

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Milton Keynes
Date of visit: 27 February 2007

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

Overall college performance in 2005/06

- Success rates have improved over the last 3 years and are now close to national averages. For learners aged 16 to 18, success rates on levels 1 and 2 courses improved in 2005/06 and are now in line with the national average. At level 3, they are above average on vocational courses, but below for GCE AS and A-level courses. Success rates have improved for adult learners and are close to the national averages, except at level 1 and for GCE AS and A-level courses. Low success rates were affected by poor retention rates on level 1 ICT courses and the college has revised this provision in 2006/07. Poorly performing evening class GCE AS and A-level provision has been discontinued.
- Value added data indicate that progress relative to prior attainment improved in 2005/06 and that most learners make the progress expected. Average point scores per examination entry for level 3 courses also improved. They were above the national average and were the highest of all schools and colleges in the local authority in 2005/06.

Progress being made in improving WBL overall and timely success rates

- Overall success rates for apprenticeships have improved but the college recognises that they are still poor and below national averages. Success rates have increased from 24% in 2004/05 to 45% in 2005/06, compared with the national average of 49%.
- In some sector subject areas, there is evidence of continuing improvement this year. For example, in hairdressing the proportion of learners achieving a full framework increased from 24% in 2004/5 to 38% in 2005/06. Progress for current learners in hairdressing is significantly better with 21 of the 42 learners due to complete in 2006/07, having already achieved a full framework. In construction, overall success rates have improved from 14% in 2004/05 to 32% in 2005/06. Approximately half of the current learners, who are due to complete in 2006/07, have already achieved their full framework.

Impact of actions being taken to address variations in the performance of different groups of learners.

- The college's analysis of the performance of different groups of learners by gender, ethnicity and disability indicates improved success rates over 3 years for almost all groups of learners. Where success rates for some groups were below the college average, the college has used a range of strategies to improve learners' performance. These include working with individual learners at risk of underperforming, focussed work with specific groups, targeted ESOL support and increased training for staff on equality and diversity issues. Lower success rates for some groups are usually caused by below average achievement rates. The college does not yet collate data on the prior attainment of these learners to assess whether they make the progress expected.

Reasons for the drop in retention rates for learners aged 14 to 16 in 2005/06.

- The college analysed retention rates on 3 different strands of 14-16 provision. Lower retention rates were identified on some parts of the increasing flexibility programme (IFP) as some schools withdrew learners from the programme to take more GCSEs. Learners' surveys indicate a high level of satisfaction with 14-16 provision. The college is making adjustments to the IFP, in consultation with partner schools to ensure it meets the needs of the participating schools and learners.

Any available in-year data which indicates progress towards meeting college targets for 2006/07.

- The college has strengthened its process for monitoring performance and progress against targets, by developing a more structured approach to senior management meetings. Key performance indicators are monitored regularly and managers have up-to-date information about the performance of curriculum areas and courses. In-year retention rates indicate overall improvement compared with a similar time last year. Overall college attendance also shows some improvement, although this is variable in different curriculum areas.
- Improving success rates in 2005/06 have meant that the college has already exceeded some targets set in the strategic plan for this year, and managers are revising targets in the light of this.

Quality of education and training

Has there been any improvement in the quality of teaching and learning?

- The college has significantly increased the number of lesson observations, completing over 500 observations in 2005/06. Of these, 54% were judged good

or better. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was reduced by half. In the first half of 2006/07, over 200 observations have been undertaken, of which 63% were good or better. The college is focussing on improving satisfactory teaching through increased investment in continuing professional development and re-observing teachers, where lessons have been graded satisfactory.

- There is a well developed system for moderating the findings on lesson observations to develop consistent practice across a large team of observers. Findings from lesson observations are collated at college and curriculum area level to inform staff development priorities and plans.

The consistency of quality of target setting through individual learning plans (ILPs)

- ILPs are used widely in tutorials. At the previous re-inspection of the ESOL area, the use of ILPs to help learners' achievements of long term goals was a key area identified for improvement. A small sample of ILPs from the ESOL area seen during the AAV show much better use of specific short term targets to ensure learners know what they have to do to improve. ILPs for students in receipt of learning support also have specific and detailed targets, but a small sample seen from other areas often had more general and less easily measurable targets.

Leadership and management

Impact of actions to improve provision and curriculum management in construction.

