

**FURTHER EDUCATION
COMMISSIONER ASSESSMENT
SUMMARY**

Greenwich Community College

JANUARY 2015

Assessment

Background

- 1) Greenwich Community College (GCC) is the largest provider of further and adult education in the Royal Borough of Greenwich. It is a medium-sized General Further Education College.
- 2) The College attracts learners from the local area, the majority coming from within the Greenwich local authority area and neighbouring boroughs, particularly Lewisham, Bexley and Bromley. Many learners have disadvantaged backgrounds and a low level of prior educational attainment. Around half are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.
- 3) Courses are offered in most subject areas, ranging from pre-entry to higher education. Around half of all enrolments are for literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Around 60% of learners are aged 19 and over, and 70% of all learners are studying on a part-time basis.
- 4) Following the Skill's Funding Agency's notification on the 19th December that Greenwich Community College had been graded as inadequate by Ofsted at its most recent inspection the Minister for Skills decided that the FE Commissioner should assess the position of the College in line with the government's intervention policy set out in '*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*'.
- 5) The FE Commissioner's report is intended to advise the Minister and the Chief Executive of the Funding Agencies on
 - a) The capacity and capability of Greenwich Community College's leadership and governance to deliver quality improvement within an agreed timeframe;
 - b) Any action that should be taken by the Minister and/or the Chief Executive of the funding agencies to ensure the delivery of quality improvement and financial recovery (considering the suite of interventions set out in '*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*'); and
 - c) How progress should be monitored and reviewed, taking into account the Agency's regular monitoring arrangements and Ofsted's monitoring visits.

Assessment methodology

- 6) The assessment was carried out during the period 12th January to 16th January 2015. The assessment consisted of consideration of briefing documents provided by the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency, examination of the inspection reports of the College and the actions that have been taken since, an analysis of the College's accounts and interviews with staff, students and stakeholders. A list of the staff and stakeholders interviewed and the documentation that the College was requested to be

made available is given in the appendices of this report. In addition the FE Commissioner toured the College's main site and attended a meeting of the Corporation.

The Role, Composition and Activities of the Board

7) The Board consists of 16 members, including the principal, 2 staff members and 2 student members. The Chair of the Corporation, the Chair of Quality and Standards and the Chair of Audit resigned at the special meeting of the Corporation in November 2014, immediately following the publication of the inadequate Ofsted report. Consequently none of the remaining Board members have been on the Board for more than three years.

8) The Vice Chair has agreed to undertake the role of Acting Chair for a limited period until the end of the current academic year. He accepts that the Board has been insufficiently rigorous in the past and is determined to bring renewed pace and energy to the required improvements, He also acknowledges that the culture until recently has been undemanding with minimal questioning of data or challenge.

9) The inadequate Ofsted Report, however, has galvanised the Board into action. changing two key members of the senior College leadership i.e. the Principal and the Vice Principal Corporate Services, and filling these senior roles with experienced interim replacements.

10) The Board has also recognised gaps in its own skill set and is now seeking qualified financial expertise, significant local employer input and members with experience of teaching and learning. It has agreed to move to a Carver style model of governance meeting monthly, although, given the seriousness of the College's position the key committees of Finance and General Purposes and Quality and Standards, whilst under review, will be likely to continue to meet for some time.

The Clerk to the Corporation

11) The Board has an experienced, independent Clerk, who has also tendered his resignation with effect from February 2015. Overall the minutes record the questions asked by Board members rather than recording the debate, responses and requirements for further action A new clerk is currently being sought.

The Senior Leadership Team

12) The Executive team consists of the Principal, VP Curriculum and Business Development and VP Corporate Services. Only the Principal is a senior post holder. This senior team has not been stable for the past 3 years, with earlier changes to the VP Corporate Services role and additional churn in MIS and Business Development.

13) Recent restructures have occurred annually, increasing the levels of discontinuity in line management. The College has frequently seen the practice of removing staff and restructuring as the only actions needed to make improvements. There is a high turnover of managers and a number of key posts remain vacant undermining efforts to effect improvement.

14) Staff are critical of the senior team and have lost confidence in their ability to lead the College. They criticise the overall lack of vision and leadership. The senior team are perceived as measuring systems in private meetings without any drive or pace to secure improvements. Managers describe the College as 'not knowing where it is going'. There is clearly a large gulf between the body of staff and both the senior team and the Board who are seen as invisible and remote.

The Quality of Provision

15) Greenwich Community College was inspected by Ofsted on 10-14 November 2014 with the following grades:

Overall effectiveness of provision	Inadequate
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate

16) The College's self-assessment report, however, had painted an over optimistic picture. The strengths were overstated, weaknesses minimised and judgements founded on scant evidence. Little acknowledgement had been made of, or attention given, to the worryingly low and declining student success rates

17) The Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) is similarly unfit for purpose and an unhelpful document in moving the College forward. The priorities for improvement have not been clearly identified, or sufficiently detailed to ensure that all managers understand the actions they must put in place and the timeframe for completion. Managers state that little consultation has taken place and therefore the plan is not seen as a cohesive vehicle for all staff to work towards and achieve. Many of the teaching staff have not yet seen a copy of the plan and have been excluded from its development.

