

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Sutton Coldfield College  
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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.

Note: Sutton Coldfield College and Josiah Mason College merged on 1 August 2006. Both colleges were inspected during the 2005/6 academic year.

### Achievement and standards

What does analysis of 2005/06 data show by level, mode of attendance and age for each college?

- At Sutton Coldfield College (SCC) in 2005/06, success, retention and achievement rates on long courses for both students aged 16 to 18 and for adults are above the national averages for 2004/05 and improving steadily because of improvements in achievement and the maintenance of high retention rates. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 and for adults are improving on level 2 and level 3 courses and there has been considerable improvement in the success rate for students aged 16 to 18 on short courses. Overall success rates for students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 courses are at the national average and on courses at levels 1 and 2 they are above the national averages. Success rates for adults are well above national averages on courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 but below average on very short courses. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 are around or above the national average in all sector subject areas in 2005/06, an improvement from 2004/05. Success rates for adults in leisure, travel and tourism and in arts, media and publishing continue to be significantly below national averages. There are significant numbers of students aged 16 to 18 on AS and A level courses. On A level courses success rates are at the national average and on AS courses they are below the national average. Value added analysis shows that learners generally achieve as expected when measured against the predictions derived from their levels of prior attainment when they enter the college.

- At Josiah Mason College (JMC) in 2005/06, success, retention and achievement rates of students aged 16 to 18 are above national averages, especially because of good retention. This is an improvement on the previous year when success rates were at the national average. The success rate on level 2 and level 3 courses is well above the national average. On short courses the success rate is well below the national average. Adult success rates are well below the national average on courses at levels 1 and 2, on short courses and on courses across many sector subject areas, although this is an improvement on the previous year. The college has reduced its offsite delivery of adult provision considerably because of funding and quality issues and anticipates that the changed offer will improve adult success rates further in 2006/07.

What does analysis of 2005/06 provider performance report (PPR) data show by sector and level for each college?

- Prior to the merger, the last inspection of JMC identified low framework achievement in work-based courses. Work based learning (WBL) data for the merged college shows a mixed picture. For all apprenticeships, framework achievement is above the national average but the gap between the college rate and the national rate is closing. Achievement in advanced apprenticeships is considerably higher than the national average and, apart from a dip in 2004/05, is rising. In addition, the number of leavers on which this is based has increased. In two of the four sectors, health and social care, and retail and commercial services no learner has completed a training framework in the 3 years 2003/04 – 2005/06; engineering and manufacturing technologies shows a marked decline from 2003/04 to 2005/06; whereas business, administration and law shows a steady upward trend over the same period. The college intends to discontinue the provision in retail and commercial services. It identifies a past issue with technical certificates in care. In this area the first cohort will not achieve their frameworks, the second cohort will achieve late and the college believes the third cohort will be on track for timely achievement.

## Quality of provision

How is the quality of teaching and learning being developed across the college?

- The strong focus in the quality system on the observation of teaching and learning has driven up standards, so that in SCC less than 1% of lessons are unsatisfactory. In 2005/06 a common rigorous observation system has been implemented across the merged college. All tutors are observed annually.

Observers are trained and observe in their specialist area. Newly trained observers are shadowed initially by experienced observers for moderation purposes. Joint observations are also carried out with external consultants to moderate further college grading and main findings. Teachers with particular development needs are required to observe colleagues with strengths in that area.

- There are good opportunities for continuing professional development focusing on college priorities and the teaching and learning priorities are evaluated through the lesson observation process. Teaching and learning mentors within each division work across campuses and lead on teacher support, staff development and the sharing of good practice. For example, the most recent cross college event included information and learning technology (ILT) workshops led by college staff. Across the merged college there are two meetings slots per week, one of which is used for cross college activities including teaching and learning. There are several examples of cross college groups working to improve teaching and learning and raise standards: for example, an A level improvement project. The college conducts teacher training in house and encourages staff not yet qualified to work towards qualification.

The college intends to implement a standardised process of initial assessment across all campuses in September 2007. What does the current analysis of practice show?

- Although the target date for full implementation of a common system of student services is September 2007 a great deal of standardisation has already taken place, generally with SCC processes being adopted at JMC: for example, student information, policies and procedures have been standardised with common handbooks and diaries issued to all learners. The JMC reporting system for foundation learners was considered a strength and has been adopted across the merged college. Student mentors are in place on each campus.
- Currently all full-time learners on courses at levels 1 and 2 and those without the requisite General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grade in mathematics and English on Level 3 courses undergo initial assessment electronically. Where indicated, further diagnostic testing identifies support needs and/or the appropriate level of basic or key skills that students should work towards. A common system of student target setting and monitoring has been adopted across all campuses ensuring all full time learners receive a minimum level of individual support with review meetings each term.

