

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Macclesfield College
Date of visit: 3 July 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

Have there been any further improvements in in-year retention and success in 2006/07?

- LSC data for 2005/06 show that the college's overall success rate was 84%: in the top quartile and very nearly in the top 10% of colleges. Success rates for 16-18 year-olds were good in 2005/06: at levels 2 and 3 they remained in the top quartile of colleges nationally, and at level 1 they rose from 62% in 2004/05 to 72% in 2005/06, against a national average of 69%. Adult achievement on long courses was above the national average at all levels except for the rate for 48 learners on GCE A levels which remained below the national average.
- In the current year the indications are that results have continued to improve. College data for 2006/07 show retention at 89% overall and a success rate of 86%, compared with 84% in 2005/06. For adult A level learners, results are not yet known, but retention has increased from 81% to 92% this year. For the small cohort of work-based learners on a nurse cadet scheme, in 2005/06 achievement of apprenticeship frameworks was good, but success rates for advanced apprenticeships were low. This programme has ceased in 2006/07, following changes in NHS funding for the scheme.

Has the action taken to improve the consistency of results been successful?

- Close attention has been paid to setting and monitoring of retention and attendance targets, with reviews carried out throughout the year. The 2006/07 action plans show that each curriculum area has identified their areas of underperformance and action planned to address it. For example, area 7 aims to tackle achievement of 16-18 year olds on level 2 programmes, while area 14 is focussing on retention of adult learners at level 3. The June update to the plan suggests many of these actions have been completed successfully.

Based on the college's in-year data, the lowest success rate in current year is 79% in retail; all other areas have success rates between 80 and 100%.

How effective are measures to improve success rates in key skills?

- Success rates for key skills qualifications continue to improve, although the college recognises further improvement is required. Retention rates for key skills courses have improved from 58% in 2005/06, to 89% in the current year, based on the college's data.

Quality of education and training

How are teachers being supported and encouraged to make use of a wider range of teaching approaches?

- The college places a high priority on staff development for teachers. Teachers have a target of 30 hours of continuous professional development (CPD) each year, but many have done far more than this. The staff development programme has included sessions on specific techniques such as differentiated learning and questioning techniques as well as wider issues such as e-learning. The college also supports teachers to attend external courses. Appraisal of teachers has a particular focus on developing their teaching practice and the range of methods they use.

What are the outcomes/action plans from the teaching observation process this year?

- The teaching observation process is well established and its outcomes are well used to improve quality of provision. Currently all full-time teachers are observed twice a year and part-time teachers once. All observations are moderated internally, and the college plans to introduce external moderation through its local consortium next year. The college has analysed the outcomes of the 163 observations carried out in the current academic year. 76% of lessons were graded good or better, an increase of 1% over last year. The analysis breaks down the results by learner age to show that teaching is less strong for 16 to 18 year olds than it is for either adult or 14 to 16 learners. Teaching observation reports are well used to inform staff development. The quality assurance unit compiles a list of strengths and areas for improvement from observation records and uses it in designing the college's staff development programme. Teachers receive helpful feedback from observations. Where this shows development needs, they are guided to an appropriate training session. Detailed analysis of observation profiles are being carried out as part of a benchmarking

exercise through the Quality Improvement Agency network. The outcomes of this will be used in the self-assessment process starting in August. Further improvements to the observation of teaching and learning are planned for 2007/08, including vocational area inspections and a greater use of risk analysis in planning additional observations.

Have changes been made to the feedback provided to teachers in the teaching observation system?

- As part of the post inspection development, observation record sheets are being re-designed to include more detailed sections for teacher feedback and measurable target setting. Observers have completed external and internal training in recording detailed, measurable improvement targets.

How has the college developed its use of information and learning technology (ILT) within teaching and learning since the inspection?

- An ILT strategy and accompanying action plan contains clearly defined performance targets for staff and learners use of the virtual learning environment (VLE). Targets have been set for staff on the use of the VLE by both learners and staff in the coming academic year. A wide-ranging e-learning showcase for all staff was delivered as part of the annual staff development week. Learners received an induction to the VLE in September: this has been updated for delivery in September 2007. Learners report that the VLE is a useful supplement to the information they receive through their classes. Not all teachers have yet begun to use the VLE as an integral part of their teaching schemes, but this is being encouraged through the work of the ILT mentors. There are now 7 ILT mentors in the college, who work with curriculum teams to identify opportunities to improve schemes of work and lesson plans by incorporating ILT and the use of the VLE.

What are the outcomes from the action and development plan for tutorial provision?

