

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Thanet
Date of visit: 12 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

Retention rates are low, particularly on level 2 programmes. Has there been any improvement since the previous inspection, and are they now showing an improving trend? What is the picture across different curriculum areas?

- Following a thorough college review of retention, with Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) support, retention rates have improved. Retention for long level 2 courses has risen from 66% in 2005/06 to a current 74%. For 16-18 year olds the retention rate has risen from 74% in 2005/06 to 78% in the current year. For those students aged 19 or over, the rate in 2005/06 was 61%, and is now 71%. A good range of measures are now in place to bring about continued improvements to retention rates, including improved monitoring by managers, better access to and use of data by course teams, clearer identification of at-risk learners, and swifter follow-up to student absence.

Has the improvement in work-based learning achievement identified in the inspection been maintained? Has timely completion of frameworks improved?

- In most areas completion of frameworks has improved. Advanced apprentices' completion has increased from 26% in 2005/06, and at period 10 of the current year, is 64%. Apprentices' achievement has risen from 50% in 2005/06 to 61% in the current year. Timely completion of frameworks has shown an improvement across all apprenticeships from 32% to 40% in year to date. However, the rate of timely completion for apprentices aged 19 or over has risen more slowly from 24% to 32% overall, and remains poor.

Overall success rates in construction have been poor for the last two years.

- Retention on long courses remains poor, though some pass rates are improving. However, the college has recognised the problems in this area in a thorough and recent curriculum area review. The curriculum review judged construction provision to be inadequate overall. A new section head was appointed to the area in the spring term of 2007.

Pass rates on AS level courses declined in 2005/06 and were unsatisfactory. Have the actions outlined in the college's post-inspection action plan (PIAP) been carried out, and what impact have these measures had?

- Actions outlined in the PIAP have been carried out according to target dates. Provision has been reviewed, and the college has worked effectively with schools, as part of the local 16-plus consortium, to ensure that the curriculum offer remains available where no longer offered at the college. A number of under-performing courses are targeted for closure from September 2007, and a new BTEC national diploma in forensic science has been offered to meet strong demand. Managers are closely monitoring attendance, retention and achievement on AS courses. A student forum meets each term to discuss issues arising from courses. The tutorial system is used more effectively to identify and monitor individual targets.

At the previous inspection the college had been slow to develop mechanisms for judging the progress that learners make in comparison with their starting points. What has been done to deal with this area?

- A more coherent approach to monitoring students' progress is now in place. Staff have been trained in using and understanding measures of value-added and distance travelled data in an effective pilot prior to full introduction in September 2007. Across the college monitoring of students' progress is now more accurate and efficient.

Quality of education and training

In the PIAP the college recognises that more needs to be done to improve the proportion of lessons that are good or better. Has the profile improved and have the PIAP actions been carried out?

- Targets from the PIAP have been met. Staff and team leaders are supportive of the college's attempts to improve teaching and learning. A number of 'excellence practitioners' are to be appointed from September 2007 to assist in the sharing of best practice amongst teaching teams. The colleges' overall profile of good or better grades has not improved significantly since inspection, but the rigour of observation has been increased. There are secure moderation procedures in place for observation of teaching and learning reports.

The rigour with which learners' progress is monitored is inconsistent across the college. What has been done too improve monitoring?

- Improved procedures are in place for gathering staff views and perceptions and for sharing good practice. Section tutor representatives now assist more effectively in supporting the checking of student progress. Individual learning plans (ILPs) have been improved, and useful e-ILPs are in place. A second chance co-ordinator works effectively with students identified at risk of withdrawing from the college, and shares best practice on supporting students with other staff.

The self-assessment report (SAR) claims a strength in the college's nationally recognised and widely used virtual learning environment (VLE). How is the VLE currently used and is student use of the platform still high?

- The college's virtual learning environment 'learning curve' is generally well used. Students and staff make frequent use of the platform from remote locations. Observation of teaching and learning reports now comment on the tutor's use of the VLE. However, some courses have yet to provide full materials for use on the VLE.

In excess of 700 students received additional learning support in 2005/06. How is the quality of the support monitored and is support effective? The college's strong focus on literacy and numeracy led

to good achievements on skills for life and key skills qualifications. Are these being maintained?

- The area of additional learning support is well managed. A comprehensive skills for life policy is in place, supported by a clear set of skills for life procedures. A good range of measures is in place to monitor the quality of provision in this area. Achievement rates remain strong for skills for life and key skills. The key skills success rate for 2005/06 was 59%, rising from 30% in 2003/04. The college has succeeded in reducing the numbers of students who do not attend for testing, from 17% in 2005/06 to 11% in the current year. All apprentices and advanced apprentices passed their key skills tests in 2005/06.

Initial advice and guidance (IAG) were good at inspection. Has the quality of IAG been maintained?

- Since the previous inspection the college has made steady progress in improving the quality of advice and guidance given to students. In May 2007 the college was awarded the Matrix standard, for the quality of its guidance and welfare procedures.

The extent to which tutors take responsibility for ensuring that each learner's progress, attendance and welfare are closely monitored is inconsistent across the college. What is being done to make tutors' actions more consistent?

- The college has established a strong and consistent approach to monitoring progress, attendance and welfare. Tutors are better informed about procedures and course, section, division and senior management team agendas now contain fixed items to review attendance, retention and achievement. All tutors have responsibility to monitor these key areas at frequent intervals. Students are aware of the improvements in measures to monitor their performance.

Leadership and management

The college recognises that managers have not been quick enough to identify and resolve inconsistencies in course performance. What has been done to improve matters? The self-assessment report (SAR) identifies slow progress towards improvement in some areas, particularly the understanding of data issues. What has been done to improve responsiveness and use of data?

- Senior managers have provided effective leadership and support for staff in implementing the whole college focus on improving attendance, retention and achievement. Course teams have high levels of commitment to raising the quality of provision. During November and December 2006, a comprehensive review of all courses' quality and viability was carried out by senior managers and section heads. Data accessibility and usage have improved considerably. Good training on data analysis has been provided for staff teams. Staff now routinely use live data to more effectively monitor course performance.

The SAR states that employer engagement has been significantly improved in terms of numbers, quality of provision and marketing. What is the present position?

- Since 2005/06, the number of employers with whom the college works has increased from 389 to 419. The number of stakeholders with whom the college engages has also risen from 615 in 2005/06 to 742 in 2006/07. The college works effectively with employers. Communications have improved, and employers are now well supported in constructing work-placement schemes. The college has been successful in its bid for a Train to Gain contract, currently involving 126 learners, principally in care. Numbers in work-based learning remain steady. There are a number of successful fully-financed programmes provided for large local employers. There are excellent relationships with local schools and with the county council for 14-19 training and education.

Are communications between staff and managers still good?

- Communications remain good and show signs of continued improvement. Staff and managers closely share the college's improvement agenda, and staff consultation has been good on a range of recent initiatives.



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