



Stratford-upon-Avon College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published April 2007	Provider reference 130837
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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Stratford-upon-Avon College
Type of college:	General further education
Principal:	Martin Penny
Address of college:	The Willows North, Alcester Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 9QR
Telephone number:	01789 266245
Fax number:	01789 267524
Chair of governors:	John Latham
Unique reference number:	130837
Name of lead inspector:	John Evans, HMI
Dates of inspection:	5 - 9 March 2007

Background of the organisation

1. Stratford-upon-Avon College is a medium-sized further education college serving South Warwickshire, although it also attracts a significant number of students from North Warwickshire, Worcestershire and South Birmingham. Across most of the college's catchment area, GCSE results are much higher than the national average and unemployment is low. School sixth form provision is extensive in Stratford. The college has some 2,000 students aged 16-18, mostly studying full-time courses, and over 5,000 students aged 19+, mostly studying part-time. About 70% of full-time students take courses at level 3, 20% at level 2 and 10% at level 1; whereas 40% of adult students are on courses at level 1. Two-thirds of students at the college are female. About 4% of students have minority ethnic heritage which reflects the local area.
2. The college provides for 200 apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships and about 100 learners on entry to employment (E2E) through South Warwickshire Training (SWT), its work-based learning arm. The college is contracted to deliver Train to Gain within two different consortia. The college is the lead partner for the Central Academy for Hospitality and Catering, a centre for vocational excellence (CoVE) shared with two other Warwickshire colleges. The college also makes significant provision for international students, primarily through higher education courses and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).
3. The college was last inspected in January 2003, when it was judged to be good overall. Its mission is "to develop the destinies of all our stakeholders by providing high quality learning opportunities that enable a full participation in active economic, social or community life".

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report (SAR) and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and students' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2
Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

Contributory grades:

Learners aged 14-16

Outstanding: grade 1

Work-based learning

Satisfactory: grade 3

5. This continues to be a good college which has managed to raise standards further and develop a broader range of strengths since its last inspection.
6. Achievements and standards are good. Success rates have been maintained at a high level and continue to improve. Students develop good vocational skills. Standards of work are good in most areas and outstanding in hospitality and the arts. Students aged 14-16 and E2E learners achieve very well. However, success rates in key skills and for apprentices remain low and value-added data indicate that GCE AS and A level students do not make as much progress as expected from their GCSE scores.
7. Teaching and learning are good. Courses and lessons are mostly well planned and there is a strong emphasis on providing students with a good variety of learning activities. However, some students are insufficiently challenged or supported because lesson planning does not take enough account of the range of student ability. Assessment practices and learning resources are good, although the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in lessons is underdeveloped. Internal lesson observations are developing into an effective tool for improvement.
8. The college meets the needs and interests of students well through a good range of courses and progression opportunities. The approach to educational and social inclusion is good. The college has developed good community links and responds extremely well to employers' needs. Although activities to enhance the curriculum are good, the college enrichment programme is limited and students have little recreational space.
9. Guidance and support for students are very good. The college provides a safe, highly inclusive and supportive environment. Advice and guidance help students to make the right choices. Initial assessment and learning support are mostly good. A very good tutorial programme promotes the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda well. However, monitoring and evaluation is insufficient to ensure target setting within progress reviews is consistently effective and learning support is always provided where needed.
10. Leadership and management are good. Effective strategic leadership is helping to increase the college's value to the communities it serves. Most curriculum management is good or better. Quality assurance arrangements are

comprehensive and high standards are being maintained. Promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. Governance and financial management are very good.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

11. The college has good capacity to improve. Managers, teachers and support staff have demonstrated their effectiveness in improving quality and maintaining high success rates across most of the provision. The college has a clear and appropriate strategic direction. Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive. Staff development supports college priorities and contributes to raising standards. Governors closely monitor the academic performance of the college. Effective financial management ensures most students have good resources. Managers have been less effective at improving value-added scores and achievement rates in key skills and for apprentices.
12. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and involves governors and all staff. The SAR provides a generally accurate picture of the college's performance and includes appropriate action plans to remedy issues. However, some strengths are overstated or inadequately evidenced, there is insufficient evaluation of teaching and learning and inspectors found further areas for improvement not recorded in the report.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

