



Thames Valley University

Re-inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

Published
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Introduction

Reading College was inspected in November 2003. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be unsatisfactory in science and mathematics, construction, ICT, hairdressing and beauty therapy, work based learning in hairdressing, hospitality, sports, leisure and tourism and visual and performing arts and media.

In January 2004 Reading College merged with Thames Valley University. The responsibility for leadership and management of FE provision at the former Reading College now rests with Thames Valley University.

The less than satisfactory curriculum areas were re-inspected on 22 and 23 November 2005. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Science and mathematics	4	3

Context

The university offers a broad range of science and mathematics courses, mainly at GCSE and GCE AS and A-level. At the time of the re-inspection there were 450 16-18 year old learners and 252 adult learners. The university has recently introduced a level 2 free-standing qualification in mathematics, but GCSE mathematics remains the largest single course with 217 enrolled at the time of the re-inspection. Courses are offered in the day, in the evening and through distance learning.

Strengths

- *good leadership and management leading to higher standards*
- *teaching meeting the needs of individual learners*
- *good monitoring and support for learners*

Areas for improvement

- *low pass rates in A-level mathematics and chemistry*
- *low success rates for 16-18 year olds on AS level courses.*

Achievement and standards

Retention rates have improved significantly and are now satisfactory, but pass rates remain low on some advanced courses. At AS level, less than one third of 16-18 year olds who started courses in AS level mathematics, chemistry and physics successfully completed them in 2004-05. Pass rates in GCE A-

level biology and physics are high, but low in mathematics and chemistry. Many GCE A-level science learners progress to related degree courses. In GCSE mathematics pass rates have steadily improved to above national averages. Attendance has improved significantly, to around 85%, and punctuality is satisfactory. Learners on intermediate courses demonstrate sound numerical skills and high levels of confidence. On advanced level courses most learners make good progress.

Quality of provision

Lessons are well planned and incorporate a variety of learning activities. Teachers systematically assess learners' understanding and set appropriate learning tasks to meet the needs of individual learners. Teachers effectively utilise ICT equipment to enhance learning through presentation and specialist software. Opportunities for learners to use ICT in learning and for experimental analysis on science courses are limited. The standard of accommodation is much improved; laboratories have been well adapted to meet the demands of both practical and theory work. Assessment is regular and helpful. Learners' progress is carefully monitored, and a system of reviews and target-setting is improving performance. Very good pastoral systems support those whose attendance or academic progress is unsatisfactory. Learners' literacy and numeracy needs are screened on entry and study skills are effectively developed through tutorials.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. Rigorous and comprehensive self assessment and action planning have successfully raised standards, as well as retention and attendance rates. Lesson observations have accurately identified priority areas for improvement in classroom practice, and these have been effectively tackled in mathematics through staff development, sharing of good practice and the use of advanced practitioners. Course evaluation of learners' achievement is hampered by the lack of reliable value added data.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Construction	4	3

Context

There are 1050 learners on construction courses in bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, heating and ventilation, plumbing and technician studies. Most learners are part-time, but 177 learners study on full-time courses; 659 learners are aged over 19 and the remaining 316 are aged 16-18. An additional 39 learners aged 14-16 attend building craft operative courses.

Strengths

- *high retention rates on most courses*
- *good attendance*
- *good assessment and internal verification practices*
- *good support for learners*

Areas for improvement

- *low pass rates on many courses*
- *insufficient challenge for learners in some lessons*
- *the negative impact of the recruitment and retention of teachers.*

Achievement and standards

Most retention rates are high. However, retention is below the national average on level 3 provision for 16-18 year olds and on level 2 provision for adult learners. Pass rates are improving but, with the exception of level 3 provision for 16-18 year olds, they are below national averages. Attendance is good at over 90 per cent. Learners are well motivated and their practical skills are satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The university's judgements on the quality of teaching and learning are generally accurate. In the better lessons teaching methods are varied to maintain interest and learners' understanding is thoroughly checked. Teachers make good use of learning technology in their lessons. Theory and practical lessons are effectively linked and safe working practices are reinforced at every opportunity. Some lessons do not effectively challenge learners and progress in these is slow. Assessment procedures are good; they are robustly verified and are well understood by learners. The process ensures that learners get detailed feedback to help them improve. Support for learners is good. Teachers liaise with specialist

personal tutors to ensure that issues which affect learners are identified and dealt with quickly. Initial assessment clearly identifies learners' needs and in the better lessons teaching is differentiated to take account of this.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Significant improvements have taken place over the last year. Quality improvement measures are well understood by staff. The course review process is strong and good practice in teaching and learning is shared using the advanced practitioner's expertise. Staff shortages are problematic and teachers teach more than their timetabled hours. Assessors are diverted from the on-site assessment and training programme to cover for them. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate but fails to give sufficient emphasis to actions that will improve pass rates.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
ICT	4	3

