

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Tower Hamlets
Date of visit: 8 May 2007

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 were the college's success rates in 2006 for each level of qualification?

- Overall, college success rates have continued to improve at most levels. Level 1 long qualifications improved significantly for 16 to 18 year olds, after a sharp fall last year. They are now roughly comparable to national averages and above it for adults. Level 2 long qualifications are above the national average for all ages, rising by 7% for adults. Level 3 long qualifications have continued to improve for adults, but they fell slightly for learners aged 16 to 18 and are just below the national average.
- Results of the minimum level of performance analysis produced by London East LSC indicate that 2.4% of long qualifications offered by the college are below the 50% success rate threshold. Much of this provision was ESOL level 2 provision and these lower success rates are linked with a change in the college's curriculum from non-accredited to accredited courses.
- Value added measurements of GCE A-level students, carried out through the ALIS scheme, achieved slightly below expectations in 2006. However, these results are not significantly low and the value added score has improved over the previous four years.

What are the success rates for key skills?

- Success rates for key skills have continued to increase for adult learners, but show a trend of decline for 16 to 18 year olds. Around two in three learners (some 550 learners) submitted a portfolio of evidence of an acceptable standard last year. The pass rate for the external test in level 2 communication was 21% in 2006 and the college has put a number of measures in place to specifically address this issue. Attendance at key skills lessons is not different from that for the rest of the course.

What are the current success rates for work-based learning?

- Previous success rates for work-based learning have been very low and they were 0% in 2006 for the IT practitioner's apprenticeship frameworks. This was largely due to a national issue surrounding the appropriateness of the technical certificate. However, while no framework achievements were recorded, at the end of the programme at least six learners were employed by the employer responsible for providing their work placement and some learners have since taken up other training options. In the current year, 15 learners started on the IT apprenticeship programme and nine are currently still in training. All nine have achieved their full framework (60 per cent) and are awaiting final verification. It is anticipated that the majority of those who complete the youth worker trainee apprenticeship will achieve the framework.

How effective are the actions that are being taken to improve students' attendance and punctuality in areas such as ICT which the college has highlighted as a key area for development?

- The previous Annual Assessment Visit (AAV) reported the overall students' attendance rate at 84% for 2006 and the figure for this current academic year is similar. Adult courses continue to have the lowest attendance rates, such as Skills for Life and Access to Higher Education. Attendance for the ICT curriculum area has improved from 85% in 2006 to 89% in the current year.

Quality of education and training

What support is given to teachers to improve the proportion of good or better teaching and learning in all curriculum areas?

- The college has continued to maintain a strong emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Lesson observations are planned for all full and part-time teachers and the grade profile for the current year shows 66% good or better teaching and very little that is inadequate. Tutorials are also observed, although these are not graded. The college has instigated an action research programme. This is developing best practice teaching and learning exemplars and learning materials which are being collated onto the college Intranet.

What work-related learning provision is in place currently?

- Work-based learning is offered in IT and youth work for apprentices. Companies such as Deloitte contribute to courses to prepare learners for employment by working on college premises with learners, helping them

to complete CVs and preparing them for interviews. The entry to employment (E2E) programme has recruited some 50 learners in the last year with a significant number moving into employment or onto other courses. The Step Up programme provides a progression route for E2E learners. Other NVQ programmes include health and social care and early years, hairdressing and beauty therapy and NCFE employability courses. Additional courses are provided in Financial Services through the National Skills Academy for Financial Services and Customer Care courses.

What progress has been made in the borough's 14 to 19 partnership, including plans for the delivery of the new diplomas?

- The borough's 14 to 19 partnership is currently amalgamating information on students' achievement and progression from each partner. Only 36% of Year 10 pupils studying at the college progressed to the second year of the course in 2006. However, many of the pupils not progressing to the second year continued to engage in useful education and training in Year 11 at school.

What progress has been made to ensure individual learning plans (ILPs) are used effectively?

- ILPs for work-based learning learners are much improved. They contain specific, measurable targets aimed at improving vocational and interpersonal skills. Timescales for achieving targets are set and monitored frequently by tutors.

Leadership and management

What are the main issues facing the college in the past year?

- The college has had a large turnover in senior staff within the previous year, including a new principal. The new senior management team has focused successfully on improving identified weaknesses in the previous inspection report, such as the poor achievement of work-based learning and insufficient sports facilities. Changes in the funding arrangements for adults, reflecting national priorities, has led to radical re-organisation in this area of the curriculum.
- The college continues to make good progress with external partners. Strong relationships with local schools ensure a wide range of learning opportunities for students. Employer partnerships continue to be a feature of the college's strategy for engaging students in the local community.

The National Skills Academy for Financial Services is a prime example of the collaborative work taking place.

How is the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda being taken forward and coordinated within the college?

- Many initiatives in the college are successfully meeting the ECM agenda. The self assessment report is explicit about the ways the college is addressing the ECM agenda by identifying current activities that are taking place. Tutorial support workers continue to provide effective help to students at risk of failing or dropping out of college. Good enrichment opportunities, such as those provided by the youth and enrichment team, cover a number of pertinent issues including sexual health and drug abuse. A police constable from the Safer Neighbourhood police team is based in the college and helps to make the college safer. Financial literacy is taught through programmes such as the certificate in financial studies that is offered as an additional voluntary course.

How effective are the methods by which the college captures the student voice and has this led to improvements in provision?

- Student representatives are in place for the large majority of courses. These representatives meet with college staff and minutes from these meetings are produced, with actions highlighted. The students interviewed by inspectors all felt that their views were taken seriously by staff. The student voice is also promoted through tutorials and focus groups and on-line questionnaires.