

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Redbridge College

Date of visit: 24 September 2007

Context

Redbridge is a medium-sized general further education (GFE) college based on one main site at Little Heath in the London borough of Redbridge and a second site in Ilford town centre. Redbridge operates a partly selective system of secondary schooling, and all local schools have their own sixth form. The nearest similar colleges are Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Newham. The college has grown significantly in recent years. It has revised its curriculum offer recently and is now a wholly vocational college.

The college was last inspected in January 2007. Effectiveness of provision was satisfactory, as were achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management. Capacity to improve was judged to be good. The curriculum areas inspected were either graded as good or satisfactory with the exception of health and care and business and administration which were unsatisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates since the last inspection?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection, achievements and standards were graded as good for adults and satisfactory for learners aged 16-18.

For the monitoring visit, the college provided retention, achievement and success data for 2006/07, for the four levels of long courses and for short courses. Performance figures were based on complete data for retention and between 78% and 100% completeness of data for achievement. The college did well to reach this stage of data entry by the end of September.

The college has made good progress with further improving learners' retention, but achievement data were incomplete at the time of the visit and it cannot be certain what full achievement data, and hence success rates, will show.

Retention continues to be good and is often high. In 2006/07, for learners aged 16-18, it is improved over 2005/06 for all levels, except for Level 2, where it is much the same. For all long course levels and for short courses, retention is above the national rates in 2006/07. For Level 3, retention is ten percentage points above the national rate.

The college anticipates that once all further data are recorded, achievement rates will be at, or above, 2005/06 figures. For Level 3 long courses, where 94% of data are entered, , achievement rates for both learners aged 16-18 and for adults have significantly improved in 2006/07 and are both well above the national rates, leading to success rates above the national rate.

Short course retention rates are high, but achievement and success rates are likely to be below national rates when all data is processed. The college is aware of the courses which are contributing to this likely fall in achievement and is taking action to address identified issues.

What progress has been made in improving the outcomes for work based learning apprentices?	Reasonable progress
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Achievement and standards for work based learners were judged to be unsatisfactory at the last inspection. Virtually all work based learning apprentices now follow apprenticeship programmes in business administration. Reasonable progress has been made in improving the outcomes for apprentices. Framework success rates have improved from 25% in 2005/06 to 41% in 2006/07. Timely success rates for the same period have improved from 28% to 40%. These rates continue to be below national averages.

Quality of provision

What actions have been taken to improve links with employers?	Reasonable progress
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The last inspection reported limited links with employers and restricted opportunities for work placement as key areas for improvement. Although many actions are still at the planning stage, the college has made reasonable progress to increase its engagement with employers.

A recently appointed vice principal provides leadership and coordination for employers' links through the newly established centre for enterprise and innovation. Further approved staffing posts, to be appointed, include a director of enterprise and business relations. Existing employer boards are

being widened to include all vocational areas and will meet three times a year. The college has good links with a number of employers and organisations. It plans to produce a prospectus for employers and has established a flexible learning unit for delivery of qualifications in the workplace. The college aims to achieve accreditation for the new standard for employer responsiveness by September 2008.

A work placement unit is being established to coordinate all college work experience placements. It is planned to streamline procedures and ensure that all placements are vocationally relevant and enable learners to obtain a broad range of experience. Although work experience placements are well-established in some curriculum areas, for others, such as sports and leisure, only a limited proportion of learners will benefit from them this academic year.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the management of provision in business administration?	Reasonable progress
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Provision in sector subject areas 15, business administration and law, was considered to be unsatisfactory at the last inspection. Since then, the senior and operational management arrangements for the area have been fundamentally changed. Reasonable progress is being made in addressing the areas for improvement. Three new staff provide leadership and management. A vice principal and a director of curriculum provide overview and direction, working with a curriculum manager. The curriculum has been reviewed and changed. Poorer performing business administration programmes have been discontinued. Some new programmes, planned within the context of enterprise and innovation, will be started.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning is a clear priority, for managers and teachers. The area shares in the improving proportion of lessons graded above satisfactory for the college as a whole, identified through the college's scheme of lesson observation. A mentoring scheme to help teachers with specific aspects of their teaching is in place. Good resources, including those for e-learning, support the well founded approach to improve teaching and learning.

Retention for main courses is often high, and well above national rates. Success rates on these courses are often improved since the last inspection, although achievement rates on the national diploma/certificate programmes fell somewhat in 2006/07.

Framework success rates for apprentices in business improved from 25% in 2005/06 to 41% in 2006/07. Good actions have been taken to improve performance in technical certificates and in key skills assessments.

What progress has been made in improving the leadership and management of provision in health and care?	Reasonable progress
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Since the last inspection, when health and social care was graded unsatisfactory, the college has made reasonable progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There are new senior and curriculum managers and the college has adopted an open and self-critical approach to weaknesses identified. New and experienced teachers are in post and team teaching is in place across all courses

Overall retention rates for 2006/07 increased by 15 percentage points from the previous year and are above the national average for similar colleges. The low achievement and retention rates in some courses are being addressed through re-structuring of the curriculum and bringing forward assessments to ensure accreditation is gained earlier in the academic year. More stringent monitoring of learners' progress is taking place and learners at risk of under-performing or dropping-out will be identified sooner and provided with support.

Work experience placements are rightly identified by the college as a key area for improvement. Good links have been established with the child centre, situated on the college site, to provide more opportunities for learners to gain experience of a realistic work environment along with other childcare providers and local employers.

It is too early to assess whether the quality of teaching and learning have improved. All teachers continue to have their teaching observed and graded and peer observations are being introduced. Subject learning coaches and an e-learning champion are working with managers and teachers to improve teaching and share good practice. Staff training is planned to ensure the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) is used more effectively. A resources coordinator has the responsibility to improve the availability of learning materials.

What progress has been made in improving the management of work based learning?	Reasonable progress
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The college has thoroughly reviewed its strategy and plans for the delivery of work based learning. The small provision is tightly managed and learners' outcomes are improving. The college has suspended its provision of advanced apprenticeships and is concentrating on ensuring the quality of the apprenticeship programme.

Initial and diagnostic testing are now more systematic. The teaching of key skills and technical certificate content now take place at the start of the programme, helping to address previous issues of poor performance in these. Employers are increasingly well engaged in planning and helping to deliver learners' programmes. There is significant work to ensure that learners' programmes embrace work experiences and are relevant to their work.