

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Freeman College, Ruskin Mill Educational Trust Limited (RMET)

Date of visit: 10 March 2009

Context

Freeman College is one of three independent specialist colleges (ISCs) run by the Ruskin Mill Educational Trust Limited (RMET). All three colleges offer specialised learning experiences to young people, aged 16 to 25 years, with developmental delay and 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 in 2005, is located in a range of sites across Sheffield including the city centre, the suburbs and city woodlands. The college has more than doubled in size since it opened and now caters for 61 learners, 86% of whom are male and 34 are residential. Staff numbers have increased from 30 in September 2005 to 145 in July 2008.

In January 2008 the college moved to a new purpose designed site, the 'Sterling Works', in the city's cultural industries quarter. This is the administrative headquarters of the college and also houses the weaving, felting and spoon forging workshops and the medical facility. Some of the metal working curriculum and the college's own pewter business 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 in Derbyshire. The Academy of Makers, housed in the ground floor of the 'Butcher Works', which is adjacent to the Sterling Works, provides work experience for learners with independent makers from a diverse range of craft skills backgrounds. There is also a commercial organic café currently being run as a pilot project and a wood fired bakery is due to be opened following approval of a funding application.

The profile of the learners attending Freeman College includes many with serious social and behavioural difficulties. The last annual assessment visit took place in April 2008 and the previous inspection was in January 2007 when the overall effectiveness was satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

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| What progress has been made in ensuring 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 well. Since the previous annual monitoring visit, the college has continued to maintain its clear focus on monitoring and improving the quality of target-setting through training and support for tutors. In October 2008, a tutor meeting was held for staff to work together to set and moderate individual learner targets. Targets are monitored effectively by the quality assurance co-ordinator and modified through this process. Evidence indicates some recent improvement in targets for the summer term.

The quality of recording learner progress against targets remains variable. A new document was introduced in September 2008, for personal tutors to record weekly progress at tutorials. Termly summative progress reports are detailed but in some instances do not record the level of progress made; examples include that the learner is 'able to concentrate for longer' or that 'budgeting and saving are improved'. The college is aware of the need to continue its focus on improving the recording of progress through ongoing training and support. Comprehensive baseline assessments are now in place for all learners and are used effectively to identify appropriate goals and annual core targets. The learner journal is now used well by learners to review sessions, in relation to what was learnt, what went well and identification of problems encountered.

The college has clear plans to develop the RARPA framework further. This includes plans to formalise the process of recording incidental learning; while this is currently collected it is not used formally and not used to set targets. During the summer term, there will be a pilot project on using the management information system (MIS) to develop the RARPA system online. This will be reviewed by the learning and quality working group prior to full implementation.

Quality of provision

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| What progress has been made on improving the Skills for Life provision? | Significant progress |
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The college has made significant progress in improving the structure of the Skills for Life provision. A level 4 literacy and numeracy specialist tutor was appointed in 2007 to lead this aspect of the curriculum. An additional literacy and numeracy tutor was appointed in November 2008 and is working towards level 5 in numeracy. A communication, literacy, numeracy and life skills team is now in place across the college. At the previous inspection, the identification of literacy, numeracy, language and communication support was judged insufficient and incomplete. A

comprehensive initial assessment of learners is now completed before entry to the college which clearly identifies learners' specific literacy, numeracy, communication and language needs. An appropriate diagnostic assessment is completed that provides a clear summary of individual areas for development. A recently developed movement assessment will be implemented to assess the impact of each learner's disability on their movement and to identify ways to support learners to overcome this. Staff training has taken place and the assessment will be implemented for the new intake of learners for September 2009.

Learners' feedback indicates that they understand clearly the literacy and numeracy skills that they develop through their curriculum. They value these skills greatly and the way in which the college is supporting their development. Where appropriate, learners work towards levels 1 and 2 accreditation in literacy and numeracy. The college introduced a range of nationally accredited literacy and numeracy qualifications for learners at Entry level in January 2009. The aim is to accredit the skills developed through the curriculum.

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| <p>How effective is the transition planning process? What progress has been made in preparing the learners to meet their long term goals? How successful are learners in progressing to these?</p> | <p>Significant progress</p> |
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Significant progress has been made on improving the structure of the transition process. The college has a clear focus on preparing learners well for transition out of the college. The first cohort of learners left the college in 2008. Of the nine who left, there was good progression to further education, training and employment. Two learners were accepted onto higher education courses in drama or music, one is on a BTEC national diploma in art and design, one is in supported employment and two others are doing voluntary work. The college is collecting data on transition outcomes in relation to learners' long-term learning goals and is aware of the need to develop this tracking further as the number of learners increase.

