

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
Date of visit: 6 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

How well has the college addressed the issue of low retention rates though its post-inspection action plan?

- A well focused post-inspection action plan outlines clear strategies for improving low retention rates on a number of courses. Most recent data shows that these strategies have impacted on retention rates during 2006/07. Action taken includes the appointment of two attendance officers to allow for closer monitoring of attendance patterns and to provide additional support for checking and intervention strategies. Quick indication of poor attendance has allowed course leaders to detect and intervene early. There has been closer monitoring of learners 'at risk' of not completing their course. A more systematic approach to monitoring has also been established through the faculty review process. Current retention data for 2006/07 demonstrates a pattern of improvement when compared with a similar period in 2005/06. For example retention has improved for 16-18 year olds from 2005/06 to 2006/07 at level 1 from 79% to 84%, at level 2 from 64% to 78% and at level 3 from 73% to 76%. For 19+ learners increases have ranged at level 1 from 73% to 78%, at level 2 from 73% to 83% and at level 3 from 72% to 80%. Overall retention on long courses is currently running at 80% which is an increase of 7% over the previous year and at the national average for similar colleges. Retention rates have increased by 8 percentage points on long courses for 16-18 year olds.

What action has the college taken to improve low key skills success rates?

- During the current academic year a greater focus has been placed on teaching and learning, the monitoring and registering of learners to the appropriate key skills, better use of proxy qualifications and improved systems to ensure that end dates match the length of programme. In-year retention for 2006/07 on key skills courses show a significant

improvement from 74% in 2005/06 to 84% in 2006/07. A new model for the organisation of key skills has been developed and will be implemented in 2007/08. This model will devolve the responsibility and quality assurance for key skills to the faculties and curriculum areas.

Quality of education and training

How is the college improving the quality of teaching and learning?

- The use of 'learning champions' has been promoted throughout the college. Support for individual teachers is now in place and there is a strong improvement focus on the large percentage of satisfactory teaching identified at the November 2006 inspection, in order to further raise standards. There has been an increased focus in sharing good practice, the use of standards unit materials, the development of ICT resources and close working with learning champions to promote teaching and learning skills. The use of learning champions has contributed significantly to improvements in construction and work-based learning programmes. Developing and supporting teaching and learning is a key strand in the college's professional development programmes for staff.

What cross college initiatives have contributed to improving retention and pass rates?

- The college introduced curriculum learning centres in September 2006. The centres provide a wide range of learning resources and support and are dedicated to the specialisms taught around their location. There is a strong emphasis on technology and ICT in the centres. Since their introduction curriculum learning centres have proved popular with learners, leading to a significant increase in usage over the year. Easy access to computers and a range of ICT learning materials have contributed to the popularity of the centres. The use of computers has doubled. The centres are also used to deliver information skills sessions and staff training. The centres are well staffed and are providing a catalyst for improvements in web-based resources and the development of innovative approaches to teaching and learning through technology.
- The College's programme of courses for 14-16 year olds has made a significant contribution to the local 14-19 strategy. Over 600 learners

attended courses in 2006/07. These learners came from 16 secondary schools and two special schools and accessed a variety of courses. In 2005/06 the achievement rates for 14-16 learners on the school links programme was 76%; on the increased flexibility programme 91% and on the Young Apprenticeship programmes 100%. Of those accessing courses in Year 11 some 58% enrolled on courses at the college.

Leadership and management

How well have senior managers led the improvement strategy and post-inspection action plan?

- The senior management team (SMT) has moved swiftly to address issues raised in the November 2006 inspection. The inspection team noted that capacity to improve was good and the progress made since the inspection reflect this grade. The SMT has led the post-inspection action plan with vigour. Quality assurance systems have been further tightened. Curriculum leaders and faculty heads have a greater involvement and responsibility in self-assessment. In construction and work-based learning well focused development plans have been implemented and the impact on the quality of provision is already apparent. A strong emphasis has also been placed on improving teaching and learning. The introduction of learning champions and learning centres has proved particularly successful. The principal, supported by the SMT, has advanced a self-critical and improvement culture throughout the college.

Has the quality of provision in construction improved?

- Following the grade of inadequate for construction at the November 2006 inspection a detailed and well-focused action plan was devised. A senior manager was given responsibility for the overall implementation of the plan. Significant progress has been made in addressing areas for improvement within construction. Two learning champions were assigned to the area and have worked very closely with staff to improve approaches to teaching and learning. Internal observations in 2006/07 indicate improvements within the area. More assessors were recruited to support the achievement of full frameworks for apprentices. Resources have been updated and aligned to the changed approach to teaching and learning. Retention on construction framework courses in 2005/06 was 49% compared to a current rate of 58% for 2006/07. Success rates for 2006/07 also demonstrate improvement with a current rate of 48%

which is likely to convert to a year end figure of 60% plus. The manager responsible for construction in partnership with his staff is proactively addressing issues raised in the inspection report. Some impact of the changes instigated are already clear.

Has the management and provision of work-based learning improved?

- A new model for work-based learning has been implemented. A new manager for work-based learning was appointed in September 2006. Eight new staff have been appointed as apprenticeship co-ordinators and reviewers. Links between employers and the college have improved significantly. The responsibility for work-based learning programmes has been assigned to faculty and curriculum areas and integrated into their quality assurance processes. The checking and monitoring of progress has improved. Work-based learners are better integrated into the tutorial programme and have greater access to other college services. The use of learning centres by work-based learners has doubled. Current data indicates significant improvement in work-based learning rates.

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