



Richmond upon Thames College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

Published
March 2007

Provider reference
130454

Contents

Basic information about the college	3
Background of the organisation	4
Scope of the inspection	4
<hr/>	
Summary of grades awarded	6
Overall judgement	7
Main findings	9

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Richmond upon Thames
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Kevin Watson
Address of college:	Egerton Road, Twickenham, Middlesex TW2 7SJ
Telephone number:	020 8607 8000
Fax number:	020 8891 5998
Chair of governors:	Paul Mudge
Unique reference number:	130454
Name of lead inspector:	Samantha Morgan-Price, HMI
Dates of inspection:	29 January – 2 February 2007

Background of the organisation

1. Richmond College is a general further education college located in Twickenham. The college is based on a single site, of approximately twenty acres. The college was established as the first tertiary college in the south east of England and is one of the biggest tertiary colleges in the country. The college's mission statement is, "Richmond upon Thames College exists to help all of its learners achieve their full potential".
2. The college provides courses in all of the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) sector subject areas with the most popular being science and mathematics, ICT, arts, media and publishing and business administration and law. The sector subject area of preparation for life and work accounted for 22% of the college's enrolments in 2005/06. The college has two Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in Digital Design and New Media (e-Media which is in partnership with Richmond Adult Community College) and Coaching, Leisure and Fitness (in partnership with Kingston College).
3. Just over 40% of the college's 16-18 year old learners come from the borough, which has a population of approximately 182,700. Around 34% travel from surrounding boroughs, notably Ealing and Hounslow. Some 50% of learners are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of school leavers with five or more grades A* to C at GCSE in the borough is 57%, which is 2% lower than the national average for England. The skills levels of the borough's residents are amongst the highest in London, with 63.2% of the working population holding NVQ level 3 or higher. This is well above the London average.
4. At the time of inspection, there were 4,109 16-18 year old learners. In 2005/06, there were 3,349 adult learners on courses mainly leading to externally accredited qualifications. The college also provides apprenticeship programmes for a small number of work-based learners. The majority of 16-18 year old learners were studying on courses leading to level 3 qualifications; the majority of adult learners were enrolled on level 1 and level 3 courses.

Scope of the inspection

5. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision

- leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

6. This is a good and improving college. Achievements and standards are good overall. Success rates in 2005/06 are above national rates for similar colleges and have generally improved over the last two years. Adult learners still under perform at levels 1 and 2. Work-based learners on apprenticeship courses succeed in line with national rates. Learners on advanced apprenticeships do not do as well. Pass rates in key skills have improved considerably in the last year and are now generally in line with national rates. Full-time learners with learning disabilities and/or difficulties achieve well.
7. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Learners are well motivated, attentive, participate well and make good progress in lessons. The use of information and learning technology (ILT) in learning is improving. Assessment practices are good overall. Learners have targeted actions for improvement and understand precisely how to improve their grades. Initial assessment is prompt and comprehensive.
8. Educational and social inclusion are good. Programmes are well suited to learner needs. Efforts to widen participation are successful, supported by collaboration with the community. Links with employers continue to be developed. Provision for learners with learning disabilities and/or difficulties is well established and good. The curriculum at level 3 is broad. There are good progression opportunities. The college's provision for enrichment is outstanding.
9. Learners receive good support and guidance. Pastoral and other support services are effective. However, there is limited access to some services for part-time learners. Careers guidance is highly effective.
10. Leadership and management are good and have ensured continual improvement, mainly since 2005. The principal and his senior management team have provided a clear focus for improvement. In some areas, the rate of improvement has been rapid, particularly in relation to adult success rates. Quality assurance arrangements are good. The process is well understood by staff and clearly links to the college's priorities. However, the college needs to continue to develop the monitoring of observations of teaching and learning.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

11. The college has made significant changes to key aspects to improve the student experience. Managers, supported by governors, have, through comprehensive strategic planning, refocused and invigorated the college and made

fundamental changes to the college's mission, objectives and structures. Effective quality assurance processes have enabled the college to make tangible improvements. Communication of change has been very well managed and staff are excited by the opportunities to make further improvements. Internal communication is highly effective and firmly concentrated on learner achievement and support. The student voice is a very strong feature of the college and effective actions have been taken as a result of student consultation. Learners' progress is closely monitored. The college self-assessment process is thorough and comprehensive and provides a full overview of the college's performance. Overall, college success rates are good and improving and areas for improvement have been clearly targeted.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

