

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Freeman College

Date of visit: 30 April 2008

Context

Freeman College is one of three independent specialist colleges (ISCs) run by the Ruskin Mill Educational Trust Limited (RMET). All offer specialised learning experiences to young people with a range of learning difficulties. The three colleges are set within commercial craft and arts centres where a steady stream of visitors attend craft workshops, concerts, lectures and exhibitions. Freeman College, which opened less than three years ago, is based in a converted cutlery works in the heart of Sheffield with additional locations in the city centre, the suburbs and city woodland. The college has more than doubled in size since it opened three years ago and now caters for 48 learners, 75% of whom are male. In January 2008 the college moved to a new purpose designed site, the 'Sterling Works', in the city's cultural industries quarter. Some of the metal working curriculum has remained on the Wentworth Site. The speech and language and performing arts elements of the college are based at the Merlin Theatre in Nether Edge. The 'ancient and sustainable technology curriculum' is based in Ecclesall Woods. A new animal husbandry programme was successfully started in September 2007 at Highcliff, Eyam, Derbyshire. The profile of the learners attending Freeman College includes many with serious social and behavioural difficulties. The last annual assessment visit took place in June 2007 and the previous inspection was in January 2007 when the overall effectiveness was satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What improvements have been made to better ensure the consistency of target setting and recording of progress at all levels across the college?	Reasonable progress
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The implementation of the framework for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) continues to develop at a good pace; this takes place through the RMET comprehensive educational planning cycle. Since the previous annual assessment visit, the focus on monitoring and improving the quality of target setting and recording learners' progress has increased across both the academic and extended curriculum. Targets are effectively monitored by the education and quality improvement co-ordinator and modified through this process. Personal tutors are

well supported and trained to set initial core targets for new students. All tutors receive individual support from the co-ordinator as necessary. Each tutor team leader mentors a group of tutors and they meet regularly to maintain consistency. A learner journal has recently been introduced for use in all sessions. Initial indications are that it is successfully enabling learners to develop their reading and writing skills as well as providing good opportunities for them to assess their own progress. The recently established learning and quality working group is developing a new assessment framework for implementation by July 2008. A comprehensive diagnostic assessment in communication, word and number was completed for all learners last term. The outcomes have been used well to set more precise targets in that area.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in implementing a more thorough lesson observation scheme that can be used to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The scheme to observe teaching and learning is developing well. Systems are more formalised and outcomes are effectively analysed to demonstrate improvements. All tutors are observed and assessed in sessions at least twice a year and all receive comprehensive feedback on their performance. The observation scheme now includes residential provision and the extended curriculum. A trained team of observers meet regularly to plan and ensure consistency of judgements. They are establishing a culture of quality improvement across educational and residential provision. A clear process is in place to support staff whose lessons are judged less than satisfactory. In 2006/07, 70% of sessions observed were good or better. Although this proportion has decreased slightly for 2007/08, the process is now much more effective.

How effective is the transition planning process in preparing learners for the next stage in their life after college?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the transition arrangements for learners; it is more individualised and comprehensive. Two transition seminar groups are now well established. They meet twice a week and focus on all aspects of moving on, including developing self awareness, relationships, managing money, housing and liaising with a range of agencies. The success of these groups is being closely monitored and evaluated so that further improvements can be introduced for the coming year. Wherever possible, all learners have their future long-term placement identified on their individual learning plan. The transition co-ordinator attends the annual reviews of final year leavers and liaises closely with all appropriate agencies. A transition resources library has been started, and includes, for example a video on housing options and work experience information. A system

of recording transition planning and the tracking and monitoring of work experience has been set up, and is gradually being transferred on to the college database. Cross-college meetings have been arranged between the transition co-coordinators of the three RMET colleges to more effectively share methods of working, best practice and the issue of employability. All tutors, support workers and house parents have received initial training in using the national literacy and numeracy core curriculum and are expected to integrate skills for life in sessions held in the residential homes. Over 20 work experience placements are now available with a much greater range of options available for those learners for whom this is appropriate.

Leadership and management

Does the college now have a more thorough approach to the consistent application of quality improvement procedures including self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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Overall, self-assessment processes are improving. The report is informative and clearly indicates strengths and areas for improvement. However, the evidence provided is not always sufficiently thorough nor does the report adequately reflect the many developments taking place within the college; for example the good retention, attendance, and achievement data or health and safety issues which are given high priority. The college is aware of the need to further develop and embed the self-assessment processes. A comprehensive quality improvement plan is designed to maintain strengths and resolve areas for improvement. The plan is appropriately detailed containing objectives, actions, target dates, and responsibilities as well as commentary on progress. Since the start of this term, a quality improvement self-assessment team has been successfully established to include representatives from across all areas of the college. Plans are in place for this team to meet each half term in order to better record and update issues related to self-assessment. Arrangements for quality improvement continue to develop well and procedures are more thorough than at the previous annual assessment visit. Most aspects of the provision are effectively covered by the RMET educational planning cycle and this is now more effectively embedded into the college year. It provides a much improved system to identify learner achievement than at the previous inspection. A service level agreement is now established with the local further education college and links with local agencies and schools are good. Although many improvements have been made in the application of quality processes, the college does not set itself whole college targets on which to more accurately measure its performance year on year.

What progress has been made to resolve weakness in staff qualifications and appraisal processes?	Significant progress
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The proportion of staff who hold either teaching or skills for life qualifications is improving. At their annual appraisal all staff are invited to join the RMET Hiram Academy 'institute for learning' to discuss their continuing professional development needs. Staff training is now appropriately recorded and tracked and the Academy provides an excellent resource for staff. A thorough induction programme is in place for all newly appointed staff. From September 2008, a comprehensive range of courses will be available to ensure that all new staff reach educational attainment to at least level 3. In addition, during this transition year and in order to meet the requirements for teacher training, Freeman College is working in partnership with another ISC to deliver the City & Guilds 7304 associate teacher qualification. Currently 40 teaching staff are employed, of whom 13 are fully qualified to postgraduate certificate in education level, 17 are taking the associate teacher qualification and hope to continue onto the full teaching qualification in the future and two deferred to next year. Now only eight tutors are without teaching qualifications. All of these staff are either new or hold small fractional posts but all are expected to begin their teaching qualification during the next academic year. Tutor team leaders are mentoring and supporting these staff to achieve their qualification. The communication, word and number (CWN) co-ordinator and full-time CWN tutor hold level 4 qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Level 4 training opportunities for CWN tutors have been identified as an area for development in the next academic year. Freeman College now has a staff development plan clearly linked to the outcomes of regular staff appraisal processes. Staff appraisal is effectively linked to the outcomes of the teaching observation scheme.

How well has the college responded to guidelines on safe recruitment practices and safeguarding?	Significant progress
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The college has taken effective action to meet guidelines on safe recruitment practices and safeguarding. A single central record of vetting and recruitment checks is well established, comprehensive and regularly monitored. All staff and volunteers are appropriately checked through the Criminal Records Bureau. All staff have received timely safeguarding training as appropriate as have the college trustees. The trustees not yet fully trained in safeguarding are new to their role and training is planned for them. A nominated trustee is responsible for safeguarding issues. Health and safety is a clear priority, for example, the Trust's health and safety consultant continues to visit the college every three weeks, conducts an inspection across all site residences and work placements and monitors actions for improvement.

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