Context

The university offers a range of full-time and part-time courses at its main sites in Reading and in a number of community venues in Berkshire. Specialist computing and IT application courses are available across the Reading campuses. Part-time courses range from level 1 computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), to level 3 specialist qualifications. Adults can enrol on some courses, such as CLAIT, ECDL and ITQ throughout the year. Learners aged 16 to 18 study for GCE AS and A-level examinations; BTEC first and national qualifications. At the time of the re-inspection there were 1964 enrolments on courses in ICT.

Strengths

- *high success rates on BTEC national awards*

Areas for improvement

- *low retention rates on several courses*
- *low success rates on many courses*
- *lack of assignment timetables for vocational learners*
- *insufficient planning and progress monitoring for individuals in workshops.*

Achievement and standards

Success rates for the one-year national awards in software development and ICT systems support are high and were 20 percentage points above the national average in 2005. Retention rates have been consistently low on City and Guilds Start IT, ECDL, GCE AS level computing and GCE AS level ICT, with little improvement since the last inspection. This has resulted in low success rates on these courses. Success rates are also low on the CLAIT plus courses and first diploma for IT practitioners in ICT system support. Attendance has improved since the last inspection, although during re-inspection it was lower than university statistics suggest.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning have improved and are now satisfactory. Inspectors agreed with the university's own judgements on the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers now share their objectives with learners and use more variety in their teaching methods. There is insufficient planning and progress monitoring for individuals in workshops, where learners work at their own pace. Learners on vocational courses are not given assignment schedules. Provision is offered from foundation to higher education. However opportunities for learners studying the national award for ICT systems support to progress to further courses are limited. Many unemployed learners enrol on ITQ level 2, although the course requires for work-based assessment.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. However, little progress has been made to improve retention or pass rates on GCE computing courses. The self-assessment report is evaluative with an overall quality improvement plan plus seven quality improvement plans for each aspect of computing or ICT. These do not relate well to the course development plans in the course reviews, which have improved to satisfactory since the last inspection.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	4	3
Hairdressing work based learning	4	3

Context

The university offers a broad range of full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy, holistic and sports therapies. At the time of the re-inspection there were 420 learners enrolled on courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Of these approximately 235 were aged 16-18 and 185 were aged over 19. In addition there were 62 learners on work-based learning in hairdressing.

Strengths

- *high standards achieved by learners on beauty therapy courses*
- *effective monitoring of progress of work-based learners*
- *good teaching*
- *strong leadership and management*

Areas for improvement

- *low and declining retention rates on full-time level 2 hairdressing courses*
- *low proportion of work-based learners who achieve a full framework*
- *insufficient client base*
- *insufficient emphasis on issues relating to inclusion and diversity.*

Achievement and standards

Success rates on all full-time courses have significantly improved since the last inspection. In 2005 success rates on beauty therapy courses were very high. Pass rates have improved at all levels on NVQ courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy and are now at or above national averages. The retention rate on the full-time level 2 hairdressing course has declined each year for the last 3 years. Achievement of the full framework on hairdressing work-based learning programmes has improved significantly. The proportion of learners who achieved a full framework in 2003-04 was around 46%. This compares very favourably to the national average, but is nevertheless low. Retention rates on work-based learning programmes have improved and learners make good progress towards framework completion. Learners attend well and make satisfactory progress. They develop practical skills appropriate to the level of course and demonstrate a sound understanding of their subject specialisms.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are varied, lively and successfully engage and motivate learners. Teachers make clear links between theory

and practice and learners apply their knowledge with confidence. Good relationships between teachers and learners create a positive learning environment. Strategies for differentiation are identified on lesson plans but are not always applied in practice. In some lessons learners are not sufficiently extended or challenged in their learning. Specialist personal tutors provide effective support to all 16-18 year old learners. All NVQ Level 1 full-time learners are allocated a student mentor, and at the time of the inspection one mentor was supporting three profoundly deaf learners for 2 hours a week.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. Quality assurance arrangements are effectively bringing about improvements. Detailed course reviews and development plans inform both the quality improvement action plan and the highly evaluative and self-critical self assessment report. Internal verification is adequate. The appointment of two specialist tutors to coordinate work-based learning systems and procedures has had a very positive impact on retention and learners' progress. Refurbishment of two salons has addressed health and safety issues. There is insufficient emphasis on equality and diversity issues within the curriculum and there are no targeted plans to increase the recruitment of male learners. There are still insufficient clients of the appropriate range required for practice and assessment.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Hospitality, sport, leisure and tourism	4	3