12. The college has made good progress since the last inspection. Success rates are not yet as good for adults as they are for 16-18 year old learners but there has been significant improvement at all levels of courses. Most of the issues identified at the last inspection have been tackled, although several are ongoing. The grades awarded through self-assessment in some curriculum areas show improvement on the last inspection. The profile of teaching and learning is similar to the profile awarded at the last inspection. Improvements have been made to accommodation and physical resources.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- high success rates on level 3 courses
- an extensive range of enrichment activities
- inspirational leadership and management of change
- highly effective internal communication.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the below average success rates for learners aged 19+ at levels 1 and 2
- the further development of the monitoring of observations of teaching and learning.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

13. Learners make good progress and achieve high standards on all 16-18 and adult level 3 courses. Standards achieved by learners on some GCE advanced courses are particularly high. Where courses are underachieving, actions are put in place to bring about improvement. Learners enjoy their studies and behave well. Learners produce work of a good standard. Skills for future life are well developed in the provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors agree with the college's self-assessment that the overall standards achieved by learners are good.
14. There has been a sharp rise in overall success rates in 2005/06. Prior to this there was steady improvement on most courses. The 16-18 year old learners achieve well at all levels of study. The success rate on the college's new International Baccalaureate programme is high. There has been a significant improvement in adult success rates on level 3 courses. These are now above the national average having been below in the previous two years. Despite improvements made, success rates on adult levels 1 and 2 courses are still below national averages. Learners attending day release programmes from school achieve well.
15. Work based learners on apprenticeship courses achieve at a better rate than nationally. Work based learners on advanced apprenticeship programmes have not been as successful. Success rates have shown a decline on the previous year and are below national rates. The college has identified the reasons behind learners' failure to complete and have now developed clear measures to improve success.
16. In 2006, success rates in key skills qualifications improved dramatically; some levels now exceed national rates. They are better than average in communications. However, more remains to be done. Success rates on level 3 key skills in application of number and information technology are below national averages and have been so for the past three years. Provision for key skills has been re-organised since the last inspection to enable learners to be placed on the most appropriate level of key skill. Alternative qualifications are also now being offered.
17. A high proportion of 16-18 year old learners complete their course and a good proportion pass the qualification at the end. More 16-18 year old learners have remained on their courses in 2005/06 than at the same time in the previous year. This is not the case for a large majority of adult learners. Attendance at lessons is good. The attendance rate during the last two academic years has risen to around 87%, which is above the average for similar colleges. The college continues to employ strategies to improve punctuality. Progression to

higher education for learners at the college is high. The progression rate onto other college courses for 14-16 year old learners is also high.

18. Learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are highly motivated and keen to learn. Learners make the most of all the college has to offer them. There is good participation in enrichment activities. The college is an effective learning community where learners contribute through a range of activities that includes working as ambassadors in local schools.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

19. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Learners are well motivated, attentive, participate well and make good progress in lessons. Key skills lessons now engage learners with relevant and interesting activities. Learners benefit from easily accessible workshops, including those which successfully meet their individual needs and develop literacy, numeracy and language skills. The use of information and learning technology (ILT), an area for improvement in the previous inspection, is now satisfactory, with some innovative use that enlivens lessons. However, lessons do not always meet the individual needs of learners. Punctuality remains a problem in some lessons, although it is challenged appropriately.
20. Following recent changes to the observation of the teaching and learning process, inspectors have insufficient evidence from the college's own lesson observation profile to support judgements. However, a team of 10 experienced and committed teachers motivate staff to focus on improving teaching and learning strategies. They manage a series of well attended staff development activities in areas such as theory teaching, ILT and active learning. Success rates are rising.
21. All full-time learners are thoroughly initially assessed. All entry level and level 1 learners are supported in class. Learners needing more intensive support are identified early and promptly given sufficient help. Attendance at support sessions is carefully monitored, and learners who fail to attend are contacted immediately. Support staff clearly explain the individual needs of learners to all their teachers. Many learners make good progress, especially in developing language skills and confidence. All have specific and time bound targets which are regularly reviewed.
22. Assessment practice is good overall. Learners have targeted actions for improvement and understand precisely how to improve their grades. For example, entry level learners work with staff to mark their own work, and fully understand how to pass tests. Success criteria are clearly communicated to learners. In a minority of cases, learners do not have clear or challenging targets for improvement. Learning is carefully checked in lessons. The college fulfils the assessment requirements of awarding bodies.