18) Processes and procedures are confusing and unknown by many, described by managers as 'tangled like a ball of wool'. When problems arise new procedures are often added to those in existence in an effort to provide a solution, but repeatedly this simply compounds confusion and fails to address the cause. Target setting and monitoring of progress is weak.

19) The College lesson observation grade profile records that teaching and learning are of an acceptable standard. However, this does not reflect the observations made during the recent Ofsted inspection. Senior managers say that the standard of teaching and learning demonstrated during formal observations is not a realistic picture of everyday practice. In an endeavour to assess the quality of teaching and learning more accurately the College has plans to introduce no-notice observations.

20) The College has made a concerted effort to ensure that students can participate in relevant work experience and have employed an external company to find appropriate employers. However, the mechanisms to ensure that College staff keep in touch with students on placement and check the quality of learning have not been adequately considered.

21) The majority of learners interviewed are nevertheless positive about their experience of the College. Teachers are described as helpful; they arrive on time and are well

prepared. Work is generally well marked and returned promptly. However, there is evidence that issues arising from learner voice feedback are not actioned.

The Financial Position

22) The College provided its latest financial plan in July 2014 and self-assessed its financial health grades as Good, Good and Outstanding for 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16 respectively. Post Agency review the financial health grade for 2013/14 was moderated downwards to 'Satisfactory' in accordance with the *Financial Planning Handbook* (published May 2014).

23) The College forecasted further operating deficits for 2014/15 but at a reduced level of which was reversed when adjusted for depreciation. This indicated the College self-assessed grade of 'Good' was appropriate at that stage and did not require further moderation.

24) The Financial plan provided by the College indicated a forecast operating surplus for 2015/16. The College liquidity position reflected in the financial plan appeared strong with a year-end cash balance of nearly £5m for 2013/14 and £3.5m for 2014/15.

25) However the recent appointment of an experienced interim finance director has revealed a somewhat different picture. The latest position projects a deficit for 2014/15 of in excess of £3m, with little or no corrective action planned to address the underlying causes. On the current trajectory the College will be dependent on bank borrowing or government loans from early in the next academic year.

26) There are several reasons for this situation but the most noticeable lies in archaic staff contracts and poor staff utilisation.

27) Budget setting is also weak. There is minimal staff involvement and budgets are received very late into the year. Despite a known shortfall in learner numbers, staffing costs as a percentage of income at 31st October 2014 were still running at 78%. This is only predicted to fall to 72% in July 2015, significantly above sector norms.

28) The College has routinely missed their planned enrolment targets and shortfalls in adult funding have been filled by sub-contracting. The rise in expenditure that this has caused has not been balanced by the reductions in core staffing that would normally be anticipated.

29) The College's financial position is therefore more serious than it would first appear, disguised by having money in the bank from previous years. This is being swiftly eroded and significant changes are required to all aspects of the College's operations if the College is to survive as an independent institution.

Views of Stakeholders

30) External stakeholders are highly critical of the leadership team and the quality of delivery for learners. The College has not demonstrated any desire to grow local partnerships (with the exception of ESOL) and the College's relationship with the Royal

Borough of Greenwich is poor and disconnected. The local authority has taken action to grow their own Skills Centres, with other FE providers, in the absence of any proactivity by the College.

31) The College is not seen to be focused on the needs of young people in the Borough. Local school improvements have been significant over recent years and the College is viewed as non- collaborative, insular and inward looking. Partners described the College's support of learners as 'inadequate'. Several have already severed their relationship with the College.

Conclusions

32) Greenwich Community College has serious problems, both in terms of the quality of what is on offer and its worsening budget position. Steps have been taken to bring in a number of highly experienced interims but the scale of the task to turn the College around is such that it will be necessary to consider alternative ways of meeting the education and training needs of learners and employers in the area. Administered College status and an urgent Structure and Prospects Appraisal are therefore recommended. This will consider all potential options for the college, taking into account the best interests of learners and employers in the wider area.

Recommendations from Further Education Commissioner

1. The College should be placed in Administered College status.
2. A Structure and Prospects Appraisal should be carried out as soon as possible to determine the best way of providing high quality education and training for the learners and employers of the area, in the context of broader provision in South East London.
3. Weaknesses at Board level should be addressed with the appointment of new members with relevant up-to-date financial commercial and business experience and a knowledge of quality improvement in further education
4. Arrangements for Board training should be reviewed and a comprehensive programme of updating implemented
5. A set of relevant Key Performance Indicators, benchmarking the College against sector norms, needs to be established and presented to each Board meeting for review and discussion
6. A new Post Inspection Action plan should be drawn up that identifies the actions needed to address the weaknesses identified in the Ofsted Report, with milestones and clearly allocated responsibilities for implementation
7. A financial recovery plan is needed to address the college's financial weaknesses, including issues of overstaffing and inefficient resource utilisation
8. Existing processes for quality assurance, the provision of relevant management information and human resource management should be reviewed and improved in line with sector best practices

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