ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Highbury College
Date of visit: 30 January 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

Improving success rates
- The college's provisional data for 2005/06 show that the overall college success rate for 2005/06 is 81% compared to 80% in 2004/05. This is above the national average for general further education colleges. Success rates are high at level 1 for students aged 16 to 18 and aged 19 and above. A high proportion, 36%, of the college's enrolments are at level 1. Success rates at level 2 and 3 were above the national average in 2004/05 but the rate for level 2 has dipped to around the national average for 2005/06.
- To improve success rates the college has already extended to the other courses some appropriate measures which have been successful on its level 1 programmes. These are:
  - Effective pre-entry processes that include clearer information on the courses and more appropriate entry criteria, backed up by an interview before acceptance. An initial assessment, diagnosing numeracy and literacy levels, has been introduced for all students to ensure that they are placed on the right course at the right level.
  - A thorough induction programme in which students identify and agree individual goals with staff as part of the induction process.
  - Good follow-up of progress through the newly introduced electronic student tracking system which includes communicating to teachers the attainment of students through points on entry scores.

- In general there is much improved awareness of the importance of ensuring that all applicants are appropriately assessed for their course through sound initial assessments.

- The college has also introduced an appropriate improving teaching and learning programme (see under quality) supported by some successful staff development activities.

- The college's commitment, as evidenced through staff actions, to delivering key skills suitably to the students is good. The college's policy and practices are coherent and staff promote and teach key skills effectively. The staff development to support key skills is good.

Improving apprenticeship completion rates
- There is now a good centrally co-ordinated system to undertake students' reviews more promptly.
- The electronic system is well used to monitor student progress.
- Communication with employers is good; effective work has been done to identify appropriate assessment opportunities with employers in the workplace and ensure that they understand the needs of the trainees.
- Key skills are now explained more clearly in the work-based learning context, making them more meaningful for students and understandable for employers.
- Facilities and support for students in construction are outstanding.

Success rates for Black and minority ethnic students
- The college's approach towards monitoring and reviewing performance of the different groups of students through its equality and diversity committee is good. It has been proactive in identifying follow up actions as a result of its analysis of the data on these students.
- In construction a project has been established with the Network of Black Professionals (NBP) to raise the awareness of those involved in the industry and increase opportunities for minority ethnic people and females.

Quality of education and training

Improving teaching and learning
Good progress has been made in helping staff to improve teaching and learning. A new centre for teaching and learning is providing a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to improving teaching and learning. New staff, many of whom enter direct from industry, are well supported by mentors and a successful training programme.

Teaching and learning is also being improved by the lesson observation process. This ensures that teachers have performance targets directly related to improving learning and teaching and helps the college to decide on its next development themes. For example the college has prioritised improving the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and developing planning and teaching strategies to meet each student's needs. Staff expertise in observing lessons has been improved, resulting in a more realistic grade profile than that for previous years.

Other successful measures introduced to improve teaching and learning are:
- Tips for Teachers programme for teachers and workshop instructor assessors. Staff consider this effective in sharing good practice and helping them to improve their skills.
- Good use of external expertise to motivate students and make them aware of industry practices and standards.
- The adoption of Moodle as the new college virtual learning environment (VLE) and the investment in ICT, such as interactive whiteboards.
- Peer observation and mentoring
- A very positive staff conference on teaching and learning, which is to be a regular event.

Additional learning support
- Since the last AAV good progress has been made in ensuring take up of additional learning support as a result of better identification of need at initial assessment and induction. The Northarbour centre also provides good and appropriate support. Good monitoring of the impact of the support is being developed.

Impact of changes in the tutorial programme
- Coordination from the centre is effective and there is a clear framework for delivery of tutorials. The development of tutorials to link with the themes of Every Child Matters (ECM) has been taken forward positively and staff in many areas have integrated the themes into their courses. Monitoring of tutorials by observation and by student questionnaires is being developed well. However, when staff adapt the framework at course team level there are no mechanisms to ensure full or adequate coverage of the tutorial programme.

Leadership and management

Impact of the changes in the management structure.
- The college structure established in 2005 is understood by all staff and the changes have brought a clearer student focus. The new structure has also ensured greater accountability and responsibility in planning. Effective features are:
    - Monthly reporting and reviewing of student progress based on a user-friendly traffic light system.
    - The Programme Quality Review (PQR) process assessing performance and reviewing targets.
    - A performance related appraisal system.
    - The successful establishment across the college of the Skills for Life (SfL) initiative through a clear and definite structure managed by a senior position. The increased SfL success rates show the impact of the changes.

Impact of changes in the management of work-based learning
- Changes have resulted in clearer expectations and performance targets being set for learners and tutors.
- There is now improved coordination of programmes.
- Central coordinators are used effectively to coordinate student reviews and involve employers more closely.
- Tracking of students has been improved.

Improving attendance
- The introduction of same day follow-up and closer monitoring of absences, together with the introduction of the yellow and red card system have been effective in improving attendance. In 2005/06 this was 85%.

Self Assessment
- Work has been done to help staff to understand how to use and analyse data at course team level but there is still further training to be done to secure greater ownership and improve expertise.

Internal Verification (IV)
- Several actions have been taken to improve the IV process including training and earlier sampling but the college recognises more needs to be

done to raise the profile amongst staff to ensure IV is fully effective across all areas.

Ensuring awareness of safeguarding and child protection

- Several appropriate actions have been taken to ensure staff, particularly new staff, are fully aware of their responsibilities. Examples are:
  - Training at the start of each new year
  - Staff briefings
  - Posters and displays highlighting its importance
  - Some schemes of work include elements of safeguarding and child protection
  - The Tips for teachers training course includes safeguarding and child protection and ECM themes

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

- Students commented favourably on the goal and target setting though they considered that sometimes these could be more precise than, for example, "completing work on time or improving presentation".