

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Basingstoke College of Technology  
Date of visit: 19 June 2007

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit (AAV). 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 impact have the strategies introduced to improve retention rates had in 2006/07? How well has specific course performance been monitored, and what evidence is there of improvement? What progress has been made on reaching targets for 2006/07?

- The college has introduced three key strategies to improve retention rates. These include: using a 'red flag' system to identify full-time courses with particularly low retention rates; focus group meetings with students to identify any issues that might affect retention rates; and implementing a new system for a further education board of studies to monitor student and course performance more closely.
- Of the 15 courses given a 'red flag', 14 show improved retention rates in 2006/07, compared with the previous year. However, some of these courses still have relatively high levels of early withdrawals. Further analysis of withdrawal rates by the college also indicates other courses across a number of curriculum areas with high levels of withdrawals, and managers acknowledge that improving retention is still a key focus for the college.
- Overall in-year retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 show some improvement over the previous year, and exceed the college's target for 2006/07. Retention rates for adult learners have declined slightly, due to some very low retention rates on level 2 information and communications technology (ICT) courses held at the college's outreach learning centre. Retention rates on other courses for learners aged over 19 have improved by one percentage point and are just below the college's target for 2006/07.
- The college plans to extend the 'red flag' system to include part-time courses from September 2007, and to use a wider range of performance data when determining those courses which require closer monitoring. Senior managers monitor the performance of all full-time courses, not only those identified as causing concern. Whilst they also monitor retention rates for part-time courses on a termly basis, managers acknowledge that this is not as thorough as for full-time courses.

Has the improved attendance rate noted at the last AAV been maintained?

- The improved attendance noted at the last AAV has been largely maintained in 2006/07, with an overall attendance rate of 84%. All but one curriculum area have attendance rates above 80%, and over one third have met or exceeded the college target of 85%.

What progress has the college made in using value added and distance travelled (VA/DT) measures and what impact has the pilot project had?

- The self-assessment report acknowledged that work on using value-added and distance travelled measures was in its infancy. The college has extended its work in this area in 2006/07 through training for staff and piloting the use of value-added data and chances graphs in one curriculum area. There are well developed plans to extend this across the college in September 2007, and a comprehensive handbook has been produced to support staff on this. Managers acknowledge that they still have much work to do to ensure that these data are used effectively in all areas to set appropriately challenging targets for students and to monitor their progress towards these. The analysis of value-added data so far suggests that while pass rates are often at or above average, too few students achieve higher grades.

Have the improvements in WBL success rates been maintained in 2006/07?

- Overall success rates for full frameworks improved by 9 percentage points between 2004/05 and 2005/06. Success rates were low in engineering in 2005/06. The college acknowledged that learners had been registered for the wrong technical certificate in engineering and this has since been rectified. In-year data for 2006/07 indicates improving success rates for engineering apprenticeships from 14% to 41%, although they still remain below the national average.
- Motor vehicle continues to have high success rates for advanced apprenticeships. Overall success rates on construction programmes are significantly above the national average. Success rates for apprentice frameworks in hairdressing are above average.

## Quality of education and training

What actions has the college taken to improve teaching and learning, and has the proportion of good or better teaching observed increased in 2006/07? What does the college analysis of its lesson observations indicate

about the quality of teaching in different curriculum areas or levels of courses? How effective are internal moderation processes in ensuring consistency of grading and feedback?

- The college has established a new teacher support unit in 2006/07. Staff in this unit are very closely involved in the internal observation of lessons and in supporting staff development needs. They have implemented an introductory teacher training course for new teachers, to provide practical guidance and support on teaching and learning strategies. This has been effective in providing on-going practical support for those staff new to teaching and enabled them to develop skills in their first year, before progressing to a higher level Certificate of Education programme. New teachers who do not have a level 2 qualification in literacy or numeracy are also screened and required to take an appropriate course to develop literacy or numeracy skills as required and achieve a level 2 adult literacy or numeracy qualification.
- The college has a rigorous approach to monitoring the quality of lessons, and plans to strengthen this further next year, through reducing the numbers of managers who observe and grade lessons. All observers have received externally delivered training and have carried out paired lesson observations to ensure consistency of grading. A sample of observations records are moderated by staff in the teacher support unit, and any apparent discrepancies are discussed with the observer.
- Records of lesson observations are mostly detailed and have a clear focus on learning. Many make clear reference to how teachers plan for different abilities and interests, how more able learners are stretched and less able learners are supported, and how teachers check students' understanding. In a few records of the sample seen, the text did not always support the grade given. In several, it was not always clear what was identified as evidence of good practice in the lesson, or what was being recommended as good practice for the future.
- There are robust systems to provide support and mentoring for teachers, if lessons are judged unsatisfactory. College re-observation records indicate that this is generally effective in bringing about improvement. The college also monitors the performance of teachers where lessons were judged satisfactory, to identify areas for development to support further improvement. Over 250 lessons were observed between September 2006 and April 2007, of which two-thirds were judged good or better. This represents an improvement on the previous year, with a marked decrease in the number of lessons judged only satisfactory or inadequate.

