

Maritime and Engineering College North West

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 54873

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Last day of inspection: 18 March 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Maritime and Engineering College North West (MECNW), formerly known as The Laird Foundation, was established in Birkenhead in 1988 as a private training provider with charitable status and a company limited by guarantee. In 2007, the Laird Foundation merged with Mersey Maritime Group. MECNW specialises in engineering manufacture, engineering construction and marine engineering apprenticeships.

MECNW is funded through Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to deliver Young Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships, Advanced Apprenticeships, and workforce development training such as Train to Gain and a European co-financed training called Skillworks.

MECNW has 54 learners following apprenticeships and 124 following Advanced Apprenticeships. There are 38 young apprentices and approximately 32 learners following other 14 to 19 schools programmes. In 'Train to Gain' there are 286 learners following qualifications at NVQ level 2 or level 3.

At the inspection in October 2007 the overall effectiveness was good. Achievement and standards and the quality of the provision were both good. Leadership and management, equality of opportunity, social inclusion and capacity to improve were satisfactory. The provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies was good.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has MECNW made in improving the effectiveness of the self-assessment process and the quality improvement plan to bring about improvements? Significant progress

MECNW has made significant progress in developing the self-assessment process. At the previous inspection, arrangements for self-assessment were judged to be good and they remain so. The process is consultative. Staff attended a series of workshops to discuss the Common Inspection Framework key questions and how they related to MECNW. These discussions led to proposals for key judgements. Views were collected, analysed and a draft report circulated for comments. The final report was externally validated by a Beacon provider. Learner views are used well. Employer views are collected through questionnaires which are followed up by phone calls. Most employers said communication is good and they understand the role of self-assessment and the report contents. Staff have a very good understanding of proposed grades and the reasons underpinning them. Inspectors found the most recent self-assessment report to be evaluative and self-critical but it did not contain enough judgements about quality improvement. The quality improvement action plan identifies clearly the actions required to improve provision. Progress against the

quality improvement plan is monitored effectively. Effective actions have been taken to improve the inadequate success rates for apprentices and these are starting to yield results.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made with improving outcomes for learners? Reasonable progress

MECNW has made reasonable progress in improving outcomes for learners. Current apprentices, advanced apprentices and 'Train to Gain' learners are making good progress towards completion of their qualifications. Trainers are now monitoring learners' progress more closely. Since 2007, new managers have gradually introduced wide-ranging measures to improve overall success rates and the proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications in the allocated time. These measures have included: more effective learner tracking systems; improved teaching methods; improved course documentation; use of a college intranet system and more personal contact with learners and employers particularly in the 'off-the-job' setting. However, these measures are not yet fully embedded, although overall apprenticeship success rates have risen gradually to match national rates.

'Timely' success rates for all apprentices, although improved, are still overall 19 percentage points below national success rates. Overall and timely success rates for Train to Gain learners exceed national rates. The introduction of Cammell Laird's mentorship programme in 2008, where apprentices are working to industrial standards before moving into real work situations, is now established and the new measures to improve overall and timely success rates are having a beneficial effect. A group of apprentices has also helped to raise £33,000 for the Fairbridge charity by selling advertising space on calendars. They are to attend an official prize giving ceremony, where their efforts will be acknowledged.

How effective have been the actions taken to address the low success rates in apprenticeships in 2006/07? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, MECNW has taken significant actions to improve the low success rates for apprentices. Success rates for apprentices have improved to 68%, close to the national rate of 70%. Adult learners achieved 100% success; much better than learners aged 16 to 18 who have a success rate of 67% and slightly below the national rate. Timely success rates for apprenticeships have improved to 42% which is still well below the national rate of 59%. Learners aged 16 to 18, on apprenticeship programmes, have a timely success rate of 42%; they achieve in a timelier manner than adult learners on similar programmes who have a timely success rate of 33%. However, both age groups lag behind the national timely success rate.

The planning of training has improved with the introduction of improved documentation and a more effective monitoring and recording system for learner progress. Staff meetings are more focused with the emphasis on the welfare of the learner and learner progression. Progress reviews are more thorough.