Context

Courses are offered in hospitality, sport, leisure and tourism at levels 1 to 3 for full-time and part-time learners. At the time of the re-inspection there were 821 enrolments on these courses. Approximately 25 per cent of learners are enrolled on full-time courses. One third of the learners are enrolled on hospitality courses, just under half on sports courses and the remainder on leisure and tourism courses.

Strengths

- *high pass rates on many hospitality and first diploma travel and tourism courses*
- *good progress made by learners in hospitality*
- *good management of punctuality and attendance*
- *good learning resources*

Areas for improvement

- *very low pass rates on full-time courses in sport*
- *low retention rates on level 3 courses in travel and tourism and sports studies*
- *insufficient attention to the analysis of retention and pass rates.*

Achievement and standards

Pass rates have improved on long courses in hospitality and the first diploma in travel and tourism and are now either at or above national averages. Pass rates on full-time courses in sport are very low. Retention rates are around the national average for level 2 courses, but on level 3 courses in travel and tourism and sport studies retention rates are low. Pass rates on approximately half the short courses in sports coaching are good but are poor on the remainder. The departure of a member of staff adversely impacted on learners achievements in sport. Adult learners have higher success rates than those aged 16 to 18. Attendance rates are good. Learners in hospitality make good progress.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning overall are satisfactory. Judgements made by the university on the quality of teaching and learning are accurate. Assessment practice in hospitality is sound, but teachers do not make sufficient use of the part-time work experience of full-time learners. The learning resources in sport and hospitality are good. There are effective procedures for tutorial provision and poor attendance or punctuality are followed up rigorously. The sound measures introduced to more closely monitor and support learners' progress have improved success rates on some courses but not for learners in sport. Additional learning support is provided promptly and take up by learners is high.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. Good progress has been made to improve learning resources, teaching and learning, assessment and attendance, but retention and achievement targets have not always been met. Provision in sport remains inadequate. The analysis of retention and pass rates is insufficiently rigorous in self-assessment reports. Development plans for courses are helpfully detailed.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Visual and performing arts and media	4	3

Context

The university offers a wide range of courses from level 1 to higher education. The provision includes GNVQ intermediate art and design, first diploma in performing arts and music, national diploma courses in photography, art and design, fashion and textiles, 3D design, graphics, media, music technology, music practice, performing arts, access to art and design. Around 1100 learners are enrolled on courses in this area.

Strengths

- *high pass rates on national diploma in photography and fine art, performing arts and first diploma in performing arts*
- *good planning for improvement*
- *good resources for three dimensional design, multimedia, media and music technology*

Areas for improvement

- *low pass rates on media courses*
- *low retention rates on most courses*
- *poor punctuality*
- *ineffective use of individual learning plans.*

Achievement and standards

Learners' achievements on courses in art and design are satisfactory and good on the diploma in foundation studies (art and design) and the national diplomas in photography and fine art. In performing arts achievement is good on both first and national diplomas and low in media. There are poor retention rates on courses in art and design and media. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Learners' work in art and design shows a competent use of mixed media. However, drawing skills need to be integrated more thoroughly. The standard of learners' work in performing arts (drama, dance) is good and it is satisfactory in media.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Individual tuition in lessons is good across all areas, however some lesson plans lack detail in performing arts and media. In some art and design lessons, learning activities are not sufficiently challenging for the more able. Arrangements for learner support and tutorials are good. There is a rigorous system in place to support and monitor learners who fall behind in their work. Attendance is satisfactory, but punctuality remains poor. Individual learning plans have been introduced but they are not fully integrated into the tutorial process. Arrangements for internal verification are effective. The standard of accommodation and equipment is good, although there is overcrowding in some areas.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Areas of weakness have been identified and procedures introduced to enable steady improvement. The quality assurance system is much improved and appropriate performance targets are in place. The self-assessment reports are generally accurate. Teachers are well supported and equality of opportunity is promoted well across the curriculum.