

# Rotherham College of Arts and Technology

Reinspection report

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## Introduction

Rotherham College of Arts and Technology was inspected in November 2006. Inspectors carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in construction which was found to be inadequate. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is inadequate.

Construction was re-inspected on 1 May 2008. The outcomes of the reinspection are as follows.

Curriculum	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Construction	4	3

## Context

The college offers traditional construction trades and technician courses at levels 1 to 4 and has 292 learners aged 16 to 18 and 307 adult learners. Approximately 65% of learners study full-time. A further 166 learners are on work-based programmes of which 147 are apprenticeships and 19 are advanced apprenticeships. Courses are provided for 150 learners aged 14 to 16 from local schools. Around 4% of learners are female and 9% are from minority ethnic groups.

## Strengths

- High success rates on many level 1 and 2 courses
- Good standards of learners' written and practical work
- Much good teaching and learning
- The high level of managers' and teachers' commitment to continuous improvement

## Areas for improvement

- Low success rates on advanced construction award
- Insufficient use of information learning technology to support teaching and learning
- The weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Success rates have improved significantly since the previous inspection. However, rates vary significantly between programmes. In 2006/07, success rates on many level 1 and 2 courses were well above the national averages. Success rates on the advanced construction award, however, are low and remain below national

averages. Although overall success rates for work-based learners were still below the national averages in 2006/07, evidence shows that they are improving.

Learners' written work is of a high standard. Assignments on technician courses are well presented and have good technical content. Learners' portfolios include photographic evidence of the completed work and good narratives describing the work. Learners' practical work is good and meets industrial standards.

### Quality of provision

Much teaching and learning are good. Good use has been made of 'learning champions' to support teachers. Tutors plan their sessions well and include a good range of activities to interest and involve most learners. Key skills are taught in a vocational context. Practical sessions are well organised, realistic and carried out safely. Tutors make insufficient use of information learning technology and specialist computer software. The frequency of the onsite assessment has improved considerably since the previous inspection. College-based assessment is accurate and internal verification is satisfactory.

The needs and interests of learners are well met through the good range of courses. The range of enrichment activities is satisfactory.

Learners receive good guidance and support and those 'at risk' receive additional support.

### Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has a strong and sustained focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and achievement. Strategies to improve the quality of provision are beginning to make an impact. Tutors have good access to management information to monitor the effectiveness of the provision. Action planning for improvement is satisfactory. The construction self-assessment report is broadly accurate but insufficiently evaluative. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is weak and delaying achievement of some learners.

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Rotherham College of Arts and Technology

Date of visit: 1 May 2008

### Context

Rotherham College of Arts and Technology is a general further education college in Rotherham. Rotherham College of Arts and Technology merged with Rother Valley College in August 2004 and took over the Rotherham Managing Agency work-based learning provision in March 2004. The college offers courses from foundation to under-graduate degree level in most of its 14 sector subject areas. Currently 31,000 enrolments to the college have been made. Of these, 81% are adults and 85% are part-time.

The college was last inspected in November 2006. The effectiveness of the provision, achievement and standards, the quality of the provision and leadership and management were satisfactory. The college's capacity to improve was good. In sector subject areas, the college was awarded one good grade, four satisfactory grades and one unsatisfactory grade. The unsatisfactory grade was in construction.

### Achievement and standards

Have success rates of all learners continued to improve?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates have improved at all levels. For learners aged 16-18 at level 1, success rates improved by 6%, at level 2 by 9% and level 3 by 4% in 2006/07. The improvements are less marked for adult learners; at level 1 there was a small improvement of 1%, at level 2 by 1% and at level 3 by 4%. However, success rates at most levels remain at or below the national average for 2005/06.

Key skills success rates have improved significantly, but in 2006/07 pass rates were 42% still below national average. Short course success rates for students aged 16-18 years improved by 1%, but for adults have declined.

Have success rates of work-based learners improved?	Reasonable progress
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The key focus of attention is currently on retention and timely success rates. The current data indicates a small year on year improvement. The current year indicates progress towards the national averages for last year in most areas. The college now uses its standard quality assurance policies and procedures to monitor the work-based learning provision. The college has

taken the decision not to offer some provision including apprenticeships in health care, information and communication technology and retail.

#### Quality of provision

Are actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning effective?	Significant progress
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Senior managers have implemented a wide range of strategies to develop and improve the quality of teaching and learning. These strategies have effectively developed a critical culture focused on improvement. The system for the observation of teaching and learning is well managed. The teaching and learning observation team produce a detailed analysis of activities in an annual report and evidence shows an increase in the proportion of good or better teaching. After each observation an action plan is negotiated with the tutor, and tutors' progress is monitored. Additional support from a learning champion is allocated to any tutor whose session is graded satisfactory or less. Good use is made of the three learning champions. Peer observation and support is actively encouraged and supported by managers at all levels. A wide range of both formal and informal processes have been developed and utilised to share good practice.

The college has invested significantly in the provision of information learning technology as well as the training of staff in its use. The e-learning strategy group directs and monitors the development of e-learning in the college. All full-time staff have been issued with a laptop, and support for less confident staff in the use of available technology is readily available. Well resourced staff learning lounges have recently been introduced at all sites. These provide very good resources to allow staff to experiment, practise and share teaching techniques.

