

The Marine Society College

First re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Marine Society College following publication of the inspection report on 24 November 2014, which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

The Marine Society College offers a range of educational opportunities, including GCSE and A-level qualifications, to professional seafarers. Qualifications are offered as a distance learning package through a subcontractor. The inspection in October 2014 focused on the GCSE and A-level qualifications.

The purpose of this visit was to establish what initial steps managers have taken to improve provision, in response to the previous inspection, and to set key priorities for the next visit.

Themes

Increase the number of learners who complete successfully their GCSE and A-level programmes, by establishing accurately learners' starting points, to ensure that all are on the most appropriate course, and are clear about the course content and examination requirements.

Given the flexibility of the way qualifications are studied, those learners who sit examinations at the end of their course may not do so at the same time as others in their cohort. This makes the calculation of comparable success rates challenging. Best estimates put success rates for GCSE and A levels combined at approximately 25%, which is very low. Learners who are studying at sea face a series of specific challenges and most of them start qualifications on their own initiative. At present, the education officer on board the learner's vessel or their line manager does not necessarily know that the learner is undertaking a qualification.

Prior to the inspection in October 2014, college managers did not monitor the progress of learners routinely. The subcontractor did not provide information about learners' progress frequently or routinely to college managers. This information is now forthcoming and college managers will be monitoring this every two weeks initially, and contacting learners to find out how they are each progressing and why they may be falling behind the agreed progress targets and supporting them to get back on target.

While college managers and the subcontractor's staff recognise the unique challenges of studying at sea, they have not been firm enough with learners on the boundaries and timescales required to be successful. They have allowed learners too much flexibility and additional time, to the extent that a high number of learners who

have enrolled on a course have not submitted any work in the first six months of being on the course.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that all learners receive sufficiently detailed and accurate information before they enrol on their course, which explains the challenges of learning at sea, so that they can make a well-informed decision about their course.
- Improve the pre-course and enrolment assessment to establish better learners' prior knowledge of the subject the learners are proposing to study to ensure they have sufficient prior knowledge to be able to succeed.
- Discuss with the Royal Navy Education Manager the potential to provide learners' details to the Royal Navy Education Officer, or their line manager, to enable them to provide support, encouragement and coaching to learners studying on Royal Navy vessels at sea.

Ensure that all teaching, learning and assessment are good or better, through improving tutors' planning and setting of individual targets for learners, giving them the best opportunity to gain their qualification and achieve high grades.

Since the recent inspection, college managers have introduced a system for assessing learners' abilities in English and mathematics at the start of the course. Managers now pass this information to the subcontractor when a learner enrolls. However, no evidence is available to show that college managers or tutors adapt the learning packs and materials in any way as a result of the information gained from the assessment. Furthermore, the tutor allocated by the subcontractor, according to the learner agreement, has a responsibility for marking work and providing feedback to learners and does not have a responsibility for support and guidance if a learner does not make contact with their tutor.

College managers and HMI reviewed a sample of the learning materials that the subcontractor supplies to learners. Whilst it was apparent that the learning materials are well structured to meet the requirements of the examination syllabus, they lack clear information on which elements or sections relate to which assignments. The majority of the materials are paper based, and all but one of the folders contained no opportunities for using technology, such as presentations or video teaching sessions on CD ROM or memory stick.

Priorities for improvement

- Discuss with the subcontractor how the learning packages and the support that learners receive for each subject are to be adapted in the light of learners' abilities in English and mathematics and prior learning in the subject they are studying.

- Discuss with the subcontractor how learning packages will be improved to use a wider range of teaching and learning methods, recognising that online learning and the wider use of the internet are not always possible when learners are at sea.
- Develop systems to monitor learners' progress against their target grade and provide feedback and support where learners fall below their target.

Ensure that all learners make good progress in their studies by requiring tutors to alert managers swiftly when learners make slower than planned progress, thus allowing for prompt additional help and guidance to enable learners to succeed.

