

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: West Cheshire

Date of visit: 23 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 success rates on long courses continued to improve?

- Success rates on long courses at all levels and for all age groups have improved consistently year on year since 2002. Success rates for all adults and 16-18 year olds at level 1 are above the national average for 2005. Those for 16-18 year olds at Level 2 are below the 2005 national average. During the period 2001 to 2006 success rates for 16-18 year olds have improved 16% at level 1, 8% at level 2 and 23% at level 3. Success rates for adults during the same period have improved 11%, 19% and 13% for levels 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

Have success rates in work based learning continued to improve?

- Overall success rates on advanced apprenticeships have improved considerably and are significantly above the national average. Overall success rates on apprenticeships have declined slightly but remain around the national average. An acknowledged error in data submission has slightly understated the overall rate. Timely success rates have also improved significantly and are at or around the national average.

Quality of education and training

What steps have been taken since the last inspection to improve further the quality of teaching and learning?

- The risk-based system of observation of teaching and learning continues and has been extended to include other activities such as advice and guidance and assessment. The system remains focused on quality

improvement. Preparations for the proposed re-development of the Handbridge campus are ongoing. Staff in all curriculum areas are currently gathering information on how spaces in the new building will be used for learning with a view to informing the architect's brief. The intention is to give proper weight to learning activities in the design of the building. The college continues to sharpen its focus as a vocational college by moving teaching and learning into a vocational setting. Sports and leisure courses are now offered at the local sports centre where the college has a considerable presence. Teaching and learning take place in classrooms and in the leisure centre and learners benefit from access to all the facilities. Learners are very much in public view in a commercial setting, which helps with their personal development. Commercial staff also provide extension training where appropriate. Learners in catering and hospitality now benefit from working in college kitchens, which ensures that learners carry out their training in a real commercial environment. Some particularly good development work is being carried out on using information learning technology (ILT) in the classroom in this area.

Has the college continued to develop tutorial and enrichment arrangements?

- The tutorial process continues to support the college's commitment to develop personal and employability skills in all learners. To standardise good practice the college has produced a minimum enrichment entitlement that each curriculum area has to make available to their learners. Tutorials are effective in supporting learners' progress and achievement over a range of activities designed to improve employment skills. Learners agree achievement milestones at the beginning of the year and personal tutors monitor learners' progress. Programmes are planned to include set periods each term to allow learners to catch up if they are falling behind, or to improve grades on work completed. Although core curriculum achievements are well recorded, the college is engaged in further development to capture and monitor learners' personal development and their commitment to additional enrichment activities.

Do college quality assurance arrangements extend to learner support advice and guidance?

- Inspectors judged the support and guidance for learners as outstanding during the last inspection. The college has maintained its development of learner support with good quality assurance practices. All key support processes identify the standards expected by the college. A well-conceived quality assurance strategy evaluates practice against these standards. From this, the college identifies clearly defined actions for improvement that form part of the college wide quality improvement plan. Additionally, an internal customer survey is used to evaluate performance of all support teams each year and this contributes to the self assessment process and development plans.

Staff acting as personal tutors receive support and mentoring as part of a continual quality monitoring process.

What steps has the college taken to improve employer engagement?

- The college has clear strategic objectives to increase employer engagement and promote the specialist vocational areas within the college. Working with a number of strategic partners the college has considered the local and regional vocational priorities and used the information to help establish new and innovative programmes. The college has a strong commitment to provide employers with a quality service to match their individual needs. Each sector subject area has targets for both commercial and learning skills council (LSC) funded programmes. Designated curriculum staff act as employer advisors and work with employers developing training plans to improve their employees' skills and productivity. Employers are very responsive to requests for involvement in curriculum evaluation, to act as mentors to learners and to provide guest speakers. The college's commitment to employer involvement is well recognised in that it was one of the 70 colleges invited by the LSC to evaluate the New Standard for Employer Responsiveness as part of the new Framework for Excellence.

Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to improve curriculum management in some areas?

- A programme of management development training has been offered to all curriculum managers along with training for aspiring managers. Take-up of training opportunities is good. New managers have been appointed in construction, information communication technology (ICT) and management and enterprise.

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:

- Further development of college quality systems
The college is in the process of extending existing measures that it uses to assess the quality of its provision in an innovative "college framework for excellence". Using the new national framework for excellence as a starting point, managers have devised a new set of measures that supplement the common inspection framework by providing a variety of measures of effectiveness and efficiency. The college approach recognises the importance of efficient delivery of provision in the context of its large population of adults and reduced funding. College measures are based on definitions of "excellence" in a variety of contexts such as responsiveness, advice and guidance, tutorials and course organisation. Performance indicators are established from the definitions and used to review every course in the college. The first set of reviews will shortly be conducted and used as the basis for self-assessment.