How has the college monitored the quality and consistent use of individual learning plans (ILPs) and to what extent have these improved in 2006/07?

- Several documents are used to record students' learning objectives and progress. These are used effectively to produce an overarching summary of students' performance towards targets as well as their attendance and punctuality. Part of this document is used to inform parents of students' performance. The college recognises this as an area for further development and has plans to integrate these documents in an electronic format.

How has the college monitored the implementation of agreed college policies on entry criteria and early tutorials and what improvements have there been in these areas?

- There are clearly defined and publicised entry criteria for each course. These are now being applied more consistently across the college. School leavers attend the college prior to enrolment to discuss their intended programme with curriculum staff. This is effective in helping them to understand the nature of the course and its requirements.
- All full-time students receive a one-to-one tutorial within six weeks of their start date to ensure they are on the right programme. Initial assessment is effective in identifying additional support needs and support is provided promptly. There are frequent opportunities for students to receive one-to-one tutorials to monitor their progress and to re-assess learning support needs.
- Group tutorials for full-time students provide good coverage of issues related to sexual health, drugs and alcohol awareness. These are not routinely available to part-time students. Attendance at tutorials is well recorded and monitored.

How does the college collect and respond to students' views?

- The college has an effective process for listening to students. These include 'Voice of the Student' conferences, student forums and surveys. Changes made in response to students' views include improved wheelchair access, increased computer access to the internet and the introduction of a job shop and part-time vacancy board.

## Leadership and management

What actions has the college taken to improve the consistency of curriculum management in different areas and to ensure that cross-college policies and procedure are implemented effectively in all areas? What

impact has this had on the performance of different curriculum areas? Are quality assurance procedures used effectively to bring about quality improvement?

- The college has undertaken a comprehensive curriculum review, and made changes in the organisational structure to ensure consistency of approach across the college. All curriculum areas have now been brought under a similar management structure, with clearly defined curriculum and programme management responsibilities. Curriculum management is effective in most areas, and there are clear systems for monitoring the performance of all areas. The FE board of studies, introduced in September 2007, is providing an effective means of monitoring provision by course teams. The FE board of studies panel, comprising members of the senior management team and relevant heads of department, monitor any areas causing concern. This new system is proving effective in identifying students at risk of underachieving and monitoring their progress.
- Senior managers have a clear understanding of any areas of underperformance, as reflected in the self-assessment report. Key weaknesses have also been reported accurately in curriculum area self-assessment reports, which give comprehensive coverage of the inspection framework. However, at course level, there is still some variability in the detail and fullness of course reviews, and in the quality of the evidence presented to support judgements reached. Action plans are not always fully completed to include timescales and responsibility for actions or monitoring progress on these actions.

What progress has been made in 2006/07 on issues relating to race equality, for example, its promotion through the curriculum and the monitoring of that? What impact has the mandatory tutorial unit had on raising staff and student awareness of race equality issues?

- The college has implemented a number of initiatives to improve its work in this area. They have made effective use of an audit of relevance for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision and a cultural analysis tool for engineering and construction to help influence curriculum development in these areas. The tutorial unit for equality and diversity has helped both staff and students to understand the issues better.
- Several activities relating to equality and diversity and Every Child Matters (ECM) themes have taken place, for example, international students' evenings, human rights and child protection awareness sessions. The student support manager has responsibility for group tutorials and child protection. Staff have received training in equality and diversity awareness. Impact assessment on policies and processes

are frequently carried out. As yet the analysis of the performance of different groups of students is limited.

What progress has the college made in updating Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for existing staff, on ensuring compliance with special educational needs and disability legislation, and on health & safety issues (portable appliance testing) identified at the last AAV?

- The college has a rigorous and well-documented system for carrying out CRB checks. Nineteen part-time sessional staff have yet to be cleared but the college is pursuing this as a matter of urgency. Staff in the recently acquired Basingstoke Engineering Training Association (BETA) have also been checked. There are thorough policies to ensure that new staff are checked at, or prior to, appointment and the college is developing a comprehensive policy for employing ex-offenders.
- A new health and safety manager has recently been appointed and works closely with the facilities and estates manager. Good work has taken place to prioritise health and safety and disability access work across the college and BETA premises. Impact and risk assessments have been used to inform the work programme. For example, fire alert systems have been updated and ramps and specialised entrance doors have been fitted to meet the requirements of those with mobility difficulties.
- Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) has now been effectively carried out on the majority of electrical appliances. Details are currently recorded on a paper-based system but the college is developing a more effective and efficient electronic database.

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:

- The college is developing a property strategy to improve its accommodation, and is currently actively engaged in negotiations for a new site to re-locate the campus.
- New partnerships are being developed with a local independent school in respect of its sixth form provision, which will benefit school and college students. The college is also leading the development of an International Baccalaureate (IB) programme with an independent school and local secondary school, due to start in two years time.

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