

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Ashton Under Lyne sixth form college

Date of visit: 1 December 2008

Context

Ashton Sixth Form College (ASFC) is a sixth form college in Tameside Borough which lies to the East of Manchester. It has nearly 2,000 full-time students aged 16 to 18. It has a small Lifelong Learning Adult provision and does some Train to Gain work for employers. The college offers a wider range of courses than many sixth form colleges and many of its students are in receipt of educational maintenance allowances. The college is one of two in the borough, which has a population of around 213,000. Unemployment in Tameside is lower than the national average. The proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups is below the national average. Employment in the manufacturing sector is relatively high. Over a third of residents have no qualifications. The college was last inspected in April 2008.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in improving students' success rates, particularly at level 3?	Significant progress
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Success rates at levels 1 and 3 for students aged 16 to 18 rose markedly in 2008. At level 1 they were high in this year and at level 3 they were in line with the national average for similar colleges. At level 2 the rate remained slightly above the national average. The GCE A level and AS level overall success rates rose markedly in 2008. The A level rate was in line with the national average, the AS rate slightly below. The progress made by students on A level subjects in 2008 was good and for AS subjects it was outstanding.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the quality of group tutorials?	Significant progress
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The college has developed a cross-college tutorial scheme of work, and supporting lesson plans and learning materials. The scheme covers a wide range of topics including many of the aspects of the *Every Child Matters* agenda, the promotion of

equality and diversity, a careers education and guidance programme and a study skills curriculum. Tutors are now given more time to develop and deliver the tutorial curriculum. Guidelines for the delivery of the programme are in place. Some tutor groups are composed of gifted and talented students so that they can receive more focused support with a view to improving the proportion of higher grades achieved. Tutors hold regular meetings and a professional development programme has been implemented to support tutorial teaching. Tutors' appraisal meetings focus, where appropriate, on tutorial development. Tutorials are included in the observation of teaching programme. Students' attendance in tutorials this year is high and students give positive feedback on the quality and relevance of the programme.

What progress has been made in improving the uptake of additional learning support?	Significant progress
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The college assesses learners' incoming attainment through online assessment of their basic/key skills and through subject area tests of literacy and numeracy. The college's close links with partner schools also help in identifying students' needs early. Support is now provided much earlier and take-up of this support has improved and is now high. The teaching timetable has been changed to include a fifth teaching block which has succeeded in ensuring that additional support arrangements are delivered more effectively.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of course review and curriculum area self-assessment?	Significant progress
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The college has focused on improving and implementing quality improvement strategies. Management has been restructured and a leadership and management development programme established. Curriculum review processes have been put in place which are similar to Ofsted curriculum inspections. The observation of teaching process has been made more thorough. A smaller team of observers, mainly senior college managers, has been established. Observation records make clear judgements about the quality of teaching and give good attention, in most cases, to the learning that takes place. The grades awarded are moderated appropriately.

Self-assessment reports at whole college and curriculum area level are comprehensive and make good use of evidence, including data, to determine their judgements. The evidence looked at during this visit indicates that the judgements made are accurate. The college makes use of a group of colleges in the North West to peer review its judgements. In a few curriculum self-assessment reports the overarching strengths and areas for improvement concentrate heavily on students'

achievements and pay insufficient attention to the issues relating to the quality of provision. However, the associated quality improvement plans are detailed and comprehensive, give thorough attention to the underlying issues relating to the quality of provision and provide a good agenda for improvement.