

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Mid-Cheshire

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

Success rates were good overall at the last annual assessment visit and continued to improve in 2005/06. How does the college performance compare with data for similar colleges?

- College success rates on long courses have improved every year since the last inspection and overall success rates compare very well with data for similar colleges. At levels one and two in 2005/06, they were well above the 2004/05 national average for all age ranges. 16-19 year old students also performed well at level 3 when the college is compared with institutions offering similar vocational provision. The college has analysed variability in performance in different divisions and taken action to address weaker areas. For example, student retention in care, computing and technology have improved significantly in 2006/07. Performance on short courses was lower in 2005/06 than in previous years. This was due to curriculum planning issues in basic skills and information technology, which have been now been addressed. The college has substantially reduced the amount of short courses it offers as its full-time provision has expanded in recent years.

How well is the college improving the value added to students' previous achievements?

- Data available shows the value added to students' previous achievements is satisfactory overall. The college self-assessment report (SAR) for 2005/06 showed 34% of full-time students achieving above their minimum target grades. The report identified this as an area for further improvement in some curriculum areas. In 2006/07 students' qualifications on entry are being more rigorously recorded on the management information system to allow better analysis of value added data.

The self-assessment report for 2005/06 identified some areas for improvement in work based learning. What does the most recent data show?

- Overall apprenticeship success rates have shown significant year-on-year improvements from 21% in 2003/04 to 57% in the current year, which is close to the national average. The college is making good progress in addressing areas for improvement identified in its 2005/06 self-assessment report. The management of work based learning has been restructured to provide better co-ordination of the provision, improve communication, and contribute to a more rigorous performance management. Employers are now more effectively involved in learners' training and progress reviews. An apprentice of the year award to celebrate learner success has helped to raise the profile of apprenticeships within the college.

Key skills achievement improved since the last inspection but continued to be unsatisfactory in some curriculum areas in 2005/06. To what extent has this been successfully tackled?

- Key skills success rates show significant improvement. College data shows success rates are on track to exceed the college target, rising from 32% in 2005/06 to a forecast 66% for 2006/07. A more effective curriculum model is in place this year and monitoring of performance has improved. There is better promotion of key skills across the college and more successful delivery of key skills as a result of staff development. College lesson observation data show an increase in the percentage of key skills sessions judged to be good or better from half in 2005/06 to three quarters in 2006/07.

'Skills for life' provision had unsatisfactory success rates on some courses in 2005/06; how has this been addressed?

- The management of the skills for life provision has been restructured and timetabling of the provision reviewed to provide increased coherence. Staff development has been strongly focussed on curriculum and lesson planning, and better use of management information to monitor learner progress and course performance. The curriculum has been reviewed with a substantial move from short programmes to long courses leading to national accreditation. Whilst it is too early to judge the success rates for 2006/07 the long course retention rate as at July 2007 has significantly improved to 97%.

## Quality of education and training

The college judged two thirds of its teaching to be good or better in 2005/06. What has been done to eliminate the 'uninspired' teaching found in some lessons?

- Since the last inspection the college has made good progress in developing more rigorous systems to judge the quality of its teaching and learning. There is much better moderation of the grading of lesson observations. Improvements in student achievement data, and feedback from learners, support the college findings that the majority of teaching and learning is good. Satisfactory progress is being made to improve weaker aspects of teaching through staff development, peer observations and sharing of good practice.

Aspects of the tutorial process were not sufficiently monitored in previous years; how has this been improved and what has been the impact?

- The college has made satisfactory progress to improve aspects of the tutorial programme that were not well monitored at the last inspection. Tutors on part-time courses are now required to submit a scheme of work for tutorials and keep records of individual tutorials. A sample of these is checked by the head of student services. College observation of tutorials has identified areas for further improvement, for example staff are being trained to help students set 'smart' targets to improve their work. The college recognises that it needs to further measure the impact of this work. A computerised system for capturing individual learning plans and monitoring of progress via tutorials is being investigated.

## Leadership and management

How has the college tackled under-performance identified in the 2005/06 self-assessment, for example management in business studies and curriculum planning in care courses?

- The college has improved the monitoring of performance significantly in recent years. There are regular and rigorous reviews of course performance, underpinned by reliable data on attendance, retention and achievement. Course reviews also include the outcome of lesson observations and the uptake and impact of learner support. Action plans to address under-performance are effective. In business and care, where

changes have taken place in management, curriculum and support services, student retention has improved this year.

How well does the college engage with the views of learners?

- There are good mechanisms to engage with the views of learners, including the student union, student council and student representation on the governing body. However, the course representative system is not sufficiently effective and plans are in place to strengthen its structure next year. Student feedback about their experience at college is generally positive.

Have there been any significant developments in accommodation since the last annual assessment visit?

- A new art and design facility is currently being built at the Hartford campus. Plans are in place for new accommodation to be built in Winsford and discussions are taking place on further developments at the Hartford site.

Do the partnership arrangements for the 14-19 curriculum continue to be effective?

- Partnership arrangements for the 14-19 curriculum continue to be good. The college caters for approximately 300 students aged 14-16 and success and progression rates on these programmes are good. The college is working effectively with schools and other partners to develop the curriculum. It has recently secured substantial capital investment to support the development of a creative arts and media diploma in partnership with two local high schools.

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

- An area for improvement is the uptake of enrichment activities. Plans are in place for September to introduce a compulsory enrichment programme one afternoon a week.
- There is too much variation in the way assignments are submitted and marked across the college. This has been recognised and changes are being introduced to the assessment policy.