13. The college has secured good improvement since the last inspection. It has built on its existing strengths, including high standards of attainment and the excellence of provision in hospitality and the arts. Other strengths have been developed, particularly in its responsiveness to 14-16 year olds and to employers and in guidance and support for students. The college has effectively addressed the need to improve level 1 provision, initial assessment and learning support for part-time students, the use of value-added data in setting targets and the majority of concerns with accommodation and resources. The college has grown its literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision substantially since the last inspection. However, issues around the low success rates in GCSE mathematics, key skills and much work-based learning, the limited enrichment programme and outdated science accommodation remain.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- high success rates with a continuing trend of improvement
- good standards of student work with some outstanding practical work in hospitality, visual and performing arts
- a particularly varied and effective range of learning activities
- outstanding provision for students aged 14-16

- very effective E2E provision
- highly inclusive and supportive environment
- good employer and community links
- very good advice and guidance for students at all stages of their college experience
- comprehensive tutorial support including very good group tutorial programme
- good strategic leadership
- effective management action to continue raising standards
- very good governance and financial management.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- how effectively students are challenged to achieve the best possible grades
- apprenticeship framework achievement
- key skills achievement
- the limited college enrichment programme
- insufficient monitoring of the quality and impact of initial assessment, learning support and tutorials
- the superficial evaluation in some sections of the SAR.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

Contributory grades:

Learners aged 14-16

Outstanding: grade 1

Work-based learning

Satisfactory: grade 3

14. Achievements and standards are good, as the college has judged them to be. Success rates are high and have remained well above national averages for the last five years. The overall success rate was 80% in 2006, 6% above the current national average. At 73% in 2006, the long course success rate was 11% above the national average. This places the college well within the top quartile of similar colleges. The sustained trend of improvement in success rates is equally evident for students aged 16-18 and for adult students. A significant decline in retention at level 2 in 2005/06 has been vigorously addressed and current in-year retention is high. Success rates on short courses are high for adult students and around the national level for students aged 16-18. Attendance, which averaged 84% in 2005/06, is satisfactory, with some wide differences between curriculum areas.
15. A high proportion of learners on the E2E programme progress into further education, training or employment. However, a low proportion of work-based learning apprentices have achieved a full framework in the last three years; in 2005/06 it was 26%. This partly reflects the low achievement rates in key skills across the college. In 2006, key skills success rates were well above average at level 1, but poor for the larger key skills provision at levels 2 and 3. For students aged 14-16 who take a college course during Key Stage 4, retention and achievement are very high and most of these students subsequently progress to the college.
16. Despite the high success rates, data provided by the advanced level information system (ALIS) indicate that many students on AS and A-level courses do not achieve as well as expected from their prior GCSE attainment. This is particularly evident for higher ability students and is reflected in below average achievement of higher grades in many subjects. Nevertheless, the standard of students' work is mostly good, work-related skills are well developed and practical work is outstanding in hospitality and the visual and performing arts. Students are well prepared for future working life. Progression between different levels within the college is good and each year about 50% of full-time, advanced-level students move on to higher education.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

Contributory grades:

Learners aged 14-16

Outstanding: grade 1

17. Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning is good. The best lessons are characterised by good planning, clear objectives being shared, appropriate pace, effective checking of understanding and knowledgeable teachers providing a wide variety of learning methods. Students work purposefully and enjoy their studies.
18. There are very few unsatisfactory lessons. Weak aspects of some satisfactory lessons include the insufficient use of differentiation; inadequate checking of the learning taking place and low levels of learner concentration. Teachers have comprehensive profiles of students' preferred learning styles, GCSE attainment and learning support needs, but these are not consistently influential in planning lessons. The availability of ILT has been improved by recent accommodation developments, but it is still underused in lessons.
19. Assessment is fair and rigorous. Assignment briefs are well written, thoroughly moderated and understood by students. Most marked work is returned promptly with good developmental feedback. Internal verification procedures are reliable. Comments from external verifiers are positive and issues they identify are acted on and carefully monitored. Parents and employers, where appropriate, are well informed about students' progress.
20. Specialist learning resources are excellent in hospitality and performing arts. The library offers a good range of books, magazines and on-line resources. Students have good access to computers and value the availability of laptops on a wireless network in the library. Teachers have, or are undertaking, a teaching qualification, with good support from the college's teacher training department. Teachers' vocational experience is good, especially in hospitality and catering and visual, performing arts and media.
21. The number of internal lesson observations has been increased but varies widely between curriculum areas. Although joint lesson observations carried out by inspectors with the college's own observers showed close agreement on the quality of teaching and learning, records of observations provide too little evaluation of how much learning is taking place. Plans are in place to develop the moderation of grades awarded. Clear action is taken where underperformance is identified.
22. The college has accurately graded its approach to meeting the needs and interests of students as good. A broad range of vocational and academic courses, with clear progression routes, is offered from pre-entry or entry level to level 4. These include a wide variety of AS and A-level subjects offered in successful collaboration with local schools. Provision for 14-16 year olds is

