MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Rotherham College of Arts and Technology

Date of visit: 26 November 2008

Context

Rotherham College of Arts and Technology (RCAT) is a general further education college in Rotherham. RCAT 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 undergraduate degree level in most of its 14 sector subject areas. In 2007/08, the college had 18,332 enrolments with 77% being adults and 72% part-time.

The college had a full inspection in November 2006. The college's overall effectiveness, 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 in construction. In May 2008 construction was re-inspected as satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What action has the college taken to further improve key skills success rates?	Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving key skills success rates. Overall key skills success rates improved from 21% in 2005/06 to 38% in 2006/07, narrowing the gap between the college's success rates and the national average in these years from 18% to 7% below the national average. In 2007/08 overall success rates rose to 55%, 10 percentage points above the national average for 2006/07. In some sector subject areas like construction and hair and beauty key skills success rates have risen significantly. However, a significant number of sector subject areas are not performing adequately. The college is aware of these under-performing areas, has identified them in their self-assessment report and is providing support for managers to improve key skills success rates further.

The key skills team has been re-organised with individual tutors allocated to specific vocational and academic areas. Both key skills and vocational tutors have time to plan activities. Sector subject area managers now have direct responsibility for the achievement of key skills and are accountable for any issues. Staff use initial assessment results more proactively to allocate students to the correct key skills levels. Although the college has developed good strategies, they have insufficiently developed quality improvement processes to share good practice. While they have

targets for improvement of under-performing programmes, they do not sufficiently tailor them for each sector subject area.

What actions has the college taken to improve the success rates of apprenticeship frameworks?	Reasonable progress

The college has taken reasonable actions to improve the success rates of apprenticeship frameworks. Success rates on apprenticeship frameworks have increased steadily over the three years from 2005/06 to 2007/08. In 2005/06, the success rate on apprenticeship frameworks was 36%. It rose substantially to 64% in 2007/08 and now matches the national average. In the same period, timely success rates on apprenticeship frameworks have increased from 15% to 41% although this remains below the national average for 2007/08. Success rates for level 3 programmes are significantly lower than level 2 programmes.

The college has introduced several initiatives to improve apprenticeship success rates. Staff use initial assessment results more carefully and give better information, advice and guidance. They match students to programmes better. Individual learning plans are now more personalised with particular attention paid to identifying a realistic end date for individual learners' programmes in most areas. However, inconsistent practice remains between programme areas, particularly with respect to individual learning plans. Work-based learning staff now work within sector subject areas and communications between managers, vocational tutors and work-based learning staff are frequent and good. Sector subject areas now take ownership of success rates and monitor more closely learners' progress towards achieving their frameworks. Staff identify learners approaching their end date to ensure sufficient support is in place to ensure timely achievement.

Quality of provision

What improvements has the college made in teaching and learning practices, as identified during the re-inspection of construction?	Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving teaching and learning practices. RCAT has recently changed the process for observing teaching and learning whilst retaining the good elements of the previous system. They now plan a week of observations in specific sector subject areas. The area is given three weeks notice. However, individual tutors do not know which sessions the team will observe. Observers are not necessarily sector subject area specialists; some joint observations are carried out to moderate grades. Observers give detailed feedback and clearly identify strengths and areas for improvement and these are included in quality improvement plans in a timely way. Staff development includes sessions on improving the quality on teaching and learning. Managers allocate a learning champion to staff who receive a grade 3 or 4. Learning champions provide good and ongoing support. Lesson observations carried out in 2007/08 resulted in 76% good

or better, 23% satisfactory and no inadequate grades; an improvement on the 2006/07 grade profile. While the historic elements of the observation process are effective, it is too early to assess the affect of the new elements on the quality of teaching and learning.

Leadership and management.

What cross-college improvements have been made to skills for life provision?	Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in cross-college improvements to skills for life. The skills for life strategy is satisfactory and the college has sustained its development well, over a number of years. Strategies to improve key skills in college are good. The college's approach to staff development is appropriate and planned well. Students receiving support gain high levels of confidence and self-esteem. They are able to work more on their own initiative and understand working practice more. Individual support by staff is good. However, students have insufficient understanding of individual learning plans or of using individual targets to assess their progress.

The college has not achieved its skills for life targets as set by the local Learning and Skills Council. It is delivering some community-based provision as well as a large and growing English for speakers of other languages programme. The college is also developing wider workplace skills for life provision; currently only 35 students are on the programme. The college has identified these issues and plans are in place to resolve them.

What actions have been taken to improve the self-assessed inadequate provision in information and communication technology and leisure, travel and tourism?	Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in taking actions to improve the self-assessed inadequate provision in information and communications technologies (ICT) and leisure, travel and tourism. The college has improved resources for teaching and learning in both areas. Computing students have better access to computers and can access commercial standard teaching materials and resources. Success rates have improved significantly on the full-time level 2 programmes from 50% in 2006/07 to 91% in 2007/08.

Leisure, travel and tourism students have access to better resources, particularly a mock 'check-in' desk. A good range of enrichment activities has been developed to enhance their programme such as visits to relevant tourist attractions and being involved in community projects. Tutors now assess the programme at specific points throughout the year to improve assessment and feedback in leisure, travel and tourism. Personal tutors meet monthly to share good practice. Managers and staff

have improved procedures and practices throughout the area, for example, the improved systems for monitoring and improving student punctuality and monitoring and recording student progress.

| How well have senior managers led the improvement strategy and self-assessment process? | Reasonable progress |

The college has made reasonable progress in leading the improvement strategy and self-assessment process. Overall success rates have improved well. Long level 1 programmes for 16-18 year olds were at 74% in 2006/07, 1% above the national average and rose further to 77% in 2007/08. Long level 2 programmes rose to 62% in 2006/07, compared with a national average of 69% and continued to rise to 74% in 2007/08. However, long level 3 programmes, though improved, are still below national rates. Key skills and work-based learning success rates have both made reasonable improvements.

Strategies for improvement are good, with staff re-organisation, more focused planning and improved support for staff. However, they are not yet having a consistent impact on all sector subject areas.

The self-assessment process is comprehensive. It involves staff at programme and curriculum level and the results are moderated by senior management and partner colleges in their peer review group. RCAT has been active in training staff in the use of data in self-assessment and set appropriate individual targets. However, RCAT insufficiently reflects some key strengths or areas for improvement in either the curriculum or overall college self-assessment report. While they highlight key strengths and issues in achievements and standards very well, they give insufficient attention to the other key questions.