?

- In 2005/06 the combination of a demographic decline in the numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 in Exeter and an increase in the proportion of students staying on in sixth forms in schools outside the Exeter city boundary led to the college missing its enrolment target for this age group. In 2006/07 the college met and exceeded its target for students from this age group. It currently has some 45 unfunded students aged 16 to 18 on roll and has secured LLSC funding for an additional 80 students in 2007/08. The college ascribes this success to a combination of successful marketing, enhanced local reputation, improved and well-publicised A level and International Baccalaureate results, a more attractive learning environment and the growing success of the shared strategies to improve the staying-on rate in Exeter at age 16. The college has played a significant part in increasing the percentage of students in Exeter who stay on in full-time education or training from 59% in 2004/05 to 72% in 2006/07.

## Quality of education and training

How has the coordination of services to students, under the umbrella term 'student street', improved services to students? How comprehensive are these services and what are students' views of their accessibility and effectiveness?

- The college has set out to develop a fully coherent information, advice and guidance (IAG) system from the moment a student makes a course enquiry to after they leave the college for another destination. There is a strong focus on the needs of 'the customer' (i.e. learner) and on the

integration of the five themes embraced by the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. A new reception area at the front of the main Hele Road site opens onto a pedestrian 'street' that offers direct access to a wide range of student services, support and business development functions. These services are now better identified and geographically coordinated

- Tutorial services have been enhanced. A lead tutor in each faculty oversees the nature and quality of the work of tutors, and these lead tutors have a responsibility to highlight to central student services the local needs of their students. In a large college spread over several sites this is a core function and is being carried out effectively. Students speak highly of the accessibility, nature and impact of the various types of support they receive, both in and out of lessons. However, despite the presence of a learning support team on each campus, a few students consider that support does not reach everyone who might benefit from it. The college acknowledges that the quality and comprehensiveness of information they receive about incoming students at the point of their transition from local schools is poor. Local systems are being developed with each individual school to try and improve this. In 2005/06 the college's capacity to meet the growing demand for learning support has been impeded by a reduction in funding. Within available resources, the college supports the additional learning needs of its students very well.

What has been the impact on students and tutors of the new electronic individual learning plans ?

- The college has successfully introduced electronic individual learning plans (ILPs) for year 12 students on AS courses. The format and details are clear and informative, providing easy access for staff to review progress with learners and report back readily to parents. Relevant data on attendance and minimum achievement grades are captured in a timely way. The plans to develop these further are well considered and appropriate. It is not yet possible to judge the impact of the use of these ILPs on the performance of students.

## Leadership and management

How successfully has the college taken on responsibility for all adult and community learning (ACL) provision in Exeter since 2004?

- In August 2004 the college took responsibility for providing all ACL in Exeter from the Devon local authority. The college has built upon embryonic systems for monitoring students' progress on non-accredited courses and has successfully introduced locally reactive and flexible processes to recognise and record progress and achievement (RARPA). The college estimates that these processes are being used systematically and robustly for about 60% of their ACL provision; in the other 40%, staff need further development in their writing of schemes of work and monitoring processes. All teachers are now observed by advanced practitioners trained in RARPA processes, and quality assurance is thorough. The college has made good use of their skills for life model to establish ways of initially assessing students, setting personal goals and monitoring their progress towards them
- The college has placed strong emphasis on neighbourhood working for its ACL provision. It has sought to work closely with local secondary schools to make complementary provision that builds upon the subject specialism of each school in each neighbourhood that it serves.
- The college has undertaken effective local market research and has responded well to neighbourhood needs. For example, two courses have been run recently for minority ethnic women, in direct response to declared local need.

How successfully have college managers been in improving provision in construction, particularly in work-based learning (WBL)?

- Provision in construction, including its management, has improved. College data show that framework success rates, which were still well below national averages in 2005/06, have risen in 2006/07 with a substantial rise in timely completions. Both overall and timely framework success rates are now well above last year's national averages. WBL success rates in construction have risen steadily to above the previous year's national average and are high overall. An effective tracking system has been introduced and there is now better use of additional learning support to help construction students.

- There is a good support programme for staff using the college's own advanced practitioner model. Good practice from other areas of the college have been applied such as the use of internal verification in the college's '3 step approach'
- Clear and suitable progression pathways in construction are being developed and staff are taking a proactive approach to promoting equality and diversity
- Work-based learning is well managed, with a good staff development programme and effective administrative support. Data are produced in a timely and clear way, although the college's main management information system (MIS) and the WBL management information system are not yet integrated
- Appropriate strategies and actions to engage employers in assessing the progress of learners are being developed. The college recognises that it can improve further the links between on- and off-the-job training.

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

- A complex, large and long-term property development strategy has placed significant and sustained demands on many managers, as the college seeks to move from 13 sites to 6 within the city centre over a decade. An original five-year strategy from 2003-2008 has now been joined by a further strategy from 2008-2012. In total this work will cost in excess of £70 million. There has already been, and will continue to be, considerable upheaval as almost all curriculum areas move at least once over this period
- The college plays a key role in the 'Exeter4learning' 14-19 partnership with 5 local secondary schools. Collaboration between the partners is good and growing stronger. Two new vocational diplomas have been approved for 2008 starts, in information and communications technology and creative arts; two other bids, for engineering and health and care, were not approved.