

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Stanmore College
Date of visit: 17 November 2008

Context

Stanmore College is a small general further education (GFE) college located in the London borough of Harrow. The college was established in 1987. In January 2000, Stanmore College was reorganized as Stanmore Sixth Form College and Stanmore Adult College, each with its own management structure. From August 2007, the two colleges once more became one, Stanmore College, with new staff in place in a revised structure at the start of the 2007/08 academic year.

Stanmore College was last inspected in September 2006. 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. A new principal had been appointed just before the inspection. In 2007/08, there were around 1,240 16–18-year-old full-time students and some 2,500 adult part-time and full-time learners.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving outcomes for students, particularly in key skills and numeracy and literacy qualifications, and in maintaining AS and A2 success rates?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to maintain high levels of A2 success rates. There was a notable increase in 2006/07 and initial data for 2007/08 indicates that the overall success rate has remained at 96%, above the 2006/07 sixth form college (SFC) rate of 93%. The proportion of those who achieved high grades remains three percentage points above the previous year's SFC rate. Students' average prior attainment to AS/A2 courses has dropped in each of the last three years. Added value data, and particularly DCSF contextual value-added data, shows that students in many areas are performing well above expectations.

AS results were well above SFC averages in 2006/07, but college data indicates that success rates fell in 2007/08 to 79%, around the level of the previous year's SFC rate. The proportion of high grades fell by about seven percentage points, to below

the previous year's national average. However, this data includes results from two partner schools in the Harrow Collegiate. Data from the college's own students shows an achievement rate of 90%, down from the previous year's 94% but above the 2006/07 national SFC rate of 88%. College analysis suggests that this is partly a result of students' declining prior attainment, and partly the effect of managing to retain more students in learning to the end of the year, even if this does not always result in successful exam results.

The approach to key skills changed in 2007/08, with communication and application of number being embedded in appropriate curriculum areas. ICT was offered as 'research skills' to provide a better link with routine course work. The result has been a significant increase in the numbers taking key skills, leading to a reasonable overall success rate of 67%, with the research skills element at 69%. Level 1 results were good; the poorest performing area was level 2 communications, with a success rate of 53%, although this is about five percentage points above the 2006/07 SFC average. Literacy and numeracy success rates improved, with the exception of 'preparing for work or further study' courses which had poor results; these courses have now been discontinued.

Overall success rates (excluding key skills) for students aged 16 to 18 continue at a good level of 81% in 2007/08, which is well above the 2006/07 GFE national rate and just below the SFC national rate (although only half of students are on A/A2 level courses). All the main categories of level and age group success rates improved with the exception of a dip in the level 1 results for adults, mainly linked with a group of underperforming ESOL Skills for Life courses, and the slight fall in level 3 results for students aged 16 to 18.

Quality of provision

<p>What progress has been made in engaging students to help assess how well the college's programmes and activities meet their needs and how well they are guided and supported?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Students have ample opportunities to voice their views. As well as surveys, questionnaires, focus groups and representation through the student governors, the college has overhauled its students' parliament, which now meets each month, with two groups on different days to ensure that all nominated students can attend. Students who attend represent their tutor group and most have deputies. Of the adults, only the access course is represented.

As a result of the first two meetings held in this academic year, students feel that college staff are listening to their views. Students are pleased, for example, that they were successful in adjusting the college's guidelines as to when and where students can wear hats around the college. They have also made representations about the

timing of A-level modules and await the outcome. Students remain less convinced though about the impact of student surveys. Whilst they acknowledge the positive impact on future students of the planned new building development, they are concerned about the lack of space in the canteen for current students.

How has the college improved its connections with employers to ensure that provision matches local needs in range and quality?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving its connections with employers. There is a strong emphasis on this work at a corporate level. For instance, a director of services to business reports directly to the principal, employer engagement is one of the current seven strategic objectives for the college, and the services to business department is relatively well-resourced. The college is using a specialist telemarketing business to try and engage directly with more employers; this initiative is only five months old but has already led to new contracts. The numbers on Train to Gain and employer responsiveness courses have increased markedly over the past two years. The services to business department has successfully gained some other contracts for employee training, and has some significant and innovative bids in place for new work. However, the actual numbers of employers directly working with the college is still low. There is little in the way of direct links between curriculum areas and employers, apart from through work placements for students, and here the college is competing with many others to maintain the necessary links. There are some positive developments with students, such as an enterprise competition, visiting media industry speakers and local travel agents sponsoring work-related projects; these help students to understand employers' needs better.

How has the monitoring of adult students' progress improved, and what impact has this had on their outcomes?	Reasonable progress
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The monitoring of adult students' progress has improved. The extent to which progress is recorded and monitored varies, depending on the type and length of the course. There are plans to standardise individual learning plans (ILPs) and to have them available electronically. Staff have had training on how to negotiate targets with students. Those ILPs reviewed indicate that targets are, in the main, appropriate.

Tutorial support plays a key role in monitoring performance and, on most courses, adult students benefit from one-to-one tutorials, during which they discuss their progress, aims and aspirations. Literacy, numeracy and language needs are identified through initial assessment and the induction period provides an opportunity to ensure that students are on the most suitable programme. In terms of outcomes,

retention and achievement rates for adult students in 2007/08 remained high, having improved at levels 2 and 3 and fallen slightly at level 1.

Leadership and management

<p>What progress has been made in embedding the revised self-assessment process, and its regular audit of actions, to ensure that it contributes to improvements across the college?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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At the 2007 monitoring visit, inspectors judged that reasonable progress had been made in ensuring that self-assessment procedures were being consistently and helpfully applied across the college. However that visit, and the 2007 college self-assessment report, recognised that aspects still needed to be firmly embedded in the new structure. Further progress has been made with the embedding and now, compared with the previous inspection, there has been significant progress in improving the effectiveness of the self-assessment process. The online system is being well used to provide data, to immediately highlight potential areas for improvement, and to give a good structure for action planning. Staff understand the system, and are actively engaged in further improvements. Staff also welcome the involvement of programme co-ordinators in many aspects of the process, rather than just heads of department. There is now a good understanding of the system, and the role everyone has to play. Increased delegation of powers to heads of department has increased the speed and flexibility of responding to areas for improvement. In many of the departmental action plans examined by inspectors, properly identified concerns had led to prompt remedial action. Auditing of action plans by college managers is now a regular and accepted feature of the process.

<p>To what extent has the August 2007 restructuring of the college improved effectiveness and efficiency?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The restructuring, which began in 2007, has led to several new appointments, changing job roles and different arrangements for managing courses and teams. No longer operating as two institutions, college staff have adapted to being part of one Stanmore College. Senior managers value the training they have had for their new roles and those interviewed found the detailed 360 degree appraisal and associated action plan very productive. Training for programme coordinators on their new role is yet to take place. Middle managers now have more responsibility and authority and there is some evidence to suggest that this is leading to greater effectiveness and efficiency. Managers report that in bringing together teams to manage both adult learners and those aged 16-18 they are taking advantage of opportunities to share good practice and extend teaching opportunities for staff. Those teaching Skills for Life, for example, now teach younger students as well as those aged 19 or over. The restructuring has been instrumental in beginning to change the organisational culture

so that all students, regardless of age, subject specialism or mode of study, are viewed as being of equal value to the college. There are plans to continue to refine the structure, with additional appointments and further professional development for staff, to ensure greater consistency of management practice at all levels.