Very few learners are making good progress with their assignments and towards achieving their qualification. Managers are developing systems to monitor learners' progress and, initially, this will take place fortnightly until the current learners and all new learners are on target to succeed. Prior to the inspection in October 2014, the tutors at the subcontractor did not inform managers at the college when learners were not submitting work and were not making the planned progress.

Priorities for improvement

- Improve communication with the subcontractor to ensure that college managers have the necessary information to monitor the progress of all learners fortnightly, and that managers contact swiftly those learners who are not making the planned progress. Ensure learners receive effective support and guidance from either their tutor or college managers to enable them to improve their rate of progress.

Improve managers' use of data to monitor learners' progress effectively, identifying and acting upon any differences in their performance, therefore improving the quality of learning. Make better use of data to monitor the subcontractor's and tutors' performance and make certain that managers take swift action to tackle underperformance.

Managers now have data from their subcontractor on the number of assignments that each learner has submitted. The data show that the large majority of learners who have been on course between six months and two years have submitted very little or no work, and are therefore making inadequate progress. A small minority of learners are submitting work to their tutor and are making at least the progress expected of them.

Managers do not yet routinely review progress data and take appropriate action to address tutors' or learners' underperformance. Following the recent inspection, managers initially planned to monitor learners' progress every six weeks. Given the urgency of improving learners' progress, college managers have reduced this to a fortnightly review. Managers are developing a list of specific actions to support

learners and identify who will be responsible for providing this support, which will be ready for implementation before the end of December 2014.

Managers do not yet analyse data in more detail, for example by tutor, subject or rank of the learner; consequently, college managers do not know if there are any variations in the performance of different groups of learners.

Priorities for improvement

- Contact those learners who have not submitted any work or have not submitted for several months to ascertain if they wish to remain on their course or not. Withdraw the learners who no longer wish to continue and note and analyse their reason(s) for not wishing to continue.
- Re-establish links between learners, tutors and Marine Society staff to review target submission dates in learners' action plans and agree realistic and challenging submission dates for future assignments.
- Contact learners promptly when they do not submit assignments by the deadline date and provide the relevant support to ensure they submit overdue work swiftly.
- Analyse data on success and retention at tutor, subject and learners' rank level to investigate trends in performance. Implement appropriate actions for improvement if variations in performance are detected.

To ensure that the courses offered by the college are the most suitable for the maritime industry, take immediate steps to collect and analyse information on the qualifications and employment that learners gain as a consequence of their studies.

Managers have determined in their post-inspection action plan to collect and analyse learners' destination data. This information will help managers evaluate the effectiveness of the courses they offer in enabling learners to take their next step in learning or employment. Given the current very low success rates, managers' focus needs to be on finding out which learners wish to carry on with their course and identifying why learners are not meeting deadlines for the submission of assignments.

Priorities for improvement

- Find out why so many learners do not submit work after they enrol on the course, analyse the information collected and develop appropriate actions for improvement in advice, guidance and support for current and future learners.
- Collect and analyse data on learners' destinations to evaluate the effectiveness of the different courses offered in helping learners to take their next step in education or employment.

With immediate effect, ensure that the college's safeguarding of GCSE and A-level learners improves, by requiring partner organisations to risk assess adequately their staff and tutors to determine whether they are suitable to work with vulnerable adults.

Managers have received signed assurances from their subcontractor that all of their tutors have either CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) or DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks and that they are suitable to work with vulnerable adults.

Learners studying at sea face a range of unique challenges to their learning. While the vast majority of the cohort would not necessarily be considered as vulnerable, their lifestyle, working conditions and shift patterns may potentially make them more vulnerable at different times. Managers should ensure that tutors receive regular updates about safeguarding to ensure they are able to continue to support learners effectively.

Priorities for improvement

- Provide further information to tutors on the challenges and vulnerabilities of learners who study at sea, some of whom may be in conflict situations, to ensure they are able to support their learners effectively.
- Ensure tutors receive regularly updated training on safeguarding issues that relate to vulnerable learners at sea.

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