23. The college involves parents well. Tutors meet with them early in the course, to ensure they know who to contact and how learners are supported. Parents value the quality of information about progress that teachers give them, and receive letters of concern promptly if learners are failing to attend or complete work. A parents' focus group meets the principal each term, to raise issues and concerns which are responded to and resolved quickly.
24. The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. Programmes are well suited to learner needs. It has increased entry qualifications for some programmes to appropriate levels, and guarantees to find courses to develop skills. Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Learners with severe and moderate learning needs make particularly good progress, with high acquisition of skills. In the college's café and whole food shop, learners gain confidence through working with others and develop skills for independent living.
25. Learners identified as high achieving at school are offered the International Baccalaureate programme. Those choosing to study Advanced levels benefit from extension activities such as creative writing, the Richmond Journal of Philosophy, and extension papers.
26. The college plays an active part in the 14-19 partnership, developing a good range of vocational provision for 14-16 year old learners. However, enrolment on the Increased Flexibility (IF) programme has recently declined as a result of the participating schools' inability to fund these programmes. The college has a very good reputation with those employers providing work placements or experience, responding positively and quickly to their training needs. A large number of employers work with the college through the Coaching, Leisure and Fitness CoVE and the successful Sports Academies. However, the college has had difficulty in involving employers in the work of some vocational areas, and is not able to provide suitable work experience opportunities for some learners.
27. The college offers an extensive range of subjects at AS and A level, and the International Baccalaureate programme. The range of vocational courses is good, complementing the offer at other nearby institutions. Most learners benefit from an excellent range of curriculum enrichment activities, including trips, visits, residentials and other on- and off-site activities. In particular, the widely used sports facilities, enhanced by the college's status as a Centre of Vocational Excellence, have enabled learners to gain or maintain healthy lifestyles. Learners speak very highly of the way in which these enrichment activities enhance their experience and enjoyment of college and in some cases is the reason for their applying to the college. The college recognises the need to improve the gender imbalance on some courses and is starting to put in place plans to address this issue.
28. Prospective learners receive good and impartial advice and guidance through a comprehensive admissions process. Very effective use is made of the college's student ambassadors at events in schools. Advice and guidance for pupils from

Year 9 onwards in the feeder schools are strong. Taster days are well attended and offer 14-16 year old learners a valuable experience of the college and the vocational courses. During their course, learners access good careers advice and guidance. Adults returning to education receive satisfactory advice and guidance before their course starts.

29. Support needs of most full-time learners are identified early, usually before they start college. All full-time learners are also screened for literacy support needs at induction. Part-time adults who declare a need are assessed and supported. Many learners who take up support make good progress and are successful on their courses. However, the college does not yet sufficiently analyse the success of its support. Learners in the supported learning unit benefit considerably in life skills and social integration from the exemplary Partners Scheme which links learners with mainstream learners. The mainstream learners also benefit from understanding about learners with disabilities. The Skylights programme run by the college's youth worker is particularly successful in supporting learners who lack confidence, find difficulty in integrating socially, and are in danger of dropping out. High achieving learners are supported with special arrangements; for example, training for Oxbridge, conferences and interview practice. Apart from higher education entrants, destination data is not analysed to aid planning.
30. Full-time learners receive effective support from tutors. Individual learning plans are used at course level and action plans are used by personal tutors. Tutors closely monitor learners' progress and routinely challenge poor attendance, punctuality or behaviour. The management information system is used well to share information about good or poor performance of individual learners with teachers, tutors and senior tutors, so that any issues are addressed quickly. Where appropriate, letters are sent automatically to parents and employers resulting in improved performance. Every Child Matters issues are covered mainly through group tutorials, although there is no coordinated calendar of themes. The quality of tutorials is assessed by senior tutors as part of the lesson observation scheme. Part-time adults do not have access to tutorial support other than by their subject teachers.
31. The college provides access to a very good range of counselling, information, and welfare services, through college provision, and through the many external support agencies with which the college has excellent links. However, the limited opening times of the advice centre and the learning skills centre do not allow most adult learners to benefit from this provision.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

32. The college has inspirational leadership and management of change leading to a strong focus of continuous improvement through highly effective internal communication.

