

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Redbridge College
Date of visit: 9 November 2006

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

What are the reasons behind the large rise in retention rates for level 1 and 2 courses and the decline in success rates and fall in learner numbers at level 3 for 19+?

- Provisional data from the college indicate that retention rates are significantly above the national rate at all levels and for 2005/06 show a substantial rise at levels 1 and 2. The college has strengthened its pre-course guidance and entry procedures to ensure that learners are on the right course. The college has also discontinued some of its franchise work, especially at level 1. Achievement rates are at or just above the national average for all levels.

Success rates for learners aged 19 and over on long level 1 courses remain above the rising national rate, although the rate of improvement is falling. Provisional data indicate that they rose dramatically at level 2 in 2005/06. At level 3, they are now above the national average, although provisional data indicate a fall in 2005/06. The college had predicted correctly that achievement rates for just under one-quarter of learners at level 3 would be low. Achievement rates on access to HE, nursing and science courses were low following a change of syllabus with many learners only partially achieving the award. However, most learners still progressed to HE. In addition, achievement rates on some GCE AS level courses for adult learners were low.

Provisional data show that success rates for 16 to 18 year-olds on long level 1 and 2 courses are just above the 2004/05 national averages. At level 3 they remain below the national average despite a steady improvement from 2003/04. Retention rates are close to or above the national average at all levels. Achievement rates for 2004/05 are near to the national average at level 1, above at level 2 and below at level 3.

What arrangements have been made to improve achievement at levels 1 and 3 specifically?

- College data for 2005/06 estimate little change in success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 at all levels. The college has improved its recruitment processes for learners aged 16 to 18. Learners now benefit from much improved initial assessment of their basic skills and agree clearer and measurable targets for the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. The development of an electronic individual learning plan has enabled more staff to review learners' targets and has improved the speed with which tutors deal with learners' absence. Course tutors now analyse more thoroughly both group and individual progress. The college provides learning support assistants on all of its level 1 courses and has strengthened the role of the learning mentor. Learners benefit from the useful "booster" weeks to help them prepare for examinations. The college has phased out much of its GCE A level provision and now offers more vocational courses at level 3.

How successful have actions been to improve success rates on short courses?

- Achievement rates on very short courses at levels 1 and 2 for all ages were below the national averages in 2004/05. They were significantly below in 2004/05 for all ages at level 1 on longer short courses and at the national average for level 2. College data for 2005/06 show slight improvements for all age groups, taking success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 nearly to the national rate. The college estimates that success rates for learners aged 19 and over have remained significantly below the national rate. The college has reviewed its curriculum offer for longer short courses, especially those offered by Sandra Robinson Group (SRG), through franchise and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

What is the progression rate for learners on E2E programme?

- Over the three-year period to 2005/06, progression rates to employment, training or further education have continued to rise from 27% in 2003/04 to 62% in 2005/06, almost 20 percentage points above the average for East London.

How well do train to gain learners achieve?

- Data for 2005/06 indicate that 61% of learners achieve their qualification aim on train to gain programmes.

How closely does the college monitor the success of different minority ethnic groups and how successful are strategies to improve their performance?

- In 2004/05, success rates were below the national average for learners aged 16 to 18 from Black African backgrounds at levels 2 and 3, and for learners of all ages from a wide range of minority ethnic groups at level 3. The college monitors closely the performance of all learner groups. It has recently provided additional support to Black African learners on sports courses. The college has maintained the homework and assignment clubs it established through its previous EMAG grant.

What has been the impact of the new School of Skills for Life on key skills achievements?

- The last AAV noted that the college had set-up a school of Skills for Life and had begun to integrate the delivery of key skills. The school's new management structure provides a clearer focus on raising students' achievement and attendance rates. In 2004/05, no learners had achieved any key skills accreditation, mainly due to the poor completion of portfolios, but an overall pass rate of 70% was obtained in national tests for literacy and numeracy. In 2005/06, a total of 119 key skills qualifications were gained. External test pass rates were much higher at 56%.

Has the new support strategy led to improvements in attendance and punctuality?

- Attendance rates improved from 72% in 2003/04 to 78% in 2005/06. The current rate for 2006/07 is 81%, although staff indicate that this may be below the real level due to some data inputting problems. This is still short of the college's 85% target for attendance and the SAR reports that attendance and punctuality provide a continuing challenge. Electronic registration enables quicker follow-up of absenteeism and the work of learning mentors and tutors is helping towards the improvement.

Quality of education and training

What steps is the college taking to improve the proportion of good or better teaching?

- The college has trained a large group of staff to carry out lesson observations and external consultants also evaluate the quality of lessons. In one-third of lesson observations last year, consultants worked alongside college observers to carry out joint observations. The latest set of teaching and learning observations for September 2006, a total of 108 observations, gives a grade profile of 25% of lessons graded 1 or 2, 73% graded 3 and 2% graded 4. The proportion of inadequate teaching and learning for the initial set of lesson observations for 2005/06 was high at 17%. The reduction in this high number of inadequate lessons was the result of staff training and staff re-structuring during which many of the teachers whose lessons were judged to be inadequate left the college.