Young apprenticeship programmes have been introduced by the college. They act as a bridge to the mainstream apprenticeship programmes and provide good opportunities for employment. Many learners who have previously underachieved at school achieve well on college vocational programmes.

Quality of provision

What progress has MECNW made towards improving the planning of off-the-job training? Reasonable progress

MECNW has made reasonable progress towards improving the planning of off-the-job training. Schemes of work and lesson plans for all off-the-job training groups are now in place and are regularly reviewed and monitored. During practical activities learners are able to refer to clear plans and drawings as they undertake work tasks. However, a few learners are insufficiently challenged by the repetitive nature of some of the tasks. Teaching staff are qualified and have considerable industrial experience. Improved tracking systems for learners are now established. Staff are now able to access learner progress information from the college intranet. Staff meetings are held on a frequent basis. Specific trade meetings have also been introduced for more effective discussions between all those involved in monitoring learners' progress. Learner progression is a key focus of the trade meetings. Learner progress reviews are improving, with better discussions on equality and diversity now taking place and more specific and improved target setting observed. Most employers take an active role in the review process and are well informed about the progress their learners are making.

What progress has MECNW made in improving employer engagement, particularly the promotion of gender equality to employers? Significant progress

Significant progress has been made in improving employer engagement and the promotion of gender equality to employers. Since 2007, managers have improved working relationships between the college and employers considerably. Employers value the open and supportive structure and high level of service. College representatives visit employers and apprentices very frequently. Employers now take a more active role in the training process and most participate well in the reviews of learner progress and discussions on all aspects of training. The establishment of an apprentice training school for Cammell Laird in the college workshop area has been hailed as a significant feature in apprentice training.

Although MECNW is making significant progress in promoting engineering as a career and the number of women in training has increased, numbers remain low. Local schools are visited on a regular basis to promote the college and attendance at career days and fairs is a feature of MECNW's marketing campaigns. Successful female apprentices have taken part in recent campaigns to help raise the profile of engineering careers for women, including features in local newspapers and civic and company magazines.

Leadership and management

What progress has MECNW made towards improving and embedding the systems for quality improvement? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, quality improvement was judged to be satisfactory overall but with some of the arrangements incomplete. Since then MECNW has appointed a director to lead quality assurance with a clearer focus on the 'learner journey'. Most aspects of the learner journey are systematically reviewed and actions taken to improve where applicable. The procedures are comprehensive and cover the key aspects of the training. Internal audits have been used effectively to bring about improvement. However, the quality monitoring of the effectiveness of the review process and support arrangements to improve learners' attainment is insufficiently formal. Significant improvements have been made to monitoring and managing learners' progress. MECNW collects feedback from learners at key points of their programmes and also through a learners' forum. The feedback is suitably analysed and used to steer improvement. Observations of teaching are carried out frequently and lead to improvement action plans for individual staff and focused staff development where themes have been identified. However, as at the time of the last inspection, observation outcomes have not been moderated. MECNW recognises that there is insufficient teaching which is outstanding. Self-assessment remains good and leads to effective planning for improvement.

What progress has been made towards meeting government requirements to secure adequate safeguarding arrangements? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, MECNW has included safeguarding in its quality improvement plan and prioritised safeguarding within the college. MECNW has developed appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures which are readily available through the college intranet and they have established appropriate links with the local Safeguarding Board. Staff have all received safeguarding awareness training and the level of understanding among most staff, employers and learners is good. MECNW has two designated safeguarding officers, one male and one female. These officers have undertaken awareness training and will undertake further training in the very near future. Staff that come into frequent contact with learners have undergone Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearances and a central register is maintained. Most staff have received renewed clearances in line with MECNW's policy to carry these out every three years. MECNW does not yet share its safeguarding

policies with employers and is unaware of employers' own safeguarding measures within the workplace. MECNW meets government safeguarding requirements. Health and safety practices are good. In March 2010, MECNW received the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Silver award for occupational health and safety for its commitment to protecting the health and well-being of its employees and others.

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