

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Wiltshire and Salisbury College

Date of visit: 9-10 December 2008

Context

Wiltshire College was formed in 2000 by the merger of the three general further education colleges of Trowbridge, Chippenham and Lackham. On 1 January 2008, Wiltshire College merged with Salisbury College. The college serves a large geographical area, consisting of primarily the whole of Wiltshire. Both Trowbridge and Chippenham campuses offer similar courses in most areas of learning. The Lackham campus specialises in landbased industries.

Final data for 2006/07 showed around 4,200 full-time equivalent learners (FTEs) at Wiltshire College. Some 60% of these were aged 16-18. Around half of learners in this age group undertook courses at level 3. Salisbury College's data for the same period showed approximately 1,700 FTEs. Just over half of these were aged 16-18, and just over one-third of students in this age group studied courses at level 3.

Both colleges were inspected in the autumn of 2007, prior to their merger. Inspectors judged Wiltshire College to be satisfactory for overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, and leadership and management. Quality of provision and equality of opportunity were good. A contributory grade of good was awarded for the achievement and standards of work-based learners and learners aged 14-16. Salisbury College was judged satisfactory for overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, quality of provision, leadership and management and equality of opportunity. Achievement and standards remained inadequate overall, although a contributory grade of satisfactory was awarded in this area for strands of the college's work such as work-based learning and provision for learners aged 14-16. Of the six curriculum areas inspected, five were satisfactory and one, science and mathematics, was inadequate.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made to improve success rates for learners on long courses and apprenticeship programmes?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress overall since the previous inspection in raising success rates on long courses and apprenticeship programmes. College data

for 2007/08 to date present a mixed picture of improvement against estimated national averages for the 2007/08 academic year.

At Salisbury College, overall long course success rates have improved by 12% in 2007/08 on the previous year, significantly reducing the gap below the national average for 2006/07. However, they remain below average. For learners aged 16-18 there was a significant rise in success rates at level 1, so that these were broadly average. However improvements in success rates at levels 2 and 3 were more modest and remained low. The data show improvements in retention rates for these students. Success rates for adults at level 1 were broadly average, a significant rise on the previous year. At level 3 success rates have improved significantly and are now just below an estimated national average. Success rates at level 2 remain low at 15% below an estimated national average, and there has been a very modest improvement on the previous year. Where significant improvements in adult success rates have been secured, this has been as a result of much-improved learner retention rates. In work-based learning for apprentices, there was a very significant improvement in apprentices achieving frameworks by their planned end dates. Timely success rates in 2007/08 rose to 42% from 10% and these are now broadly in line with the national average. Overall success rates have risen and remain in line with a rising national average.

At Wiltshire College, overall long course success rates have improved by 1% in 2007/08 and are broadly average in relation to the 2006/07 national average. For learners aged 16-18 in 2007/08 success rates at level 1 fell by 6% from the previous year and were broadly average. There was a modest increase at level 2 so that these success rates were broadly average. There was a significant increase in success rates at level 3 so that these were in line with the national average. Courses at level 3 account for around half of learners aged 16-18. Adult success rates at level 1 improved as a result of increased achievement and were in line with the estimated national average for 2007/08. However, at levels 2 and 3 there was a modest decrease in success rates as a result of falling retention rates. Set against a rising national average, these were significantly below average. In work-based learning for apprentices, there was significant improvement in the proportion of apprentices achieving frameworks by their planned end dates, so that the timely success rate was above average. The overall success rate for apprentices saw further improvement and this was above average also.

How much progress has been made in improving learners' attendance?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in improving learners' attendance. Attendance in the 2007/08 academic year across the campuses of the former Wiltshire College showed a significant improvement from the previous inspection. The college has standardised attendance policy and its implementation across all faculties and campuses. Managers' accountability for attendance is more firmly

established through the quality improvement cycle, and students' attendance is more clearly featured in individual tutorials. These improvements have been supported through the recent introduction of on-line registration that has provided more accurate and timely data for teachers and managers.

