

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Ruskin Mill
Date of visit: 16 June 2009

Context

Ruskin Mill Educational Trust Limited is a company limited by guarantee, and is the sole trustee of Ruskin Mill Education Trust (RMET), a registered educational charity, that began its work in 1986. The work of RMET is inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner, William Morris and John Ruskin. Ruskin Mill college is one of three colleges of RMET that offers learning experiences to young people with a range of learning difficulties. It is centred on a large site in Gloucestershire. There are currently 95 learners funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), four learners funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and one who is privately funded. Eighty six learners are residential. At the last inspection in 2006, the college was judged to be good overall.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in recognising and recording achievement across all learners' programmes?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college acknowledged that its method for recognising and recording learner progress and achievement needed to be improved and they have made reasonable progress in doing so. Management have carried out a cross college review of how it assesses and records learner achievement and have developed a new framework for assessment and recording of learners' progress. The college is currently in the process of implementing the framework and is reviewing key documents to ensure they are fit for purpose. It has plans to restructure the roles of some of its staff and to engage eight new managers to oversee learners' assessment and progress over time and across their whole programme including transition arrangements on exit from the college. At the present time, individual learning plans (ILPs) contain a number of key goals including communication, word and number (CWN) aims. Two core targets, one for personal and social and another linked to CWN are recorded on the ILP. However, many of these goals and aims are too generic to inform subject tutors about what aspect of the learner's programme has been prioritised. Also there is insufficient identification of and recording of key specific subject targets to usefully measure progress against.

How much progress has been made in learners gaining external accreditation of literacy and numeracy skills?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

The number of learners achieving external accreditation and recognition of literacy and numeracy skills development has significantly improved over the last year, particularly for literacy. The college has continued to support tutors very well in raising their awareness of how to successfully embed literacy and numeracy support within subject areas. At the time of the last monitoring visit the college had introduced a number of initiatives to support learners with their literacy and numeracy skills and this has continued. Overall, 25 learners achieved adult literacy and numeracy level 1 and 2 awards last year compared with 10 in the previous year. The rate of achievement of level 2 literacy qualifications significantly improved during the same period from no success in 2007 to nine achievers in 2008. Improvement in achievement for those learners gaining level 1 and 2 numeracy awards is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in developing the learner voice to help the college improve further?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

The college has made significant progress to ensure that learners' views are listened to and acted on. A learner involvement strategy has been developed and implemented and clearly highlights the value that the college places on its learners' views, and contributions learners make to the forums set up for obtaining their views. Regular student council meetings encourage views and issues to be raised with management. These are supplemented by weekly student forum meetings. Representatives of the student forum get involved in organising 'themed' weeks such as healthy eating and issues surrounding smoking. A recent theme was around equality and diversity. An anti-bullying theme was co-ordinated and linked to a national initiative. A charter on expectations of behaviour for student council members was devised by learners. A suggestion box is easily available for learners to submit ideas and to raise issues for the college to consider and is now part of the student council agenda. A newsletter for learners, 'Student Voice' has been produced by a member of the student council. Two editions have been produced so far. They highlight events taking place and as well as topics relating to cookery recipes, questions and answers, lost property and a regular joke section. Results from regular student surveys on a range of views about college life are analysed very well by management. Staff are also proactive in their approach to the student council to elicit their views on a variety of topics.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in using data to monitor the performance of different groups of learners?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Reasonable progress has been made by the college in using data to monitor the performance of different groups of learners. Data relating to ethnicity, gender, age and disabilities is collated and analysed well. The college acknowledges, however, that although some actions have been taken relating to the outcomes of the analysis more needs to be done to identify and record actions for management. Some useful analysis has been carried out by RMET central staff regarding a post code analysis of learner enrolments at their three colleges and they have a clear understanding of the trend towards a more regional provision that is happening for all three colleges. They have also been able to identify gaps in geographical areas where they are not getting any referrals from. Ruskin Mill College is using this information well to target, for example, visits to potential feeder schools in the London area and to send out publicity information about the college.

How much progress has been made in collating, analysing and using equality and diversity data relating to staff?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

Procedures for monitoring equality and diversity data relating to staff have been improved significantly and provides the college with information to support particular groups of staff very well, where need is identified. The college was successful in having a return rate of 89% to its staff equal opportunities monitoring questionnaire. They are currently following up the 11% who have not yet returned the data. Thorough analysis of the data was carried out in relation to ethnicity, gender, disability and age. Analysis of data indicates that the college has a greater diversity of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds to that of the local further education sector and against Gloucestershire population as a whole; the gender balance indicates only a four per cent difference in favour of female staff and again is very favourable compared to that of the local further education sector. Twelve per cent of staff at Ruskin Mill reported a disability with approximately half this number of staff with dyslexia difficulties. The college has been able to ensure that support for these staff is provided in particular for those studying towards their professional teaching qualification. The rate of Ruskin Mill college staff aged over 60 years of age is 7%, a higher figure than the local further education sector as a whole.