The college invests in an extensive programme of staff training and development. This includes a wide range of workshops covering all aspects of teaching and learning. Staff conferences have included staff from all sites. Staff are able to access a range of 'master classes' devised to develop their own practice. All full-time staff are registered with the Institute for Learning. Professional development is being programmed for all staff in the next academic year in order to meet the Institute for Learning professional development needs.

What action has been taken to raise the quality of provision and how effective has it been? What systems are in place to identify and share good practice and how effective are they?	Reasonable progress
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The college is continually developing its estate and plans for an extensive new build in the town centre have recently been approved. Further development

of the Rother Valley Campus, including development of construction workshops, will soon begin. Most of the existing buildings have been refurbished and investments have been made to benefit current learners.

Learning centres, focused on individual sector subject areas, have been introduced to enhance learning opportunities. These centres have good resources, including often qualified teaching staff, who provide very effective support for staff and learners. The college has monitored learners' use of the learning centre resources and there has been a 76% increase in the use of computers, a 5% increase in book loans and a 113% increase in attendance since their development. Development of online learning has continued. Learning lounges have been introduced which provide a relaxed learning environment for staff. Staff appreciate this investment.

Sharing of good practice within and between teams is well developed. Good practice is identified through the observation of teaching and learning from external verifier reports and is volunteered by members of staff. However, no formal system is in place for identifying good practice other than through the observation of teaching and learning.

Improved information, advice and guidance and better use of learners' minimum target grades are part of the criteria used to place learners on the correct course. Revised information, advice and guidance criteria have been introduced for some courses, including taster courses, and more realistic information about courses and careers. Enrichment opportunities have improved and better employer engagement in the curriculum has increased the number of visits by employers and to businesses.

The delivery of key skills has been reviewed. Following extensive consultation with staff a new system was introduced in September 2007. Key skills tutors work closely with subject specialists to ensure that key skills are delivered in an appropriate subject context, and embedded into the curriculum where appropriate.

Communication is good. It has recently improved by further development to the staff portal. Employer engagement has improved as has partnership with schools. The college is the lead partner on some new diplomas. The college is proactively engaging with students not in education or employment. A roll-on, roll-off provision has been developed and will be launched in June to better meet the needs of this group.

#### Leadership and management

Has action taken by leaders and managers been successful in raising learners' achievement and supporting all learners? How effective has target-setting and action planning been in bringing about	Reasonable progress
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improvement and how effective is monitoring of performance?	
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The college has a clear focus and drive to improve retention. The retention strategy has been successful in reducing the numbers of learners who leave the college and includes a number of strands, for example attendance monitoring by the recently appointed attendance monitors. The attendance monitoring process has been adapted from successful practice at the previous Rother Valley College. Good use is now made of full-time attendance monitors. These follow up all non-attendees by mobile telephone calls, calls to home numbers, and contact with parents and employers. Retention has increased to 83%. Learners identified as 'at risk' are supported using a range of support mechanisms. In-year retention has improved compared with the same period last year.

Managers set clear targets for improvement in retention and success rates, at college, course and sector subject area level. Long- and short-term targets are negotiated with managers and course teams. Performance is scrutinised regularly by the senior management team and at faculty review meetings. Management information system reports have been redesigned to better meet the needs of managers and enable them to monitor performance. A quality improvement plan for each sector subject area is derived from the self-assessment report. Progress in implementing improvements listed in the plans is monitored. However, some monitoring is insufficiently thorough. Quality improvement plans do not include all areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment report. Some contain further areas for improvement which have been identified during self-assessment but are not identified as key areas for improvement. Items identified during the year are not always included in the quality improvement plan. Some actions do not state clear outcomes and impact measures. However, progress is being made.

Courses where success rates do not meet minimum levels of performance are subject to additional monitoring, but this is not thorough or frequent enough. Some issues were identified in February at the review meeting which could have been included following self-assessment in the autumn and implemented by February.

All learners, including those on level 3 vocational programmes, have a minimum target grade. These targets are negotiated by tutors and learners and used to encourage learners. Students' progress in meeting the targets is monitored by the senior personal tutors. 'At risk' or vulnerable learners are identified and individual support is tailored to meet the needs of learners.

Has the management of work-based learning improved?	Reasonable progress
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The college has completed a management re-organisation of work-based learning and employer engagement activities. A work-based learning manager and employer engagement manager are in place, and each has clear roles and responsibilities. A post-inspection action plan is being implemented, and supports the current quality improvement plan for work-based learning. This plan identifies key strategies related to tracking of learner progress, consistency of delivery across vocational areas, management and use of data to inform managers, and a focus on timely and overall framework completion rates. However, some of the actions identified are insufficiently focused on learners on specific programmes.

Learners now have improved access to assessors. All aspects of delivery of apprenticeships have been devolved to faculty teams. Staff recruitment and training have taken place to fill gaps. All faculties make use of pro-achieve data to monitor performance. This is effective as staff are familiar with its format and capabilities. Staff have been trained to use data more effectively.

What progress has been made to develop sustainable practices?	Reasonable progress
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The college has recently revised its sustainable development policy. The estates and building strategy is well developed. The college is at an early stage of sector subject area development and is auditing for sustainable development content.