Quality of provision

How much progress has the college made in reducing the significant proportion of lessons that remained only satisfactory?	Reasonable progress
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The college has at present observed some 20% of teachers in the current academic year, and so it is too early to assess the progress that the college has made since the previous inspection in reducing the overall proportion of lessons that remained only satisfactory in both the former Salisbury and former Wiltshire Colleges. However, the work of advanced practitioners, in supporting the teachers of satisfactory and inadequate lessons, is leading to improved observation grades when teachers are re-observed. Those development plans sampled provide clear guidance to teachers on how to improve lessons. The lesson observation process is much improved since the previous inspection, when inspectors had insufficient confidence in the accuracy and reliability of the observations that had been undertaken in that year. Much work has been done to standardize practice in observation and recording. Observation procedures enable perceived strengths and weaknesses in lessons to be captured clearly across the college, and to inform both the spreading of good practice and training and development needs.

The efforts of the advanced practitioners are having a positive impact on teaching and learning in science and mathematics provision in Salisbury. Observations are both rigorous and supportive. Action plans clearly identify areas for improvement.

How much progress has been made in improving target-setting in individual learning plans?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in improving target-setting in individual learning plans since the previous inspection. Those individual learning plans sampled showed consistently very clear and measurable objectives, and demonstrated effective review of learners' progress. The introduction of 'Stop the Track Weeks' since the start of the current academic year is much valued by both teachers and students. The suspension of the standard timetable and the clear review of students' progress enable teachers to concentrate on supporting those students who may have fallen behind on deadlines to catch up with their work, and other students to be further stretched and challenged towards meeting their potential. However, it is too soon to be able to fully evaluate the impact of this development in the form of improved retention rates and learners' progress.

How much progress has been made in improving the quality of provision in science and mathematics at Salisbury?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the quality of provision in science and mathematics at Salisbury. A new management structure is in place together with a rationalised teaching force in this sector subject area. Clear development plans have been produced and the rigour of self-assessment strengthened. In addition, team target-setting and professional development have been improved. A review of the science and mathematics provision has been carried out and a number of poorly-performing programmes discontinued. As a result A-level science courses are no longer available. Numbers of learners in this area are quite modest. However, both A2 and AS psychology continue to run and recruit reasonable numbers of learners. Learners' success rates in A2 psychology have increased over three years and in 2007/08 were above the national average for 2006/07; the access modules show high success rates.

GCSE mathematics has been reconfigured following the former Wiltshire College model. This had a positive effect on success rates last year and is now being followed on the Salisbury campus. In addition, partnership arrangements with local schools and other local institutions have been strengthened. A vocational science pathway at level 2 is planned for introduction in 2008/09. Collaboration with the Health Protection Agency at Porton Down has resulted in planned programmes in the near future leading to both national certificates for apprentices and to foundation degree modules.

The introduction of new ILPs has improved target-setting on the Salisbury campus. However, this remains a work in progress. ILPs are not yet fully embedded. Some targets are still not specific or measurable enough. The introduction of a new quality improvement cycle is focusing managers and curriculum teams on both their own and learners' targets. 'Stop the Track Weeks' have had a positive impact. Learners have felt more supported in meeting their targets and completing/catching up with their work.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in the sharing of good practice across the college?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in the sharing of good practice across the college. New systems to capture this practice such as in lesson observation and 'Meeting our Targets' meetings are well-conceived. However, it is too soon to fully evaluate the effects of sharing good practice on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising learners' achievements and standards.

How much progress has been made in improving the rigour and reliability of self-assessment?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in improving the rigour and reliability of self-assessment since the previous inspection. The draft self-assessment is highly evaluative of the college's performance, and judgements are consistent with the sample of evidence that inspectors examined. Managers point to a number of key reasons for this change. These include improved participation in and ownership of self-assessment at course team and programme area level, the introduction of moderation and support at each stage of writing, and the consistent implementation of a new quality improvement process across the college.

How much progress has been made in improving the setting and meeting of challenging targets at course team level at the former Salisbury college?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in this area. The management of curriculum teams has been restructured and clear lines of responsibility are now in place. Self-assessment has been strengthened and has now more participation from course teams.

Mid-year reviews and MOT meetings have meant that teams and managers are more confident about key quality indicators such as attendance, student retention rates and module completion. Quality improvement boards and 'Stop the Tracks Weeks' have also enabled teachers and managers to review progress both at individual student level and at the level of curriculum teams. It is, however, too soon to judge the impact of these changes on the setting and meeting of targets at course level.