

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Freeman College (RMET)
Date of visit: 5 June 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

How well has the target setting process been developed? Have the principles of recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) been effectively implemented?

- The college has made satisfactory progress in the implementation of RARPA. Initial assessment of learners has improved since the last inspection. The initial three day assessment is followed up by further assessment throughout the first half term, which leads to the setting of both core and more specific targets, against which progress can be monitored. All tutors working with the learner are well involved in this process.
- A colour coded system is successfully in place to track progress within lessons and in the residential aspects of the programme. The personal tutor meets regularly with the learner and produces termly summary reports. Monitoring of how well this process is working is at an early stage of development, including monitoring of the links between target-setting and lesson planning and delivery.

The last inspection report stated it was not always possible to identify learner achievements. What has been done to improve this situation?

- The procedures outlined above form part of the Educational Planning Cycle (EPC) that the college is developing. This is allowing them to identify learner achievement more systematically than at the last inspection. Staff training is helping staff to record achievements more effectively. Changes made to college systems assist staff to record achievement by prompting specific questions on skills gained and items produced. The college has recently introduced the role of co-ordinator for Open College Network (OCN) accreditation as part of its quality assurance system.

Have learners now got improved access to external awards?

- The college has recently improved the range of subjects available to learners. For example these now include weaving and felting (accredited), green woodwork

(accredited), catering (accredited), horticulture (accredited), medicinal balm-making, drawing and engraving, music and OCN awards. Although the Ruskin Mill Orientation Course (RMOC) is a non-accredited programme it incorporates access to OCN modules where appropriate.

- Learners also have appropriate access to other external awards such as health and hygiene to level 2, numeracy at level 2 and catering to level 1. These programmes are offered by a local general further education college in collaboration with Freeman College; however there is no formal service level agreement to monitor these arrangements. Links with external agencies are good and are being developed further.

Quality of provision

What actions has the college taken to improve the management of skills for life and literacy and numeracy across the college? Have these brought about better co-ordination and more consistency in good practice?

- The college has made effective progress in this aspect. A part-time co-ordinator with level 4 qualifications is now in place and the college has joined the skills for life quality improvement programme, which is enabling them to share good practice within a local group of providers. An action plan has been established and all staff have received initial training. The college acknowledges this work is still at an early stage of development. Diagnostic assessment of literacy and numeracy skills is being undertaken with all students with a view to setting specific targets for communication, word and number for next term. Literacy and numeracy development for learners takes place within their normal programme and, where appropriate, via additional discrete sessions. In addition to the co-ordinator, two other staff are identified to lead this work but they are not yet fully qualified.

How well has the college addressed the weakness in transition planning?

- There has been recent improvement to transition planning. A part-time co-ordinator of work experience and transition now leads this aspect of the college work. A small number of learners currently benefit from external work placements. The college has identified students who are leaving this term as a priority for placements, and it has also found external placements for a couple of other learners. The college plans two significant developments for this aspect of its work next term. Plans are in place to deliver a weekly session on transition to all third year students. Accommodation changes will allow the college to offer a much greater range of internal work placements in realistic vocational settings, as well as working to further develop external possibilities.

Leadership and management

Have arrangements for assuring the quality of the provision improved? How effective is the self-assessment process in driving up standards? How involved do staff feel in the process? Do they take full ownership of the judgments in the report?

- The college is fully aware that the systematic application of quality improvement processes remains underdeveloped, but plans are in place to bring about future improvements. The college is developing a thorough system of action planning which is reviewed termly and aims to underpin the quality improvement processes, but this is yet to be fully embedded. However, there is a comprehensive programme of staff development especially in target setting and identifying and tracking progress and achievement.
- The involvement of staff in the self-assessment process is better than at the last inspection and this is starting to bring about the necessary improvements. Most staff have an enhanced understanding of the process and their views are appropriately sought on a range of issues so that they are able to take more ownership of the outcomes. However, the college is aware that the self-assessment process remains an area for further improvement and to this end key staff are participating in specific self-assessment training. The college intends to re-evaluate the process for the next academic year and to introduce changes to ensure greater involvement of staff.
- There have been significant changes to the management structure since the last inspection. The new structure has brought about increased stability and strength for Freeman College and has enabled the three RMET colleges to share and develop good practice.

What is the college's current assessment of the proportion of good or better teaching? What are the current strategies to improve the quality of teaching?

- Although lesson observations of teaching and learning do take place, and the three observers have received training, the process is not sufficiently formalised or embedded and the outcomes are not adequately analysed to demonstrate improvements. There is no formalised system to support specific staff whose lessons are judged to be less than satisfactory.
- General strategies are developing to improve the quality of teaching and these include a high emphasis upon continuing professional development. Plans are in place to implement tutor mentor groups. Freeman College has joined a regional group of colleges to share session observation practice and has also joined the RMET Learning and Quality group with monthly meetings on quality issues.

Has the college done all it can reasonably do to ensure the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults?

- In addition to workshop risk assessments and unusual activity risk assessments, a generic risk assessment on each student has been implemented since the last inspection. High emphasis is placed upon prioritising health and safety, for example the Trust's Health and Safety consultant visits the College every three weeks, conducts an inspection across all sites and monitors actions for improvement.
- A single central record of vetting and recruitment checks has been put into place and all staff and volunteers are appropriately checked through the Criminal Records Bureau. However, the single record has some other gaps of which the college is aware. The trustees are yet to receive 'safeguarding' training.
- The recording of incidents and complaints is much improved since the last inspection. A comprehensive policy and procedure is being put into place to ensure that such issues are properly logged and dealt with appropriately.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

Co-ordination of the extended curriculum:

- There was not sufficient time to explore the improvements to the co-ordination of the extended curriculum and clearer links to individual learning plans.

Staff qualifications:

- Progress in the actions to address weakness in staff qualifications was not sufficiently explored. However, the principal explained that plans are in place to ensure that Freeman College education staff will have received qualifications by 2010. In addition, in 2007/08 the external qualifications will be integrated with the internal Hiram Academy staff training and this is to be a significant development for the colleges.