

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Huddersfield Technical College  
Date of visit: 5 October 2006

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

At the previous AAV in January there was much evidence that the college was actively addressing the retention issue through a range of strategies. What do the most recent (college) data show about the impact of these strategies?

- Strategies to improve retention include: recruitment with integrity, improved school links, more robust systems for additional learning support, educational maintenance allowances (EMAs), subject coaches, better teaching and learning. Provisional college data indicate that overall retention has increased by 2% in 2005/06. Courses which show particular improvement are National Diploma in travel and tourism, applied advanced business, most areas of hair and beauty therapy, National Diploma manufacturing and engineering (2 year), and sport. The college is aware that not all areas have improved to the same degree, but will monitor these areas closely and regularly through operational plans and performance reviews.
- Attendance and punctuality have improved, as a result of a range of strategies, including EMAs. Staff report that they have a clear understanding of expectations and are more confident in tackling low level disruption and punctuality. The college recognises that there are still some inconsistencies across the college, but are confident that further improvements will be made.

What do the most recent value added data indicate about students progress?

- The value added data for 2006 indicate an improving picture for the college. Learners, overall, are getting the grades predicted by their GCSE scores. Value added data are good in science subjects, English

language and literature and health and social care. Learners underachieve in sociology, art and design, and vocational business compared with their prior attainment. The college is beginning to make use of the learner achievement tracker (LAT) chances graphs, and welcomes this development.

Have the successes and improvements in construction and hairdressing been maintained? Have the areas of weaknesses in work-based learning (WBL) engineering and plumbing been addressed? What are (timely) framework completion rates like now?

- Framework completion rates are improving over time. Areas previously judged to be weak are improving. In plumbing, absence of a qualification at level two meant that learners were on advanced programmes that were too difficult for them. This was recognised by the college, and the introduction of a suitable qualification at level two means that learners are now on appropriate programmes. Initial assessment is now much more rigorous, and additional learning support is available to learners who need it. The college has imposed minimum entry requirements and learners who fall below this must accept additional learning support if they wish to follow a college course.
- Few work-based learners are unemployed. Most find work before joining their college course. Some are on work placements and some opt to do a period of full-time study before working. WBL programmes are responsive to the needs of the local area. The shape of provision has evolved to reflect this. Contact with local employers comes through the review process. The college is now better at resisting pressure from employers to rush learners through qualifications. The college has front loaded key skills elements to aid achievement of the full framework rather than just of national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Staff have introduced the technical certificate at a later stage in the programme to prevent learners from leaving early with incomplete qualifications.
- In some WBL, the college conducts further tests of learners' suitability for the course, for example, manual dexterity tests for hairdressing learners. There are a number of incentive schemes for learners, and success is regularly celebrated. On some programmes vouchers can be exchanged for tools, giving good incentives to learners to perform

well. If learners have an opportunity to achieve a target in work at short notice, they can phone assessors who will come in to witness it. There is better emphasis on challenging learners to reach their true potential. When learners achieve level one numeracy, they move straight on to level two. There is currently a lag of around five percentage points in the timely completion of WBL programmes and NVQ achievement, which suggests that some learners are not completing key skills. In hospitality, this is particularly marked, where the framework completion rate is 29 per cent, compared with an NVQ completion rate of 80 per cent. There are some good, appropriate additional qualifications available to learners, for example, manual handling and basic food hygiene.

What do 2006 provisional data for key skills show? Have the improvements been maintained and/or bettered? Are there any improvements at level 3? Has the good key skills work in WBL been continued?

- Performance in key skills has improved steadily over a number of years. The college integrates key skills into programmes to make them relevant, and the attitude towards them is generally positive. On-line testing has been introduced, and following some initial problems with software, is working well. Tutors work well in teams to monitor and support key skills delivery. The college analyses staff development needs in advance of the introduction of functional skills, but at present there is no requirement for staff to have a minimum level of key skills to deliver them. There are specialist staff for key skills in some areas, and more are being recruited. There are quality checks through internal verification to ensure that standards are maintained at a high level. Last year over 3000 key skills portfolios were submitted for assessment.

## Quality of education and training

What progress has the college made in developing a new process for lesson observation? Have there been improvements in the recording of evidence to support lesson observation grades?

- Teaching and learning continue to have a high profile in the college. In all the meetings we had with staff there was a willingness to try to improve teaching and learning and an enthusiasm for what the college

was trying to do. Staff acknowledged an increasing openness about discussing their strengths, but also their weaknesses and this is indicative of what many see as a changing culture. After much consultation with staff, the college has revised the observation of teaching and learning. Consultation about the process is ongoing. Teachers are given less notice for their observation which contributes to their performance appraisal. The college hopes this will lead to more robust outcomes. There is also more emphasis on informal 'drop in' observations by programme leaders.

- During our visit, learners commented adversely about very long sessions and some dull and uninspiring theory teaching.
- There appears to be sharing of good practice at all levels. This is developing well within curriculum area teams, but there is also cross-college sharing of good practice. Links with other colleges are being developed both to learn from others and to inform them of how they can go forward. New tutors are mentored, and are allocated fewer hours to help them to adjust to college life. Resources are generally good and readily available. The college is developing the virtual learning environment further. It is investing in mobile e-resources which staff find particularly helpful and adaptable.
- Staff morale is high. Staff have a clear awareness of college priorities.

## Leadership and management

The Principal outlined two main issues for the College:

The possible expansion of sixth form provision in Kirklees.

Proposed and much needed changes to accommodation are at a standstill at the moment. The Principal predicts that the college will remain on the same site over the next few years.

What progress has been made to ensure better monitoring of the service level agreement (SLA)?

- Service level agreements are in place to clarify roles and responsibilities. Managers have incorporated targets into these agreements, and staff are clear about their role with regard to improving retention and achievement rates.

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

- Provision for learners aged 14-16 is developing well. Preliminary evidence indicates that progression onto full-time courses is high. Effective links with schools appear to be having a positive impact on learners' choices: many learners view HTC as a genuine alternative to other post-16 providers because of the course choices.
- The college is currently working towards 'striving for excellence'.