highly successful; some 200 learners from local schools attend a range of vocational courses catering for all abilities, including a programme designed for the more disaffected.

23. The college's responsiveness to employers' needs is outstanding. Learning is provided for many adults in a wide variety of work places and the new Train to Gain contracts have extended opportunities further. Work-based learning opportunities have been significantly expanded since the last inspection.
24. The approach to educational and social inclusion is good. E2E provision is particularly flexible and responsive to learners' needs. A pre-E2E course is offered for those not yet ready for the demands of E2E. ESOL provision has grown significantly. An appropriate range of Skills for Life courses is now offered in the college and the community and the range of courses at level 1 has increased. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are fully integrated into college life and have much improved accommodation and resources. Links with external agencies are good and ensure students with mental health and other disabilities are able to access learning.
25. Curriculum enhancement activities are good. Students have access to a good range of trips, guest speakers and opportunities to experience the world of work through work experience or work-related activities. Tutorials cover a range of lifestyle issues and charity fundraising activities are encouraged. Almost 50% of students feel there are insufficient cross-college enrichment opportunities. There are too few clubs and societies and little access to sporting activities apart from a small gym. Currently, there is no student recreational space, although there are plans to provide this.
26. Guidance and support for students are very good. The college provides an extremely supportive environment for students with a wide variety of needs. Students and parents speak highly of the approachability and helpfulness of staff. An extensive range of support services includes an on-site nurse and a well used counselling service. Good links with a wide range of external support agencies enable students to be referred to other professionals when appropriate. Very good advice and guidance ensure students are on the right courses. Careers advice and education are effective in guiding them towards opportunities open to them.
27. Comprehensive initial assessment and diagnostic screening are undertaken with all students and integral to the effective admissions and induction procedures. Detailed individual risk assessments are completed where appropriate to ensure student safety. Students' support needs are clearly compiled and shared and good additional support helps to meet most students' learning needs. Many students value and benefit from tailored one-to-one support, although in-class support is not available as widely as it is needed. The well resourced key skills centre provides a good 'drop in' facility for students needing additional support

within an informal learning environment. Targeted support to improve progression from level 1 to level 2 has increased retention and achievement rates.

28. Personal tutors provide good pastoral support. Tutorial arrangements are comprehensive. A very good group tutorial programme aims to cover all aspects of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda. Attendance at tutorials is high. There are regular one-to-one opportunities for progress to be reviewed. However, within these reviews, target setting and the recording of students' progress vary in quality. The college does not sufficiently monitor and evaluate the quality and impact of initial assessment, learning support and tutorials.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

Contributory grades:

Learners aged 14-16

Outstanding: grade 1

29. Leadership and management are good. The principal and senior managers, strongly supported by governors, have set a clear and appropriate strategic direction for the college. The college plans and adapts its range of provision well to meet the needs of the area and the priorities of the LSC. Success rates have been maintained at a high level and continue to improve. The leadership style is open and consultative and communications across the college are good. The quality of provision has been strengthened in many curriculum areas. Most curriculum management is good, some is outstanding. Provision for students aged 14-16 is extremely well managed.
30. Managers have a clear and strong focus on raising standards. Comprehensive quality assurance arrangements are in place. The performance of curriculum and service areas is regularly and closely reviewed. Following these reviews, actions taken, such as those to address last year's decline in retention on level 2 courses, usually succeed in resolving areas of concern. However, actions to improve some of the weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been slow to have an impact.
31. Accurate data supplied by the management information system enable managers and teachers to analyse students' performance and set, in most instances, challenging and realistic targets. There are established procedures for staff appraisal and a substantial staff development programme supports quality improvement by linking together appraisal, the college's priorities and students' learning needs. Outcomes of lesson observations are discussed at curriculum team meetings, but are not analysed at college level to produce an overall evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning, determine common issues or share good practice. Students' views are collected via surveys and meetings with managers and governors. The college has established procedures for how quality improvement arrangements should be implemented. The self-assessment process is comprehensive, but although the resulting report is a

detailed and generally evaluative document, it does not fully capture the college's performance.

32. Promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The college complies well with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. There are appropriate procedures for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults, including a central register of checks carried out on staff. However, there has not yet been sufficient staff training in equal opportunities, promoting good race relations and identifying signs of abuse.
33. Governance is very good. Governors closely monitor the college's academic performance. They have a good range of skills to support the work of the college and their knowledge and understanding of the needs of the local community and employers are strong. Financial management is robust. Much accommodation has been significantly improved since the last inspection. Given its high success and the good or better quality of most provision, the college provides good value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	03/04	232	56.5	60	-3.5	708	73	59	14
	04/05	152	72	64	8	959	78	62	16
	05/06	135	74			1401	82		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	65	46	60	-14	30	53	47	6
	04/05	48	50	65	-15	8	25	52	-27
	05/06	-	-			-	-		
NVQs	03/04	49	73.5	61	12.5	1	100	62	38
	04/05	28	79	67	12	1	0	67	-67
	05/06	82	68			-	-		
Other	03/04	135	53	60	-7	699	74	59	15
	04/05	124	71	64	7	958	78	61	17
	05/06	53	83			1401	82		

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	03/04	392	58	56	2	489	71	54	17
	04/05	517	61	60	1	712	64	59.5	4.5
	05/06	417	57			415	60		
GCSEs	03/04	182	58	61	-3	37	76	59	17
	04/05	246	54	64	-10	77	64	62	2
	05/06	201	54			32	63		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	20	75	63	12	1	100	57	43
	04/05	15	73	67	6	1	100	70	30
	05/06	-	-			-	-		
NVQs	03/04	70	66	52	14	73	71	53.5	17.5
	04/05	107	72	57	15	130	77	60	17
	05/06	83	57			102	48		
Other	03/04	120	52	54	-2	378	70	53	17
	04/05	149	64	60	4	504	60	59	1
	05/06	133	61			282	64		

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	03/04	1,684	71	64	7	348	62	53.5	8.5
	04/05	1,911	73.8	67.5	6.3	513	66	57	9
	05/06	2,235	76			415	64		
A/A2 Levels	03/04	335	89	84	5	45	69	65.5	3.5
	04/05	431	93	86	7	42	79	69	10
	05/06	520	89			53	62		
AS Levels	03/04	951	66	63	3	100	66	50	16
	04/05	1,100	66	65.5	0.5	57	67	52	15
	05/06	1,322	71			46	63		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	64	77	52	25	5	80	43.5	36.5
	04/05	21	52	60	-8	1	100	53	47
	05/06	7	57			-	-		
NVQs	03/04	26	88.5	54	34.5	73	45	47	-2
	04/05	42	90.5	62	28.5	121	64	54	10
	05/06	51	100			104	65		
Other	03/04	308	63	56	7	125	66	56	10
	04/05	317	74	60	14	292	64	58	6
	05/06	324	71			208	65		

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2003/04 to 2005/06.

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	58	33	32	53	47
	Advanced	40	33	31	45	48
2004/05	Apprenticeship	77	38	38	57	50
	Advanced	12	33	34	42	48
2005/06	Apprenticeship	68	38	53	49	58
	Advanced	25	48	44	72	54

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

b) Timely success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	58	23	16	38	24
	Advanced	38	29	19	42	30
2004/05	Apprenticeship	77	25	22	45	29
	Advanced	16	25	21	31	31
2005/06	Apprenticeship	68	16	33	25	38
	Advanced	29	31	27	59	34

* The number of learners who planned to complete their learning programme in the given year

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

c) Outcomes on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes managed by the college 2004/05 to 2006/07

Year	Number of starts in year	Achieved Objectives *	Progression **	Still in learning
2004/05	88	70	70 (80%)	23
2005/06	90	70	70 (78%)	1
2006/07 ***	77	44	44 (57%)	29

* These are key objectives identified for each learner following an E2E programme

** Progression is measured in terms learners' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period

*** Up to February 2007.