- The college was judged outstanding in meeting learners' needs at the last inspection. As a minimum, all full-time learners receive a one-to-one tutorial every term, as well as weekly group tutorials. The college is developing an innovative tutorial provision through its close links with its partner schools. It aims to establish a cohesive learning community within the new learning zone by holding combined group tutorials for learners from the different institutions. Personal tutors will

support, give guidance and monitor learner progress at weekly group meetings and one to one meetings every two weeks.

How well delivered/embedded are skills for life and key skills?

- The college's general policy is to provide key skills as discrete provision, but in some cases, such as engineering, key skills are embedded within the curriculum. At induction, all learners are offered the opportunity to re-sit GCSEs or take key skills. The importance of acquiring key skills in an occupational context is communicated to learners and parents explicitly, with progression onto higher level programmes dependent on literacy and numeracy qualifications. Attendance and retention on key skills sessions has continued to improve during 2006/07.
- The college has sensible and well conceived plans to further develop and embed skills for life within the curriculum, which have been piloted in health and social care programmes. Further developments will include hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes during 2007/08. The implementation has been supported with staff development to build confidence in dealing with skills for life issues.

What improvements have been made in the monitoring of the effectiveness of learner support?

- The college has not yet determined what performance indicators it should use in evaluating this area. It monitors the overall success rates of learners receiving support compared with the whole learner cohort, but recognises that this does not adequately differentiate between the performance and needs of different groups. There is good monitoring of current practice. The student support manager monitors the effectiveness of the tutorial system and learner support through observation, learner evaluations and an audit of written records. These evaluations form part of the performance monitoring at senior and curriculum manager meetings.

Has there been any further development of curriculum enrichment?

- There is good enrichment of the curriculum, with both central direction and initiatives within curriculum areas. The centrally managed activities are mapped to the five 'Every Child Matters' themes. Curriculum areas plan vocationally specific activities, for example, learners attended a mock trial at the crown court and forensic science learners were involved in a mock crime scene. All learners are able to access financial support to take advantage of enrichment. Good

employer links provide placement opportunities, guest speakers and demonstrations.

Leadership and management

How has the college prepared for the introduction of specialist diplomas and 14-19 provision in the new Learning Zone?

- The college has achieved outstanding results in developing close collaboration with local providers, exemplified in the new learning zone which is now completing construction and will open in September 2007. This consists of a new college, a new sixth form college, a new high school, a new joint sports centre, the CoVE aerospace engineering facility, and the special school. Through the Learning Zone project, partners have developed a 14-19 curriculum plan for Macclesfield, led by the college principal. The consortium submitted bids to offer diplomas in 4 areas. Two of the diploma bids were successful, and the engineering diploma will be offered from September 2008. There are plans to develop all 14 diploma lines. This work has built on the college's role as lead partner in the local Increased Flexibility Project, providing vocational study opportunities to over 340 year 10 and 11 pupils from five local high schools.

What changes have been implemented to further improve monitoring and action planning?

- The college has continued to develop its monitoring procedures. It sets challenging quality improvement targets and is constant in its approach in achieving them. Each year five key aspects of provision are identified through internal audits as the focus for improvement or dissemination of good practice. Learner attendance and retention are actively monitored using the management information system (MIS) using electronic register data. The MIS manager reports to senior managers on these target areas. The college has developed its own system for setting minimum target grades for learners, based on their prior attainment, and this is effectively used, both within the tutorial system and as a value added measure for course teams. There are well developed systems for course costing and resource allocation.

What progress has been made to strengthen links between governors and curriculum areas?

- Most governors are linked to curriculum areas, and they are invited to activities such as planning days. The college aims to further develop these links once established in the new learning zone buildings.

How has the college coped with the additional work involved in preparing for the move to new premises?

- College managers have been careful to maintain their monitoring and management of current provision during the period of construction. A project management company has been employed to manage the day-to-day operations, and one college manager has been seconded to project manage the specification and installation of internal facilities and equipment. Despite the build project, learner numbers at the college have continued to rise and results have continued to improve.

What steps have been taken to raise the quality of promotion of equality and diversity in curriculum areas where it was less strong?

- The equal opportunities and diversity action plan is monitored robustly with all targets met or exceeded. The principal chairs the monthly equality and diversity meetings. There has been training for staff and governors this year, which included the latest legislative requirements. There is an annual action plan setting out priorities for promoting, delivering and monitoring equality and diversity. The new learning zone will have a single code of practice for equality and diversity, and planning and monitoring of the promotion of equality and diversity will be managed centrally across the campus.

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

- Although the college has a well developed management database, the information it holds about employers provides insufficient support for the college's employer engagement policy. A new management information system will be introduced this autumn which will have the capacity to provide more useful data about employers.

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