

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Stratford-upon-Avon College

Date of visit: 21 September 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

How well do learners achieve?

- The overall college success rate improved by 3% between 2002/03 and 2004/05, compared with an increase in the national average of 7% over the same period. In 2004/05 the overall college success rate was 78%. This was significantly above the national average of 74%.
- Success rates for 16-18 year olds in 2004/05 were significantly above the national averages at levels 1 and 3, and similar to the national average at level 2. Success rates have improved since 2002/03 by 11%, 2% and 4% at levels 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The overall success rate for 16-18 year olds in 2004/05 was 72% which was significantly above the national average of 68%.
- Success rates for adults in 2004/05 were significantly above the national average at level 1, and similar to the national averages at levels 2 and 3. Success rates have improved since 2002/03 by 9% and 15% at levels 2 and 3 respectively, but declined slightly by 1% at level 1. The overall success rate for adults in 2004/05 was 81% which was significantly above the national average of 76%.
- Value-added and distance travelled indicators suggest that most learners achieve in line with expectations based on their prior attainment. The college reports a weakness in its self-assessment report for 2004/05 that measures to improve the value-added performance of A level learners as measured by ALIS have not been successful. In response to this issue, the college implemented a project to raise value-added scores in four of the weakest subject areas in 2005/06. Although the ALIS data had not been published at the time of the Annual Assessment Visit (AAV) in September 2006, examination results indicate significant improvements in pass rates in these subjects and in the proportion of high grades achieved.
- Work-based learning data indicates that overall success rates for apprenticeships have improved in recent years but are below the national

average. Timely success rates for apprenticeships have declined in 2005/06 and are also below the national average. The achievement rate on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes in 2005/06 was well above the national average.

- At the time of the AAV in September 2006, a significant proportion of qualification outcomes for 2005/06 have yet to be confirmed. It is, therefore, difficult to make many firm judgements about learners' achievements in this period. Nevertheless, with around 85% of outcomes known, it is likely that the overall success rate will improve slightly compared to previous years and remain above the national average. This continues the trend of gradually improving success rates in the college in recent years.

Quality of education and training

How has the college improved its monitoring of equality and diversity in 2005/06 and what has been the impact of any improved monitoring?

- Significant improvements have been made in the way in which the college records and analyses equality and diversity data.
- Following the self-assessment report of 2004/05 the college recognised that many of its systems for recording and analysing data were either inadequate or were not sufficiently well used. A number of initiatives were put in place in 2005/06 as part of a major review of how the college deals with equality and diversity. A clear and up-to-date set of policies and procedures are now in place, along with a detailed action plan clearly setting out roles and responsibilities in relation to the recording and analysis of data.
- Whilst the college has satisfactory systems for recording equality and diversity information, it previously did little with the information collected. Over the last twelve months the college has begun a detailed analysis across a number of cross-college areas, including the enrolment and success of under-represented groups. The college is aware, for example, of the participation of minority ethnic groups compared to their representation in the local area and to the ethnicity of staff. Analysis of participation by gender has prompted a review of the courses offered at the college and has informed marketing strategies.
- The college is continuing to develop more sophisticated arrangements for monitoring equality and diversity data. For example, the college is able to

analyse learner progression according to ethnicity and gender, and any equality issues relating to the recruitment of staff. It is also possible to analyse the effectiveness of transition arrangements for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, particularly in relation to the use of funding to support transition arrangements.

- At the time of the AAV in September 2006, it was too early to assess the full impact of the improvements made in the monitoring of equality and diversity data in 2005/06.

Leadership and management

How do senior managers ensure the effective monitoring and improvement of course performance?

- The college has good arrangements for monitoring the performance of courses. Programme managers and their head of school meet the deputy principal each term for a formal course review meeting. Course performance against targets is discussed, strengths and weaknesses are agreed, and action plans are monitored. In addition to these course review meetings, each programme manager meets with their head of school every week to discuss progress against the action plan.
- Each sector subject area has an internal curriculum review, or 'mini-inspection', approximately once every four years. The outcomes of the review, together with the course monitoring outlined above, inform self-assessment and associated action planning.
- If the college identifies that a course is significantly underperforming the course has to produce an additional action plan to show how it will bring about improvements. Such courses are subject to more detailed quality monitoring and support. For example, the quality manager will routinely attend course meetings to provide support and guidance. Senior management support for programme managers may also be provided. Lesson observations and staff training may be prioritised on these courses. Additional resources may also be provided, including learning support. Underperforming courses may also be given a higher priority for internal curriculum review.
- The close monitoring of course performance has contributed to improvements in several areas, such as art, computing and business studies. Overall college success rates and the average grade awarded in self-assessment have also improved over the last five years.

- Although action planning is clear and all key issues are addressed in the plans, some key areas for improvement are not broken down sufficiently to specific tasks to aid monitoring. In some cases milestones towards completion of targets are not specific enough, nor are they linked to quantifiable indicators to enable a more accurate view of progress. The college is currently reviewing its action planning procedures.
- The subject sector area of science and mathematics is one in which insufficient progress was made in 2005/06. The college recognises this as an area in which more rigorous monitoring of a detailed action plan, together with challenging any issues of underperformance, may be required to improve the self-assessment grade from satisfactory to good.

What is the impact of the college observation system on improving teaching and learning, and how effectively is ILT used to support learning?

- The college observation system and the use of ILT have contributed to some improvements in teaching and learning.
- A team of staff made up of representatives from each subject sector area carry out most internal observations of teaching and learning. The observation team expect to observe each teacher at least once each year, although reviews of specific courses or teacher training activities may supplement the standard observation schedule. The number of observed lessons has increased significantly over the last two years from 75 in 2003/04 to 245 in 2005/06. The college has carried out additional training sessions for observers to improve the consistency and rigour of observations. The college has improved the external validation of observations of teaching and learning through partnership arrangements with two local colleges.
- The college maintains reasonably detailed observation records, although many do not contain comments from the teachers observed. There is little recording of other classroom activity, for example, reviewing learners work, or gathering the views of learners. Observation records do not make it sufficiently clear what actions are required to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- The proportion of inadequate teaching and learning has reduced over the last two years. However, the number of outstanding and good grades has also declined slightly. A comprehensive system of support is in place for teachers whose lessons are graded as unsatisfactory. The college has recognised that further training is needed to improve the performance of teachers whose lessons are assessed as satisfactory.

- Over the last two years, the college has invested significantly in classroom ILT equipment. Initial developments focused on the curriculum area of ICT and computing, with the aim of developing a range of interactive teaching methods and a system to allow teachers to monitor learning more effectively. In 2005/06 there was a significant increase in the success rate in this curriculum area. Approximately 35% of classrooms are now equipped with ILT equipment, including interactive whiteboards, data projectors and terminals for teachers. The college is currently undergoing a substantial building programme and ILT equipment is provided in all new teaching rooms.