

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Stephenson College

Date of visit: 12 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 the work-based learning success rates, which were above national averages in 2005/06, been sustained in 2006/07? Has the previous improvement in key skills success rates been maintained in 2006/07?

- Since the last inspection, work-based learning success rates have improved further. Overall framework success rates are predicted to improve by 4 percentage points to 67% in 2006/07. Overall timely framework success rates have improved significantly to 48%, well above the low national averages. The college recruits learners more effectively onto the most appropriate level of programme. Detailed management reports provide helpful information to track and monitor learners' progress. Regular meetings between trainers and managers are used to evaluate performance and monitor learners' progress.
- Key skills success rates have improved significantly in most sector subject areas and most have significantly exceeded the college's targets. This has been achieved through further development of the key skills team and the use of clear roles and responsibilities. Other actions to support these improvements include staff training to embed the delivery of key skills, interim internal verification of learners' portfolios during key skills sessions and test preparation.

How successful is the new Train to Gain provision?

- The Train to Gain provision is successful, with projected outcomes of 85% achievement in the East Midlands and 94% in the West Midlands. The college has worked quickly to develop systems to support this provision and is responsive to employers' needs. Arrangements to support learning are clear. Retention rates on most programmes are high. It is too soon to assess success rates.

Why have retention rates for learners aged 16-18 on level 3 courses been so low for so long? What has been done to raise them? Have these actions been successful? What are the current retention rates, compared with the rates at the same time last year?

- Retention rates for these learners were low for several years because of the relatively poor performance of learners on GCE provision.
- Managers have taken several actions to improve retention rates for learners aged 16-18 on level 3 courses. They discontinued the GCE provision and increased the focus on vocational courses and national diploma qualifications. The improved curriculum framework and more robust initial advice and guidance enable the college to ensure that learners' abilities and potential are matched more appropriately to their final course. Managers review each course with low retention, pass or success rates annually and take appropriate actions to improve or remove provision. For example, the low success rates on the engineering national diploma led to its replacement by engineering and marine training authority (EMTA) qualifications which are much more suited to learners' abilities and interests. The college has also improved additional learning support and individual learners' target setting in tutorials.
- These actions have been successful. The current retention rate for this group of learners is much higher than the national average and the rate at the same time last year. The data are accurate and are based on an electronic registration system, monthly 'completion status monitoring' reviews of leavers and comprehensive destination recording and analysis.

Quality of education and training

What has been done to ensure that teaching and learning meet the needs and interests of the more able learners? Do teachers plan lessons better to include such learners' needs and interests?

- The college has prioritised its staff development days on the dissemination of good practice in differentiation, as observed in lessons. Managers have also used subject learning coach and grade 1 training day materials to improve differentiation techniques in planning and delivery. They have used short, sharp, activity-based inputs in the three mandatory training days to focus on the benefits and applications of differentiation. Internal lesson observers reinforce this training during their lesson observations and tutors do so by agreeing more challenging targets for the more able learners.
- Monitoring of schemes of work, lesson plans, lesson observation outcomes

and target setting in individual learning plans indicates improved attention to the needs of more able learners. Learners have achieved higher proportions of higher grades in the motor vehicle and art and design areas.

- Managers expect to modify the internal lesson observation proforma to increase the emphasis on differentiation. They also wish to improve the sophistication of lesson planning, so that teachers consider higher level skills. Observers are looking for a better match between the planning and the delivery of differentiated learning.

How wide is the range of enrichment activities? Does it include academic, qualification bearing and vocational activities as well as sporting activities, visits and speakers? Why was learners' participation in enrichment so low? What has been done to encourage greater participation in 2006/07 and 2007/08?

- The range of activities has increased in 2006/07 and the college expects it to widen further in 2007/08, raising participation by learners. The activities do include academic, qualification bearing and vocational activities as well as sporting activities, visits and speakers. Learners' participation was low because the cross-college enrichment provision, changed on a 6 weekly rota, was not popular with learners. Consequently, the college moved to more provision being offered within sections in order to be more relevant to learners. One effect of the new building is that learners and staff are more aware of activities in different sections and this encourages greater cross-sectional collaboration and interaction. The impact of inspection and the increasing focus on the 'Every Child Matters' themes have helped to raise the profile of enrichment.
- Managers wish to increase the status of enrichment and so widen participation in 2007/08 by developing a wider spread of enrichment on offer across the college and by marketing the activities better in induction, on open days and via the plasma screens.

The last report refers to insufficient target setting for learners in health, social care and public services, construction and ICT. What has been done to remedy this and do all learners now engage in comprehensive and helpful target setting processes?

- Improvements in target setting have been supported by appropriate staff training and follow-up support for tutors by the tutorial and pastoral co-ordinator. The electronic assessment and learning plan (ALP) database is

well used to provide an individual plan of learning and assessment and to support target setting in tutorials. Learners, trainers and managers make effective use of ALP reports to monitor learners' progress. Tutors use revised paperwork which allows for clearer targets to be set. Individual action planning being piloted on IT part-time programmes has been beneficial to learners in managing their progress. It is planned to use this on other IT courses.

Leadership and management

Have college managers improved the provision of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)? What has been done to improve the management and the teaching in this area?

- A major reorganisation of this provision has led to much improved development of skills for ESOL learners. New staffing arrangements are in place. A revised timetable has improved access and significantly reduces the amount of teaching of mixed ability groups. Staff have redesigned individual skills plans to link individual and group learning needs more effectively. New standardised schemes of work ensure learning activities are relevant to learners' lives, interests and employability issues. Learners benefit from a new range of learning materials including resources to improve opportunities for learners to develop their speaking skills. Retention rates have improved in one centre from 31% in 2005/06 to 86% for 2006/07 and in another from 84% to 100%.

Will the new building be ready for occupation in September 2007?
Will the accommodation in Ashby no longer be used for learners?
How successful has the 2005 building been in improving accommodation and facilities for learners and staff? Did the college move to Category A financial status in January 2006, as suggested at the last AAV?

- The phase 2 building will be ready for occupation in September 2007. The final handover of the building is predicted for 20 August 2007. This is within the college's project plan.
- The accommodation at Ashby will no longer be used for construction block release programmes. These will move to the new college building for the start of the new academic year.
- The 2005 building has been particularly successful for learners and staff. The new campus provides a much improved environment for learning, better access and a safer environment. Learners benefit from the

clustering of the provision, bringing together classroom and practical based activities, learning resources and good access to the college intranet.

- The college did return to Category A financial status, based on its own financial assessments. However, it is not currently recognised as having this status because of the new costs of the phase 2 capital building project. The college expects to pay for this second phase in the near future when it will regain Category A status.

What is the impact of the 13/14-19 partnerships in which the college is involved? What has changed in the last three years to benefit young people in the area, as a result of the meetings and discussions with the local LSC and the local authority and other providers?

- The college has worked closely with schools to raise the profile of vocational education and training significantly over the last three years. Young people, teachers and parents, carers and guardians are now much better informed of vocational options via one day Year 8 tasters, 12 hour Year 9 link courses and two year (Years 10 and 11) increased flexibility courses. The college also makes provision for very disaffected Years 10 and 11 learners, Year 10 learners at risk of non-engagement in education and learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These initiatives are based on local collaborative agreements to meet local needs.
- The 13-19 strategic partnership has been instrumental in supporting:
 - a curriculum mapping exercise which exposed under provision at level 1 and over provision at GCE level; the college increased its level 1 provision and removed its GCE provision
 - the common post-16 application process
 - a common prospectus available on-line for September 2007
 - the specialist diploma submission, which was successful for engineering.