

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of institution: London South Bank University (LSBU)

Date of visit: 9 December 2008

Context

Further education (FE) funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is a very small proportion of LSBU's provision and represents less than 1% in terms of the university's overall funding. FE is located within three discrete units: LLU+, the National Bakery School (NBS) and The Academy of Sport.

LLU+ is a specialist Skills for Life professional development centre. Its FE provision includes family literacy, language and numeracy courses, courses which provide opportunities to obtain recognised Skills for Life qualifications, workplace programmes relating to Skills for Life, intermediate courses at level 3 and level 4 teacher training courses, with a family learning or language, literacy and numeracy focus. The teacher training courses are not within the remit of this monitoring visit. The number of students on LSC funded programmes enrolled on LLU+ courses is 178.

The National Bakery School includes the Tower Restaurant within the university. The restaurant provides the opportunity for students to obtain NVQs levels 1 and 2 in multi skills. The NBS offers qualifications that include bakery, confectionery, sugar modelling, sugar decoration and patisserie. There are currently 213 enrolments on different part-time courses. The NBS has just started a Train to Gain contract, working with Paul UK to deliver NVQ programmes. There are fewer school pupils on NBS programmes this year than in the past, but NBS is working with local schools on the development of a new diploma for 2011/2013.

The Academy of Sport provides sports coach education, drawing on a pool of LSBU approved tutors and working with a number of different partner organisations. Those participating include LSBU undergraduates on sports courses, as well as those from outside of the university. 178 people participated in 9 courses in 2007/08. Courses delivered include football and basketball at levels 1 and 2, rugby football union and rugby league at level 1 and basketball referees, gym instructors, amateur swimming association club coach at level 2.

Achievement and standards

To what extent have retention and pass rates on FE courses improved since the last inspection in 2005?

On LLU+ programmes, a high proportion of learners have few or no formal qualifications, are attracted into learning through the courses on offer and successfully achieve their goals. On first steps programmes these goals include regular attendance, good punctuality, returning to education, moving towards employment and playing an active role in their children's education and in their communities. Since the last inspection, most retention and pass rates on LLU+ courses have improved. In 2007/08 the retention rate was 81% and the achievement rate was 88%.

In 2007/08, some 66% of the LLU+ students opted for accreditation and of these, 84% gained an external award. This reflects an increase from 2006/07. For those who choose not to take the accreditation route, tutors use recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) to measure achievement against group and individual learning goals. This is evidenced using a variety of methods, such as evaluations and evidence logs. The 2007/08 self-assessment report for LLU+ acknowledges the need to continue to refine the RARPA process, particularly for those learners on roll-on-roll-off courses. It also identifies, as areas for development, the need to improve retention, the take-up of accreditation and achievement rates for learners taking level 1 and level 2 national tests in literacy and numeracy.

In the NBS in 2007/08 the average pass rate was 86% and retention was around 91%. Most students achieved their targets which, for full-time students, included their main qualification and, in addition, extra nationally recognised qualifications. With a changing course profile, direct comparisons from one year to another cannot easily be made in relation to pass and retention rates. NBS is no longer able to offer NVQs to full-time students but has introduced vocationally related qualifications (VRQs). These include level 2 diploma in food manufacture and also level 1 and 2 in creative techniques. NBS has just begun a Train to Gain contract, with 24 trainees, working with a commercial bakery to deliver NVQ 2 and 3 in food manufacture. It is too early to measure the success of Train to Gain. The recent development of a foundation degree in baking foundation management provides a good progression route for those on FE courses.

Last year 178 people participated in 9 LSC funded courses offered by the Academy of Sport and a high proportion successfully completed them. Most of the courses are offered over one or two days, a weekend or, in a few cases, several weeks. Participants are successful if they are judged, against clearly identified criteria, to be competent at the end of the course. If not successful, they take advantage of the opportunity to be assessed again on another occasion.

Quality of provision

How effective is the identification, and provision of, additional support for students on all FE programmes?

Students on LLU+ and NBS programmes have initial assessments to identify their literacy and numeracy levels. The nature and timing of these assessments varies according to the programme. Appropriate support is offered and is almost always taken up. In both areas, progress is reviewed effectively by personal tutors. These tutors monitor progress informally on a regular basis and formally through tutorials and learning agreements. They liaise, where appropriate, with additional support tutors. In a few cases, where there is a serious cause for concern, specialist mentors are also provided. Students benefit from LSBU's specialist dyslexic support service.

Leadership and management

To what extent do quality assurance procedures lead to improvements in FE provision and/or the maintenance of high standards?

A variety of informal and formal quality assurance arrangements are in place. In both NBS and LLU+, areas for development identified in the last inspection reports have mostly been addressed. For example, many pass and retention rates have improved and, within the NBS, more attention is given to identifying the additional learning support needs of students and to reviewing and planning their progress.

Appropriate use is made of student evaluations and of internal and external verification to make judgements about the quality of provision and areas for improvement. There is no institution-wide analysis of FE provision that analyses overall trends or comparisons with other providers. The individual SARs for FE funded provision produced by each of the three units are based on the common inspection framework and vary in terms of quality and depth of analysis. The SARs for NBS and the Sports Academy provide a helpful background to the context of their provision but are more descriptive than evaluative. The LLU+ SAR is comprehensive and highly evaluative, drawing very effectively on an analysis of past performance and trends to inform action plans and future developments.