

London Electronics College

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 53168

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Last day of inspection: 17 May 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

London Electronics College Limited (LEC) provides a range of electronics, engineering maintenance and information and communication technology (ICT) qualifications to adult learners from its premises in the London Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Some learners also study for general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) in mathematics, qualifications in language, literacy and numeracy or functional skills.

At the last inspection in April 2009, LEC's overall effectiveness was judged to be good, with good capacity to improve. Achievements and standards were good as were leadership and management and equality of opportunity. Quality of provision was judged to be satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has LEC made in its self-assessment and quality improvement planning to drive improvements since the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, the self-assessment process was considered sound and action planning appropriate. However, some aspects of quality improvement processes were insufficiently developed. Following the inspection, the college developed a specific action plan to address the areas for improvement identified by inspectors. LEC has strengthened the observations of teaching and learning, increased the use of learner feedback by involving learners in course reviews and conducting annual learner forum, and ensured improvement plans are shared with all staff. Clear actions are now identified during the annual review meeting when staff present and discuss specific topics. LEC gathers and analyses a wide range of data; however, it does not use this sufficiently well to monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of changes and improvements. Learners' attendance and target setting continue to be areas for development.

LEC has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. However, the current format of the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan is not helpful in prioritising the actions and ensuring improvements planned have a beneficial impact on learners and learning.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made in ensuring high success rates are maintained for learners?

Insufficient progress

At the last inspection, success rates were high and improving. Overall success rates have been around national averages for the last three years, with a slight decline against national rates. However, this masks a positive trend in retention but a decline in achievement rates in 2010/11 and significant variation between courses. Success rates remain relatively high for vocational qualifications at level 2 in engineering and are improving at level 3. However, in level 1 courses in both engineering and information technologies (IT) they are declining and are too low. Success rates for additional qualifications in mathematics, English and information technology have declined, coinciding with the introduction of functional skills. Although success rates are relatively high in mathematics, in English level 1 and IT level 2, they are low and below average. Success rates in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses are declining and are also below average.

LEC has appropriate plans in place to improve performance of vocational level 1 programmes, by introducing team teaching and making the courses shorter to retain more learners. Plans are also in place to improve success rates in additional qualifications, although it is too soon to judge the full impact of these actions.

What progress has LEC made in identifying and narrowing the achievement gap for different groups?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, LEC had very effective arrangements for social inclusion and the recruitment of under-represented groups was good. LEC continues to analyse equality and diversity statistics well and has a good awareness of the progress and achievement of all its learners. It still generates detailed data on the recruitment and success of specific groups of learners. Senior staff have a good understanding of the issues surrounding different cultural groups. Although the percentage of minority ethnic learners is still very high, the number of learners within each group is generally too small to allow significant statistical analysis. Minority ethnic learners generally perform at least as well as the whole cohort. The college recognises and offers additional support to the small groups which are underperforming. LEC has worked hard to ensure continued enrolment and success of its female learners, which is good and higher overall than the whole cohort.

What progress has LEC made in improving attendance and punctuality?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, attendance and punctuality were poor especially at the start of the day and after lunch, with little challenge from teachers. Over the last three years, punctuality has improved from 35% to 51% at the start of the day. A breakfast club is available for learners who arrive early and luncheon vouchers are awarded to those who achieve high levels of punctuality. However, the current system is unable to monitor punctuality after lunch or differentiate between learners who are a few minutes late and those who are several hours late.

Attendance rates continue to fluctuate for different courses and there are no clear trends. On a few courses, attendance rates appear to be very low but the data are not always reliable and the college does not routinely gather and analyse reasons for non attendance. LEC gathers and analyses attendance data but does not routinely use these as part of the course review process. Staff discuss concerns about learners and their attendance during regular staff meetings. They take appropriate action to support learners who have additional responsibilities and find it difficult to attend regularly.

Quality of provision

What progress has LEC made in ensuring that tutors set learners effective targets?

Insufficient progress

At the last inspection, target setting in reviews was underdeveloped. Learners continue to be very clear about the target dates set for assignments and what they need to do to complete their course. However, targets in learning plans and review documents continue to be vague and not properly recorded. The process for reviewing learners' progress each term is weak. There is insufficient clarity on what learners have achieved, any additional learning support needs or on personal difficulties that may impact on their ability to complete the course. Tutors and learners do not agree or record specific, measurable or time-bound actions during the review. They do not routinely discuss individual punctuality and attendance rates during progress reviews and tutors do not set learners targets for improvement where necessary.

What progress has LEC made in ensuring learners gain sufficient industrial experience during their programmes?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, LEC had insufficient links with industry and commercial organisations to offer work experience or projects to ICT learners. College staff have maintained good links with local employers to ensure learners on National Vocational Qualifications in engineering maintenance gain effective industrial experience during three-month work placements.

New information technology tutors make effective use of their own industrial contacts to maintain links with industry. Staff provide an effective insight for learners into current industrial practices. LEC tries to ensure that all learners benefit from listening to at least one relevant guest speaker each term. The college organises external visits to commercial organisations or relevant exhibitions during their course. There continues to be few opportunities for IT learners to gain work experience or to work on employers' specific projects due to the challenges involved with confidentiality and having access to employers' specific programs.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in introducing functional skills?

Reasonable progress

LEC introduced functional skills to replace key skills at the start of the 2010/11 year and has made reasonable progress with their implementation. The success rates for learners within English, mathematics and information technology have declined compared to the corresponding success rates in key skills during the previous year; however, this is in line with the national pattern. Success rates in mathematics at level 1 and 2 are high and significantly above the national average, as are English at level 2 and information technology at level 1. English at level 1 and information technology at level 2 are below the national average. LEC recognises that in the implementation of functional skills the staff did not have all the necessary knowledge and awareness to secure good results in all areas. Appropriate plans are in place to improve success rates. LEC is improving initial assessment specifically to target the requirements of functional skills, lowering the qualification level for those learners with identified barriers, targeting teaching and grouping learners with similar support needs.

What progress has the college made in ensuring that quality improvement arrangements and teaching and learning observations improve the quality of teaching and learning?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, LEC had made improvements in observation of teaching and learning. However, although grades for the teaching sessions observed broadly matched those given by inspectors, LEC had still not effectively tackled all of the areas for development identified. The observation grades from 2009/10 to 2011/12 have improved from less than half good or better, to over three quarters good or better. Based on these and a positive external evaluation, the self-assessment report recognises improvement from satisfactory to good teaching and learning.

LEC now uses external expertise to carry out observations, which are effective, supplemented by peer and manager observations. Three observations are carried out on each tutor during the academic year. Tutors agree a development plan based on these assessments. Team teaching has improved the development of good practice. Staff development opportunities are good, particularly in helping tutors to identify and overcome learners' barriers to learning. The college collates observation findings to develop an effective generic staff development plan. However, tutors have insufficient staff training in observation techniques, managers do not monitor development plans sufficiently and, although tutors value verbal feedback, the documentation does not allow for sufficient written feedback.

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