- Senior managers have restructured the management of the construction subject sector significantly since the last inspection. Lines of accountability are now clear and a newly appointed director regularly monitors the quality of provision. The college has recently appointed a new section head, two training advisors and six new lecturing staff. Recently appointed assessors are using tracking paperwork well to identify learners at risk of not achieving their qualification. Links with employers are stronger with more rigorous monitoring of attendance. New staff are being supported with professional development including teaching qualifications or assessor awards. A youth worker is situated at the construction centre to develop enrichment opportunities including sports programmes. Learners have participated in an innovative contemporary arts project working on the construction and deconstruction of a building for an international artist.
- A dedicated key skills tutor and learning support assistants work with whole groups and individual learners on a range of issues. However, key skills are not yet integrated within the training for the NVQ. While the department currently

offers only one start date in September for the technical certificate programme, work-based learners are able to begin to collect information for their NVOs with their employers.

- Since the previous inspection, the college has a well-organised and appropriately equipped centre for construction at Kiln Farm. The recently appointed section head has further improved facilities for carpentry with the installation of individual work areas for learners to practise on larger pieces such as doorframes. Facilities for other subjects provide good spaces for learners to practise their skills.

How the college is monitoring performance in areas where it has identified concerns of some underperformance and/or slow improvement.

- The college has strengthened its monitoring of key performance indicators with curriculum managers and with curriculum and course teams. The responsibility for quality improvement now sits with the deputy principal who is developing more consistent and rigorous systems for quality improvement and monitoring. Training on the use and interpretation of data has helped managers to monitor performance more closely and to produce more rigorous self-evaluation and course reviews. The current self-assessment report at college level identifies key improvements made, and areas where performance is not yet good enough.

What progress has been made in science and maths and humanities since re-inspection?

- These subject areas comprise the GCE AS and A-level provision in the college, which is shared with a local secondary school.
- Overall success rates in science and maths have improved, although they remain just below the national averages. The proportions of A*-C pass rates on GCSE programmes in 2005/06 were mostly below average. The college is monitoring progress closely this year and believes it is on course to meet targets of 50% A*-C grades in 2006/07. Success rates improved in 7 out of 10 level 3 courses in 2005/06, although five courses still had success rates below or well below average. Courses in environmental science, where success rates were low at the time of the re-inspection, have been discontinued.
- In humanities subjects, success rates improved in 10 out of 12 level 3 courses. Of these, 7 out of 12 had success rates at or above the national average. Success rates improved significantly in GCE AS and A-level sociology, which were low at the time of re-inspection.
- In some subjects in science, maths and humanities, managers have identified that a few learners did poorly across several subjects. Managers acknowledge that the monitoring of learners' performance was not always effective in identifying underperformance. Changes have been made to improve tutorial

provision and academic progress monitoring for GCE AS and A-level learners. Managers are developing better tracking systems which can be used by subject teachers and personal tutors to help set and review individual targets for learners.

- Lesson observations over the last 2 years show some improvement in the proportion of good or better teaching observed, but a relatively high proportion was judged satisfactory. Managers have identified some key areas for further development, including increasing the focus on stretching more able learners, and ensuring learners are more aware of subject level targets.
- Curriculum managers have a good understanding of performance in their areas and in different subjects. Monitoring of the quality of provision is now more formal and rigorous.

Have improvements identified in ESOL and WBL hairdressing provision been maintained over the last year?

- Apprenticeship framework achievements in hairdressing remained low in 2005/06. So far in 2006/07, half the learners have already achieved the framework. Since the re-inspection, the college has restructured the management, integrating further education and WBL under one team leader. The team leader for hairdressing has improved the arrangements for tracking learners' progress. The tracking documentation clearly and quickly identifies learners at risk of not achieving their framework. Two newly appointed assessors work flexibly providing assessment that meets individual learners' needs well. Classroom teachers and on-site assessors share information to review learners' progress. Individual learning plans clearly show what options learners are taking. Any concerns about learners' performance are raised promptly with employers. Internal verification has improved and now includes sampling of work place and college activities.
- Learners on ESOL programmes continue to progress into main stream programmes. Over 40% of learners progressed to a higher level ESOL qualification and 55% continued at the same level but on a different programme. New, targeted programmes are providing good support for learners. For example, an English for academic studies course is enabling GCE A-level learners to achieve better grades than might be expected based on their prior attainment. The college has increased the numbers of learners on employer-led initiatives. Investment in ICT has helped to improve the previously narrow range of teaching strategies. Most classrooms have interactive white boards and the section is developing a virtual learning environment whereby learners can access learning materials on-line. Observations of teaching and learning show a marked

improvement to 60% of good or better lessons compared with 33% the previous year.

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 continues to develop strong partnerships with local schools, community groups and employers, with a clear focus on meeting local needs.