33. The college mission has been reviewed and gives a much greater emphasis to student achievement. Strategic direction and planning is very clear and fully committed to raising the aspirations and success of learners. The learner voice is heard through a wide range of sources and is a key aspect of the college's approach to quality improvement.
34. Overall, quality assurance is good. The process is well understood by staff and clearly links to the college's priorities. Internal inspections of subject areas are thorough and comprehensive. Specific actions taken to improve achievements, to raise the quality of teaching and learning and to closely monitor learner progress have been implemented. Generally, early indications are positive but it is too early to judge the full impact yet. Overall success rates made considerable improvement in 2005/06 and many level 3 qualification success rates significantly exceed the national average. Since the previous inspection, adult success rates have improved. In a few cases, the setting of targets and action planning are unclear.
35. Curriculum management is good. Management information gives accurate and timely data on achievements. Further developments are near completion and are planned to give a much clearer understanding on a range of learner performance.
36. The management of resources is good. Timetabling has been revised to maximise learning opportunities. Staff are well qualified and staff development is good, although the insufficient formal review of staff performance does not fully support the effective planning of staff development.
37. Clear improvements have been made to the college accommodation since the previous inspection and learning resources are appropriate to the needs of learners. The college recognises that some classes are overcrowded due to limited capacity. Access to and use of ILT is satisfactory.
38. Equality and diversity are very well promoted. The college has a good understanding of the student body and has taken positive actions to support some ethnic minority groups who are under performing. Access for those with restricted mobility has much improved since the previous inspection where it was highlighted as an area for improvement. The college is compliant with the requirements of the Special Educational Needs Disability Discrimination Act (2001) and Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000). Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to ensure the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults. Learners feel safe in college.
39. Governors are highly committed and supportive of the college's work. There is a broad range of expertise and two learners are members of the governing body. Financial management continues to be strong and the college provides good value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	03/04	753	66.0	60.3	5.7	357	39.5	59.1	-19.6
	04/05	882	66.1	64.2	1.9	377	39.5	61.6	-22.1
	05/06	776	72.0	*		327	51.0	*	
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	66	74.2	65.1	9.1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	04/05	87	70.1	67.9	2.2	1	100.0	58.1	41.9
	05/06								
NVQs	03/04	33	69.7	61.0	8.7	5	60.0	62.3	-2.3
	04/05	30	73.3	67.2	6.1	2	50.0	66.9	-16.9
	05/06								
Other	03/04	654	65.0	60.0	5.0	352	39.2	59.0	-19.8
	04/05	765	65.4	63.6	1.8	374	39.3	61.4	-22.1
	05/06								

* 2005/06 national averages not yet published

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream Level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	03/04	1270	69.3	56.3	13.0	353	24.9	53.6	-28.7
	04/05	1560	65.6	60.9	4.7	297	34.7	59.5	-24.8
	05/06	1202	69.0	*		161	53.0	*	
GCSEs	03/04	549	78.9	61.3	17.6	10	70.0	58.8	11.2
	04/05	643	77.8	64.1	13.7	3	100.0	62.3	37.7
	05/06								
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	256	71.9	63.0	8.9	1	100	56.6	43.4
	04/05	272	68.0	66.8	1.2	3	33.3	70.4	-37.1
	05/06								
NVQs	03/04	64	54.7	51.9	2.8	78	32.1	53.5	-21.4
	04/05	57	78.9	57.0	21.9	51	37.3	59.6	-22.3
	05/06								
Other	03/04	401	56.9	54.1	2.8	264	20.8	52.7	-31.9
	04/05	588	50.0	60.1	-10.1	240	33.3	58.8	-25.5
	05/06								

* 2005/06 national averages not yet published

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	03/04	7342	77.3	64.1	13.2	428	51.9	53.5	-1.6
	04/05	8289	76.6	67.5	9.1	445	54.8	57.3	-2.5
	05/06	8503	80.0	*		338	67.0	*	
A/A2 Levels	03/04	2456	89.3	83.8	5.5	71	80.3	65.5	14.8
	04/05	2515	87.6	85.6	2.0	99	78.8	69.1	9.7
	05/06								
AS Levels	03/04	4054	74.9	62.9	12.0	39	53.8	49.6	4.2
	04/05	5037	74.8	65.5	9.3	36	36.1	52.2	-16.1
	05/06								
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	532	52.4	52.4	0	28	32.1	43.5	-11.4
	04/05	390	54.9	60.2	-5.3	10	50.0	52.9	-2.9
	05/06								
NVQs	03/04	5	40.0	53.7	-13.7	101	39.6	47.0	-7.4
	04/05	1	0.0	62.4	-62.4	77	51.9	53.9	-2.0
	05/06								
Other	03/04	295	56.3	56.3	0	189	50.3	55.7	-5.4
	04/05	346	47.4	60.0	-12.6	223	48.4	58.3	-9.9
	05/06								

* 2005/06 national averages not yet published

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2004 year to 2006 year

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	27	11	32	33	47
	Advanced	11	0	13	9	48
2004/05	Apprenticeship	39	36	38	54	50
	Advanced	30	30	34	47	48
2005/06	Apprenticeship	52	56	53	62	58
	Advanced	27	26	44	48	54

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

b) Timely success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	43	5	16	16	24
	Advanced	13	0	19	8	30
2004/05	Apprenticeship	48	6	22	17	29
	Advanced	32	19	21	28	31
2005/06	Apprenticeship	25	12	33	16	38
	Advanced	25	20	27	44	34

* The number of learners who planned to complete their learning programme in the given year

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

* These are key objectives identified for each learner following an E2E programme

** Progression is measured in terms learners' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period