ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: South Cheshire
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 success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on long courses continued to improve?

- The overall success rate on long courses has improved steadily and is high. Improvement at level 2 has been significant year on year and at level 3 there has been small improvements year on year. At level 1 there was significant improvement in 2005/6.
- Retention rates improved in 2005/6 having been steady in previous years.

Have success rates for adults improved in 2005/6?

- The overall success rate on long courses declined significantly in the years to 2004/5. In 2005/6 success rates at levels 1 and 3 recovered by around 4% but not to previous high levels. They remain at or around the national average. Success rate at level 2 declined slightly in 2004/5 and was then maintained at this level in 2005/6. In 2005/6 the rate was at the national average
- Retention rates for adults have followed a similar pattern.
- The college is aware of the areas which are declining or not improving and has taken appropriate actions.

Quality of education and training

What progress has been made in the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning and the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) for assessment?

- Progress, considerable in some sector subject areas (SSAs), has been made in using ILT. College staff in some areas are developing useful and

interesting interactive learning packages. The VLE is managed well and is regularly updated and keeping pace with developments in teaching and learning and in assessment. College records show an increasing level of learner usage, particularly in areas which contain interactive software. Learner reviews are favourable, confirming that the VLE is useful and helpful to learners.

Have planned changes to the enrichment programme led to improved participation and enjoyment for learners?

- Enrichment programmes are now devised and delivered within the faculties, rather than for the college as a whole. The content of the programmes is appropriately informed by advice from teachers and learners and by course reviews. There is a specific enrichment programme to meet the needs of learners who have been identified as gifted and talented. An outdoor activity day with a focus on team building has been introduced and was well-attended this year. The learner feedback on this initiative has been good and it is planned to expand the programme in 2007-08. Participation in enrichment activities has improved. Feedback indicates that learners have benefited from and enjoyed enrichment activities.

How effective have the planned improvements to the tutorial programme been?

- Student tracker software has been improved. The system now holds appropriate information for all learners for example on their attendance and punctuality, their individual learning plans, the results of initial assessment, records of individual tutorials, and notes of actions which need to be completed by the learner. The system provides useful information for tutorial tutors to use in one to one tutorials.

- Full-time learners have a weekly, one hour group tutorial session. The scheme of work and session plans are differentiated for levels 1, 2 and 3. Teachers access session plans and support materials from the intranet. The tutorial programme is well devised and covers the key themes in Every Child Matters well. Tutorial staff have been increased. The impact of the newly introduced tutorial system has been reviewed in January and April. An end of year review is currently being undertaken. Areas for improvement have been identified such as the need for more staff training

on tutorial skills and further development on the use of the student tracker software.

The need to improve arrangements for initial assessment and the provision of additional support were identified as an area for development in the self-assessment report. What actions have been taken and are they effective?

- All full-time learners and those on substantial part-time programmes undertake a college devised initial assessment, covering reading, writing and number. In 2006/07 all the learners identified as requiring additional learning support received the support they required. The results of the initial assessment are shared with teachers earlier in the learners' programme, enabling teachers to plan their lessons better to meet individual learner needs.

- Useful position papers are produced annually for each department, summarising data such as the number of learners who have support needs and success rates of learners receiving additional learning support compared with those of other learners.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made since the last assessment visit on the work placement pilot?

- The college has made some improvements to its management of work experience for learners. The work experience pilot which concluded in 2005/6 informed the establishment of a set of useful guidelines which have the potential to standardise the college approach to managing work placements across sector subject areas.

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:

How has the college addressed the tendency to over-grade during internal lesson observations?

- After identifying that there was some over grading of teaching and learning in college observations, managers improved the rigor of observations through improved validation and moderation. Consequently the proportion of outstanding observations reduced from 40% to 31%. The college believes this to be a more realistic assessment of the quality of its teaching and learning

- The college continues to develop its quality systems with changes in the management of quality assurance and significant and innovative developments in its student tracker, which are helping to improve retention.