

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Stockport College, Stockport.

Date of visit: 10 May 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 achievement and standards continued to improve?

- Success rates have continued to improve over a three year period across all levels for all age groups. At level 1, between 2003/04 to 2005/06, success rates have improved by 12 percentage points, at level 2 by 10% and at level 3 by 11%. For 16 to 18 year old learners on long courses at all levels success rates are above national averages and increased by 11% over a three year period. For learners aged over 19 on long courses at all levels success rates improved over three years by 14% to above the national averages. Achievement rates for both learners aged 16 to 18 and over 19 learners have increased significantly to well above national averages. Retention rates have increased less rapidly. The college acknowledges some need to improve retention in some curriculum areas and at level 2. Focused strategies have been engaged implemented during 2006/07 and evidence suggests that retention has improved at level 2 when current data is compared to a similar period in 2005/06.

Has achievement of key skills continued to improve?

- Key skills achievement rates continue to improve. Key skills pass rates have increased from 29% in 2004/05 to 44% in 2005/06. Current data indicates that pass rates are presently at 48% for 2006/07.

How is target setting used to aid improvement and value added on level 3 courses?

- In 2005/06 value added scores based on the Learner Achievement Tracker were used to set minimum predicted grades for students on GCE A-level courses. This has now been extended to cover all level 3 graded qualifications. Performance grades are tracked on a monthly basis and minimum predicted grades are discussed with learners in tutorials. The college has developed a strong tracking and monitoring culture that contributes to the progress of learners and sets challenging targets. In particular the tracking and monitoring of learners 'at risk' of underachieving and/ or not completing has developed and intervention strategies have resulted in improved retention and pass rates for this group of learners.

Have success rates for WBL and apprenticeships continued to improve?

- Success rates on apprenticeships are improving and are now satisfactory. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes have increased from 23% in 2003/04 to 53% in 2005/06, just above the national average for similar colleges. Much effort has been applied to improving timely success rates for frameworks, which are now also just above the national average. The timely success rate for apprenticeships increased to 42% in 2005/06 compared to a national average of 34%. Similarly, the timely success rate for advanced apprenticeships have increased to 30% in 2005/06 compared to the national average of 27%. The success rates on advanced apprenticeship programmes have increased by 12% since 2003/04 to the current level of 32%. In-year data up to period six for 2006/07 indicates that the success rate for advanced apprentices is currently 45% compared to a national success rate of 48%. The success rate for apprentices is currently 54% compared to a national success rate of 52%. Improvements have been made to the selection and testing procedures, particularly for advanced apprentices. The college acknowledges that more work is required to improve success rates, particularly for advanced apprentices.

Quality of education and training

How rigorous is the lesson observation process and how does it feed into staff development?

- Recent changes have been implemented to the college's lesson observation process. A system of peer observation has been introduced to supplement the existing formal observation structure. The peer observation process is designed to further promote the sharing of good practice. Advanced lecturers/ teachers have now taken a key role in mentoring and developing teacher skills in teaching and learning. There is a good network of support available from advanced lecturer/ teachers and subject learning coaches for teaching staff.
- In areas where self-assessment grades in teaching and learning have been static over a period of time a greater focus on improvement, coupled with more challenging targets, has been implemented. Most recent evidence shows the effectiveness of these programmes through improving lesson observation and curriculum grades in the self-assessment. Staff speak highly of the support they receive in improving teaching and learning skills.
- A programme of training, mentoring and support for to improve the skills of teachers working in the 14-16 link programmes has commenced. 14-16 programmes are now monitored through a comprehensive programme of lesson observations.

How well and to what degree is the college engaged in provision for 14 to 16 year olds?

- The college has responded well to the 14-19 agenda through the development of quality 14-16 provision in partnership with local schools. In 2006/07 numbers increased to over 555 pupils in Year 10 and 500 pupils in Year 11. 12 out of 14 mainstream secondary schools in Stockport now participate in these programmes. Programmes offer a broad curriculum with all providing formal accreditation. Pass and progression rates are good. However there is a need to develop more detailed tracking and monitoring systems to assess the impact of the programmes over a period of time.

How well is the college addressing the needs of employers?

- Employer engagement is good. The college centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs) in motor cycle, care and media use employer links well to inform their curriculum and develop access to greater expertise. Employer links have led to valuable staff development on employers' premises and arrangements for college staff to attend professional training courses organised by employers. The college liaises frequently with employers to ensure their views are considered and their needs are met. The college CoVEs present a positive image of modern practices in motor cycle maintenance and repair, care of the elderly, and media. Employers utilise college facilities to deliver their own training courses.
- Recently the college was awarded a substantial Train to Gain contract which provides national vocational qualifications (NVQ) level 2 delivery to employees in health, public services and care, retail and commercial enterprise and engineering. The college has successfully participated in the development of the New Services Standard for Employer Responsiveness for colleges.
- The college uses employer links well to obtain work placements for full time learners, including learners on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes.

How effective is the quality of provision in WBL especially in the monitoring of referrals and support of learners?

- The college has developed an effective Skills for Life strategy. The implementation plan contains clear actions, responsibilities and timescales. The college has invested significantly in professional development for staff to raise awareness of Skills for Life. Key skills tutors and vocational tutors have worked closely together in developing vocational assignments in key skills and basic skills for learners. In some areas, notably construction and in hair and beauty, Skills for Life have been embedded within the curriculum. The college worked closely with the National Health Service in developing contextualised skills for life resources based in a healthcare setting.
- There is improved progress monitoring of work based learners using an online package which can be accessed by vocational staff, key skills staff, skills for life staff and managers. Learners' progress is closely monitored against each element of the framework and each learner is discussed at

monthly meetings involving appropriate staff. Learners' progress is discussed in detail with learners at individual tutorials and at reviews.

- Additional support is available for learners in their classes by Skills for Life tutors or through drop-in workshops in the Star centre. Additional key skills workshops are scheduled during holiday periods to allow learners to receive support in revising for key skills tests or compiling portfolios.

Leadership and management

- There is a strong culture of continuous improvement that prevails throughout all levels of college management. Success and achievement rate outcomes over the last three years demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of a well-focused and comprehensive quality assurance system. The strength of the college quality assurance can also be referenced in the successful integration of the former North Area College, Heaton Moor. Provision on the Heaton Moor site has been improved significantly to better meet the needs of the local community and learners aged 16 to 18. The principal and senior management team have placed a strong emphasis on teaching and learning. Self-assessment is well developed, self critical and realistic. Middle management structures are strong. Middle managers drive the improvement agenda within their curriculum 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:

- None