Three transition seminar groups exist for third-year learners, as well as individual sessions for learners where this is more appropriate. A detailed summary of learners' transition action plans is maintained and regularly updated. Since October 2008, a weekly transition planning meeting is held to review transition for individual learners and to prepare a detailed summary of goals and recommendations for their review. Nationally accredited qualifications in employability and independence were introduced for third-year learners in January 2009. The aim is to provide appropriate structure for individual learners in the third-year transition groups. A member of staff was appointed to introduce the independence accreditation. The college has a clear focus on preparing learners to meet their long term goals which are reviewed half-termly. All learners have access to work experience opportunities which may be internal or external depending on learners' needs. The range of external work experience opportunities for third-year learners has increased from seven in 2007/08 to 22 currently. A work experience co-ordinator has been appointed to support further developments; this was previously part of the transition co-ordinator role.

Several clear plans are in place to develop the transition process further. A recent review of the transition process led to clarification of staff roles and responsibilities and the identification of gaps in the process. The college has identified the need to improve the transition passport by working with learners to increase their ownership of it. Personal tutor training is planned to support this process. Transition planning is starting to be recorded on the MIS. A personal tutor handbook for transition is currently being developed and will be introduced for all learners in September 2009. The college has a bungalow on one of the sites which will be used from May 2009 to provide opportunities for learners to develop their independence skills and confidence in preparation for transition. A restructure will take place across all RMET colleges for September 2009. A new student manager role will be introduced and part of their remit will be to manage transition on an individual basis.

Leadership and management

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| <p>What progress has been made on developing a robust quality improvement processes including lesson observation and self-assessment? What progress has been made in ensuring the robustness of the arrangements to verify learners' progress and achievement?</p> | <p>Reasonable progress</p> |
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The college has made reasonable progress in developing its quality improvement arrangements. A quality improvement planning cycle is being developed. The learning and quality working group is now well established as part of the process. Minutes of this group are detailed with clear actions. The self-assessment report identifies accurately the need to further develop the quality improvement process. The scheme to observe teaching and learning continues to develop well. Further observation training, with an external consultant, is planned in March for new tutor team leaders and residential staff. The outcomes of observations are now linked to the staff appraisal and continuing professional development processes. The college places significant emphasis on staff training and development. A comprehensive staff training schedule is in place with a clear focus on improving staff skills including issues identified through the observation process. Moderation of the outcomes of the observation system takes place through the tutor team leader meeting but the process is not formally recorded. A review of a sample of the records of observation indicates an inconsistency in completion. In some instances, the observation process is completed thoroughly with a clear focus on learning. In others, the record is descriptive of the teaching activities and is insufficiently evaluative. Different forms are used for the observation of teaching and learning which does not support a consistent approach. The head of education and therapies is aware of the need for improved moderation and plans to develop the process further after the March training. Planned developments include a formal moderation of observation outcomes, implementation of a peer review process through a link with partner colleges and the use of short themed observations.

Overall, self-assessment processes are improving. Staff are included effectively in the process. The report is informative and indicates clearly the strengths and areas for improvement. Many aspects of the report provide detailed evidence including data and graphs but some areas, particularly equal opportunities, are insufficiently detailed. Learner and parent surveys have taken place since 2005. In the current year, survey outcomes have been collated but actions plans are not formalised. At the previous inspection the recording of complaints and incidents was not sufficient. An appropriate process is now in place. The college is aware of the need to improve the robustness of the arrangements to verify learners' progress and achievement. Review of a sample of learners' records indicates variation in the setting of targets and the recording of learner progress.

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| <p>What actions have been taken to promote equality and diversity across the college? What progress has been made in using data to monitor the performance of different groups of learners?</p> | <p>Reasonable progress</p> |
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The college has made reasonable progress in promoting equality and diversity. A well-established equality and diversity working group meets once a term. In response to learner feedback, evidence from the student forum shows that actions have been taken. The college promotes a culture of respecting other's opinions, the environment and individual differences. A cultural co-ordinator was appointed in November 2008 and recently introduced the celebration of festivals and cultural events. Training on cultural festivals is planned in March. The college systematically analyses performance by gender and ethnicity but not disability as learners often have more than one diagnosis. The college is aware of differences in performance by gender and ethnicity.

The RMET trust has a comprehensive equality and diversity policy and action plan including clearly identified key performance indicators. A new website for the trust is being implemented in April 2009 with an enhanced focus on equality and diversity. Further equality and diversity training will take place for all RMET colleges in April and May 2009. The impact assessment of RMET human resource policies and procedures is ongoing. It is reported that three-quarters are complete. An equality and diversity consultant is providing support for this process. The impact assessment of learner policies and procedures is being implemented through the learning and quality working group. The impact assessment of the college's safeguarding policy is complete. Further training on impact assessments is planned.

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| What progress has been made in providing training on safeguarding for trustees? | Reasonable progress |
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Training was provided for trustees in May 2008 on safeguarding processes and legislative responsibilities.