

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Stanmore College
Date of visit: 13 December 2007

Context

Stanmore College was last inspected in September 2006. A new principal had been appointed just before the inspection. The college's overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory, as was leadership and management. Other key cross-college grades, including capacity to improve, were graded as good. Of the curriculum areas inspected one was judged to be outstanding, three good and two satisfactory. In January 2000 Stanmore College had been reorganized as Stanmore Sixth Form College and Stanmore Adult College, each with its own management structure. From August 2007 the two colleges have once more become one, Stanmore College. Appointments to the new structure were made during 2007 to allow the restructure to take effect for the start of the 2007/08 academic year. In 2006/07, in the Adult College and Sixth Form College, there were around 1000 16-18 year old full-time learners and some 4000 adult part-time and full-time enrolments.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving outcomes for learners, particularly in key skills?	Reasonable Progress
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Stanmore College's overall success rate improved in each year from 2003/04 to 2005/06, staying just above the improving national average. College data for 2006/07 suggest a further increase of 4 percentage points, to a rate of 81%. In 2006/07 level 1 success rates improved for both adults and 16-19 year old learners; adults to well above anticipated national averages, younger learners probably staying just above the changing average. Success rates at level 2 declined slightly in the 16-18 age group; however, adults results rose from 73% to 75%, and younger learners are around probable national averages. At level 3 in 2006/07 there was a significant increase for the large group of 16-18 year old learners, to well above likely averages. Added value reports for the college are positive, particularly for 16-18 year olds at level 3.

Adult learners' success rates at level 3, declined from 76% to 70%, though this is likely to be just above 2006/07 national averages. Success rates for the higher level courses remain well above national averages. Success rates for short (over 5 week) courses for adults in 2006/07 showed a good increase on the previous year, to around national rates. In the largest curriculum areas there were generally positive outcomes in 2006/07. Science and mathematics had particularly good success rates, bar 2 GCSE subjects. Business administration and law also had some good outcomes. In the 'preparation for life and work' area ESOL results were good, but literacy and numeracy success rates showed a mixed picture with some poor results, particularly in the 16-18 year old group. Health, social care and public service success rates were also variable, though the majority were above national rates. In key skills there have been recent improvements in the level 1 application of number and communication to good levels. However, ICT success rates, particularly at level 2 remain a cause for concern.

Quality of provision

How has the management and quality of skills for life and key skills provision across the college been improved?	Reasonable progress
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The management of key skills and skills for life have changed significantly since the previous inspection, partly to support the revised strategy of embedding key skills in programme areas from September 2007. The revised system has been well implemented for communication and application of number. There was appropriate initial planning, reasonable staff training and support, satisfactory resources, and there is good monitoring of initial staff and learner activity. The ICT element has been changed to 'research skills', to provide a better link with courses. There have been some improvements here, for instance with increased attendance, but there have been problems with aspects such as staffing of lessons, staff training, and choice of assignments. It is too early to comment on the quality of the outcomes for key skills, though staff are enthusiastic about the improved relevance and apparent learner acceptance of both embedded key skills and 'research skills'.

To what extent has the college improved the quality of academic support?	Reasonable Progress
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The variable quality of academic support was judged to be an area for improvement at the previous inspection. The college has continued to develop the target setting and monitoring systems for 16-18 year old learners, notably by the fuller use of an on-line system for recording and monitoring targets. In many cases this has led to clear and helpful targets and interesting interaction with students. However, in some areas the targets are still too low-level, for instance just focusing on attendance, and there is, as yet, little or no student response. The use of feedback after assignments, extra support for literacy and numeracy needs and extra subject support continue to be a positive feature of the support for 16-18 year old learners. The introduction of ICT Key Skills under the guise of research skills is having a beneficial impact on some learners and classes. There is also an innovative discussion of and setting (on-line) of individual targets in a scheme entitled 'Every Learner (child) Matters'. In some cases this leads to involving learners with an interesting discussion under 'enjoying and achieving'. The college has recognised that more work still needs to be done on monitoring adult learners. This could involve the use of individual learning plans (ILPs) in the areas where they are not currently utilized. However, little was done on this in terms of cross-college work during 2006/07. A recent internal study has again highlighted the need for college guidance on the use of ILPs for adults, and a policy and its implementation is planned for September 2008. General support for adults from staff continues to be good, and there is improving availability of information, guidance and advice for adults.

What progress has there been in encouraging improvements in the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable Progress
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Reasonable progress has been made to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Although it cannot easily be evidenced at this stage of the year, staff feel confident that teaching and learning have continued to improve. The college has a robust lesson observation system. In 2006/07, the evidence suggested that around 77% of teaching and learning was good or better, with no unsatisfactory grades. Within the new structure, six advanced practitioners are enthusiastically providing teachers with support and

successfully encouraging staff to share good practice. To address areas for attention in the last inspection report the focus for improvement has centered on the use of integrated learning technology (ILT), integration of key skills and extending the range of teaching methods. More effective use of ILT has begun to impact on students' learning, for instance with many staff using smart boards more innovatively. Many more staff are making a satisfactory range of resources available electronically for their students using a newly developed and easier-to-use virtual learning environment (VLE).

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in ensuring that self-assessment and action planning procedures are consistently and helpfully applied across the college?	Reasonable Progress
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Quality improvement has a high profile in the college and reasonable progress has been made to ensure that self-assessment and action planning procedures are consistently and helpfully applied across the college. Within the new structure, programme co-ordinators, heads of department and directors of faculty are all involved in self-assessment, before the college-wide report is brought together by the director of quality improvement. A new on-line system, pre-populated with data on retention, achievement and success rates, is encouraging greater consistency and is helping to develop a more self-critical and evidence-based culture across the college. Action planning has become more refined. Staff recognize the value of a more systematic approach to self-assessment and are adapting to a changing culture. To ensure that it becomes a key mechanism to drive forward improvement, embedding self-assessment remains an area for still further development.

What progress has there been in clarifying the strategic improvement agenda for the college in the past year?	Reasonable Progress
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The development of a more ambitious improvement agenda was an area for improvement at the previous inspection; the college has made reasonable progress in clarifying the strategic improvement agenda in the past year. The new principal has re-structured the college to place both adult provision and the sixth-form under one single management structure, instead of two

separate ones. Whilst it is too early to identify an impact on students, staff report positively on the new structure in terms of a more consultative culture, greater consistency and better opportunities to share good practice.

The curriculum offer has been reviewed to draw on the college's strengths. Ideas for future curriculum developments are closely tied into well-developed plans for a new building on the current site. An application in principle for funding is being prepared.

The Principal, supported by governors, has been instrumental in encouraging greater partnership working with local schools and colleges. Involved in a local partnership schools consortium and Harrow Collegiate, the college has a franchise arrangement with two local schools for their sixth form provision. Links with the two other colleges in Harrow are improving. Staff have been kept well-informed of new and planned developments. There are clear plans to maintain and build on the college's strengths, particularly at level 3, and to expand aspects of the adult provision and further develop employer engagement activities.