

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of university: Southampton Solent University

Date of visit: 30 April 2009

Context

Southampton Solent University provides a significant volume of further education in two quite distinctive areas of learning. The university makes a significant contribution to further education locally and regionally and is a lead institution in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Lifelong Learning Network.

Warsash Maritime Academy (WMA), a faculty of the university, provides a wide range of training and education for seafarers and for those intending to make a career in the maritime industry. In 2008/09 there are 41 full-time and 2255 part-time students on these programmes. Many of the younger students are cadets looking to enter the maritime shipping industry. Most of the older students attend short specialist courses in areas such as sea survival and first aid. All the courses have to comply with conditions set by a wide range of maritime bodies such as the Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB) and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

Sport Solent, the university's sports and recreation service, provides a wide range of mainly short coaching courses to regional and local sporting bodies. In 2007/08 there were 633 students studying across a wide range of sports activities and coaching courses. Sport Solent works with many schools and local sporting bodies.

Achievement and standards

How well do FE students achieve?

Success rates on the majority of courses are high, largely well over 90% and generally exceed those for the subject sector areas covered. Short courses at Warsash and Sport Solent often have 100% pass rates. The courses meet the needs of the industry well and recruitment is strong from a national, regional and international pool.

Students develop good professional skills required for life at sea. They are clear about the qualifications that they need to succeed in their profession and they make good progress. On completion of their current courses many students return to WMA to carry on their studies and gain higher qualifications. Student surveys clearly show that these students enjoy their courses and are well regarded by employers.

Success rates for younger students on the full time NCFE qualification have declined in 2007/08 and were poor. However, many of these learners proceeded to study on the HND without finally completing their NCFE qualification and are making good progress. The university has identified the reasons for this decline in pass rate and has changed the course structure for all starters in 2009. They are working closely with the MNTB and employers to effect these changes.

Quality of provision

How effective are the support arrangements for FE students?

Students feel well supported and safe. The university takes a proactive approach to safeguarding younger students and has the policies, systems and training in place to support this work. It has used the NSPCC to help it to create these structures and to provide training for its staff. Younger students are well supported and have an improved range of facilities and activities designed for them.

A new system of locally based support staff provides good support for students, including those who are resident on the site. Students regard staff as very helpful and approachable and as providing good support outside of the academic arena.

A lot of work has been undertaken recently to develop a better range of social and sporting activities, in direct response to students' comments.

How are standards of teaching and learning monitored and improved when necessary?

Most tutors complete the Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (PGCTLHE) that includes observations of their teaching performance. Staff who teach on short courses complete the Certificate in Education. Staff identify that they have good access to staff development to help them to improve their teaching. Generally the university relies on peer assessment, students' success and feedback, and external reporting from accrediting bodies to provide the evidence for the standards of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report identifies that the peer observation scheme has proved to be useful in supporting professional development, but that there is a need to ensure greater consistency and better sharing of good practice. Planning to develop the lesson observation process further is now well advanced.

Leadership and management

How well is the self-assessment process and report used to drive forward improvements and raise or maintain high standards?

The university judges its FE provision to be good and inspectors agree. Self-assessment processes are comprehensive and are built up from course reviews. Staff are closely involved in the process. Data is used effectively to support the judgements. There is a specific self-assessment report for FE provision. The university has a subcommittee of the Academic Standards and Development Committee specifically for FE which effectively monitors and evaluates this provision. Self-assessment is purposeful in identifying weaknesses and areas to improve. However, it did not identify fully the significant strengths of the good resources to support the FE provision in the university.

How effectively are students' and employers' views collected and responded to?

There are effective systems in place to gather students' views. The university generally responds well to the views of its FE students. All full-time students complete evaluations at the end of their course. Short course students have the opportunity to complete comment books and online evaluations and many of them do this. Formal evaluations of a sample of short courses are completed. Analysis of student feedback is generally very positive. Links with employers are strong. There is regular liaison and close working with industry. At Warsash for example, open days and seminars are held for employers to brief them on changes and to seek their views about the quality of the provision