- Punctuality, which was raised as an inspection issue at SCC, is addressed rigorously; however, local travel difficulties mean this is likely to remain an issue for some students at the start of the day.

How is the delivery of key skills being addressed across the college to raise success rates?

- At the last inspection Josiah Mason College had low key skills success rates and had started to address this before the merger however at present those on the JMC campus have a limited programme of key skills. From the start of the next academic year JMC will adopt the same approach as the SCC campus.
- All full-time vocational learners at the SCC campus are taught key skills in the context of their main programmes. GCE A level learners all take general studies, and many achieve the key skills of communications and information technology through this qualification. Apprentices attending college on a full time basis have timetabled key skills lessons taught in discrete sessions and are programmed to complete their key skills in the first year. Apprentices without a full time college phase are taught key skills either during day release in the college or in some cases in their employer's premises.
- Learners across the college have the opportunity to study IT key skills, delivered by IT specialists.
- Key skills teaching is included in the observation of teaching and learning programme across the merged college.

## Leadership and management

Since the last inspections the SCC and JMC have merged. How successful is the harmonisation of cultures and systems across the merged college?

- Although the college merger was finalised at short notice, detailed plans have been in place for more than a year in advance of the merger and these are running to timescale. A series of documents, 'planning for partnerships', have articulated this. Joint governors' meetings, and working groups, including curriculum staff links, were established and staff speak highly of these, with JMC staff considering communications to have improved as a result of the merger. A common finance system was in operation on merger, with joint college information systems and communication systems well advanced. All staff have accepted the common contract.

- The 2 main campuses are only 4 miles apart. The colleges complemented each other in their provision and the subsequent synergy has facilitated a largely harmonious and rapid transition and has not resulted in large scale duplication or subsequent redundancy of staff. Learners currently still identify with the 2 colleges.
- A common management structure has been implemented across the college and some middle and senior managers from each of the colleges have been employed at the other college to improve consistency. The merged college is organised into two divisions, sixth form and adult, and there are common systems and processes being finalised across both divisions. As referred to above, there has been a rapid harmonisation of student support processes in the sixth form.

How is quality assured across all campuses of the newly merged colleges and how is quality being improved, especially in JMC?

- There were few differences in the quality systems of the 2 colleges and the same quality assurance system now operates across the merged college. This is predominantly the SCC system jointly reviewed by staff from both colleges. The system is data led, includes information from stakeholders, requires accountability, and is monitored closely through standards boards. It appears rigorous although in the adult division at SCC success rates in two sector subject areas are below national averages for the second year running. In the sixth form all sector subject areas underperforming in 2004/05 have been improved and their weaknesses remedied.

How effective are arrangements for the management of Skills for Life provision, including key skills, across the merged college?

- On merger, a new faculty, 'Skills for Life and Partnership' has been formed across the college, responsible for work-based learning, ESOL provision and key skills. There is an overarching college policy for the delivery of key skills.
- The faculty action plan aims to address the underperformance in ESOL provision identified in the SCC inspection report. Actions include tighter monitoring of student attendance, examination entry and progress, staff development for all tutors, improved quality of numeracy delivery, and greater embedding of skills for life into vocational programmes. It is too early to judge the impact of these actions.

How effective are arrangements for the management of work-based learning across the merged college?

- Arrangements for the management of WBL are effective. Prior to the merger JMC had little WBL and that has now merged into the whole college WBL management system. The college has been very successful in employer engagement, through which it provides a wide programme of bespoke training for companies both in the local area and further afield. This adds economies of scale to its in-scope WBL for apprentices and learners in the 'Train to Gain' programmes. The college leads two 'Train to Gain' consortia and is a member of another college-led consortium. The contracts require lead contractors in the consortia to have sub-contract arrangements with the other members. It is too early to judge the success of these programmes. The college has a department devoted to business development and employer engagement, which has engendered good employer engagement in WBL and a programme which responds to the needs of local industry. This is evidenced by a very high level of repeat business. The college is receiving European Social Fund (ESF) funding for adult apprenticeships and is a pilot for Level 3 'Train to Gain'. The arrangements for the management of WBL involve a number of elements in the college including CoVE managers, faculty staff, and business development staff. Work-based learners indicate very high levels of satisfaction through learner surveys.