The college rightly identify the very low proportion of good or better teaching as an issue and senior managers report that the grading was over-harsh, partly as a response to the previously over-generous grading of lesson observations that took place in 2004/05. Another set of lesson observations is planned for all staff in December 2006 and senior managers envisage that there will be far more lessons graded as good or better, giving a lesson profile closer to that seen in other similar colleges.

What impact do action plans have to improve overall success rates in WBL? What arrangements are in place to ensure timely completion?

- Overall success rates for framework completion for both apprentices and advanced apprentices improved slightly in the three-year period to 2005/06 but remain significantly below the national rates. The college acknowledges that actions to improve success rates in work-based learning have not had sufficient time to make a difference. It has graded this provision as inadequate in its draft self-assessment report and identified appropriate actions in the quality improvement plan. The college makes good use of the six-week extended induction period for apprentices to provide learners with vocational tasters and to agree the planned duration of individual apprenticeships. It acknowledges that it needs to improve target-setting and progress reviews to ensure that learners complete within the agreed timescale.

What improvement has been made in curriculum areas judged to be performing below standard, for example music and access to HE?

- The college openly identifies under-performing curriculum areas and attempts to explain the reasons for these weaknesses. It has put in place stringent action plans with improvement strategies. Actions taken include the transfer of managers, who have proven experience of managing change, into these areas to improve the quality of provision.

Progress in the standard of accommodation

- The college has made good progress in improving the quality of accommodation. Improvements include a new hair and beauty salon, catering and kitchen areas, IT flexible learning area, a bright and comfortable student dining area and improved SRG premises in Ilford which include high quality classrooms, well-equipped IT suites and drop-in workshops. A mobile classroom is used as a student common room, partly installed as a response to students' requests.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made with SRG? What plans are in place to remedy the many weaknesses identified in the draft SAR?

- Since the last AAV, the college and SRG have made much progress. Learners now benefit from improved accommodation and the college has extended the range of programmes offered through SRG. A pre-apprenticeship course has enabled learners to investigate possible apprenticeships on this 15-week course. Progression data for 2005/06 suggest that a high proportion of learners continue to an apprenticeship.

The college has extended its work with 14 to 16 year-olds through the partnership with SRG and plays an active role in supporting pupils at risk from exclusion. The college has extended its workforce development provision through train to gain and has recently won the train to gain contract at level 3 for women entering management roles in industries where they are traditionally under-represented. The transfer of business studies to the Ilford premises of SRG demonstrates strongly the college's commitment to providing business studies courses in a town-centre setting. This enables learners to

benefit from better work experience opportunities through SRG's close links with the education business partnership. The addition of hospitality and catering to SRG's range of work-based learning programmes has enabled a wider range of learners to gain catering qualifications. Managers acknowledge that the provision of learning materials and accessibility to IT facilities need improving for the business studies learners now attending the new premises in Ilford.

SRG uses mostly college policies and procedures and has representation on most of the college's committees. It rightfully produces its own self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. SRG uses its own procedures and documents for the observation of teaching and learning. The college and SRG's observation of teaching and learning systems are similar and there are plans to incorporate elements of both into a new system.

The quality improvement plan is comprehensive and ambitious. It identifies correctly the actions and measurable outcomes needed to make improvement. SRG's draft self-assessment report contains many weaknesses for each of the areas of learning for which it has responsibility, but does not identify which of these are key weaknesses.

What progress has been made by the college on developing the ECM outcomes?

- The draft SAR has a section on the outcomes related to the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda. The ECM agenda is taken seriously within the college and an audit of the five ECM outcomes is in place and an ECM action plan is being written. Cross-college services address the ECM outcomes well. Trained youth workers work in the new students' common room. They organise the enrichment programme, but currently students cannot gain accreditation for their activities. College managers take account of the student voice through a system of course representatives and the students union. The LRC has displays relating to ECM themes. Student support services include a counsellor and there are good links with Connexions, Brook and other external agencies. The new 'Wellatcollege' on-line learning resource, used for tutorials, has a prominent ECM theme. However, embedding the ECM outcomes into the curriculum of all learning areas is still at an early stage.

What progress has been made on the planned expansion of 14 to 16 year-old learners and to provide bespoke provision for excluded learners and ESOL learners?

- The college has continued to expand its provision for 14 to 16 year-olds to meet the demand from school pupils to study vocational options at college. The number of 14 to 16 year-olds attending college has increased from 150 in 2003/04 to 450 planned for 2006/07. A broad curriculum offer includes hair and beauty, music technology, art and design, construction, catering, health and social care, childcare and sport. All courses provide accredited outcomes, except those for learners from the PRU, where a college certificate is issued. The college also works with pupils from neighbouring authorities. A group of excluded Year 11 pupils attended in 2005/06 and eight of these nine young people progressed to a mainstream college course this year. Similarly, 11 young people comprising an ESOL group from last year have all progressed onto college courses.

What progress has the college made in developing external links?

- The college has a strong focus on developing links with external agencies. These include local schools, universities and local partnerships and voluntary groups. Curriculum staff have also made links with other FE colleges to share good practice.

What is the impact of the management training carried out by the college?

- The college has continued its focus on management training for all senior and middle managers with the aim of providing a workforce that is responsive and flexible to change. Five staff review days have been allocated in the current academic year during which a number of key issues will be covered and all staff will be given the opportunity to give their views and share knowledge. A consultation with all college staff has produced a statement outlining their shared values, beliefs and behaviour.