

**FURTHER EDUCATION
COMMISSIONER ASSESSMENT
SUMMARY**

Marine Society College of the
Sea

DECEMBER 2014

Assessment

Background

1. The Marine Society has a unique position in the education sector. It was founded in 1756 and incorporated by Act of Parliament in 1772 to apprentice 'poor boys' to the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy, equip them with clothing and provide them with 'pre-sea' education.
2. In 2004, The Society merged with the Sea Cadet Association; their vision to be the leading maritime charity for youth development and lifelong learning for seafarers. The Marine Society College of the Sea is distinguished in the education sector in that it provides educational services to a defined cohort of British seafarers, who by the nature of their work and lifestyle do not have easy access to lifelong learning opportunities ashore. Whilst The Marine Society College of the Sea is now part of the Marine Society and the Sea Cadet association (MSSC), it operates under a separate banner and for education purposes is a Specialist Designated Institution, located in the Borough of Lambeth.
3. The College is used by members of the Royal Navy and the British Merchant Navy, as well as other seafarers – 'wherever they may serve and in whatever capacity'. Courses offered by the college include GCSEs, A Levels, short adult education courses and specialised diplomas relating to shipping. The college's provision is focused on the needs of seafarers and shore-based maritime professionals, and is provided via a range of services designed to enhance learning and well-being, and to facilitate professional development. Currently, the College has around 500 seafarers on a range of courses including,
 - Scholarships of up to £17,500 to help ratings study for a first certificate of competency and to help fund other vocational costs of up-skilling in functional skills (e.g. Maths).
 - GCSE and A level programmes, currently contracted out and delivered by the National Extension College on their behalf
 - Innovative functional skills programmes such as 'Maths at Sea' and 'English at Sea' aimed at ratings without formal qualifications
 - Higher Education Degree level programmes in partnership with Middlesex University and the Open University
 - The College also offers a Library resource, self-study and book service to 144 ships around the World
4. The majority of funding for the Marine Society College of the Sea comes from learners themselves, employers, bursaries and funds not provided by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) or Education Funding Agency (EFA). The SFA provides a grant fund to the Marine Society to support the provision of resources only. Under this agreement the Marine Society is required to provide information and data to the Chief Executive of the SFA about its various learning and support programmes.

5. Following the notification that the Marine Society College of the Sea had been assessed as 'Inadequate' by Ofsted in November 2014, the Minister for Skills and Equalities decided that the FE Commissioner should assess the position of the College in line with the government's intervention strategy policy as set out in 'Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills'.
6. The FE Commissioner's Report is intended to advise the Minister and the Chief Executive of the SFA on:
 - The capacity and capability of the College's leadership and governance to secure a sustained improvement in the level of learner outcomes, and the overall quality of provision
 - Any actions that need to be taken to deliver these improvements within an agreed timetable
 - How and when progress should be monitored and reviewed

Assessment Methodology

7. In view of the limited amount of provision offered by the college and the relatively low level of SFA funding it was agreed that a one-day review by the FE commissioner would be proportionate. The FE Commissioner, supported by an FE Adviser, therefore carried out an assessment on December 10th 2014. They received in advance detailed briefing information provided by the SFA and reviewed a wide range of College documentation. They interviewed the Chair, the CEO, the Director of Lifelong Learning and the member of staff directly responsible for programme management and learner progression.

The Quality of Provision

8. The focus of the November 2014 Ofsted Report was on the GCSE and A level provision and related courses mainly provided on a sub contracted basis by the National Extension College. Ofsted determined that teaching and learning and the outcomes for learners were 'Inadequate' and the number of learners who completed their programmes was low.
9. They further noted that the Marine Society managers' monitoring of the subcontracted provision was inadequate, target setting for learners ineffective, and data systems for assessing learners appropriateness for courses and their progress ineffective in regard to these programmes.

Governance and Leadership

10. The Board and Senior Leadership Team have accepted the judgments of Ofsted and shown an eagerness to make improvements within a clear timescale. The Chairman of the Board has extensive experience in the Maritime industry and training and was instrumental in starting a complete review of provision in 2010.

11. Following that review a new CEO was appointed to deliver a new vision and strategic plan providing wider lifelong learning opportunities to the College's 'seafaring cohort' of learners. A restructuring of the small management team followed in 2013 with the appointment of a new Director of Lifelong Learning and a new Seafarer Education Manager.
12. The Director has taken the view that the Ofsted visit and report has been helpful in assisting the team to identify failings, which they are now working hard to remedy. A Post Inspection Action Plan has already been produced and priorities have been identified. The team clearly understands the needs of their client group, accepts the Ofsted criticisms, and has started to take action. An Ofsted Inspector is currently supporting the College in a support and guidance role.
13. The Action Plan has identified the following actions as priorities:
- Driving up GCSE and A level success rates from the current 23% to 70% over a three year period
 - Reviewing the progress of learners on a monthly basis, by ensuring that NEC provide monitoring data
 - Engaging with all learners to emphasise the importance of individual learning plans
 - Reviewing and clarifying the joint tutor and support responsibilities of the subcontractor (NEC) and the College
 - Ensuring that the internal Self-Assessment Report and CEO and Board monitoring processes are robust
14. The College Board of Trustees and the management team have a clear view of what needs to be done, and have accepted responsibility for achieving these improvements. Whilst it is evident that they wish to achieve these improvements with haste, there is a need to identify key priorities first and for new systems to be introduced in a measured timescale.
15. The size of the task should not be underestimated, and a careful ordering of the priorities needs to be considered with a focus on the student experience leading to improvements in success rates in 2014/15.

Conclusions

16. The Marine Society College still lacks a systematic process for managing the learner journey from start to finish. The Inspection revealed insufficient support for learners from guidance at the start of courses to helping students to progress when on course, partly as a result of over-reliance on the subcontractor the National Extension College (NEC).
17. It is evident that the College has not monitored subcontracted provision effectively, and that the subcontractor NEC has not met the standards required in its provision. The College does not hold the NEC to account sufficiently well in order to ensure that the learner journey is well managed.

18. The College further lacks a means of effectively tracking learner progress, both through a particular course, and also from one programme level to another; for example from 'Maths at Sea', to GCSE, to A level and Degree.
19. A specific issue highlighting the lack of monitoring and management of the subcontractor is the risk assessment of tutors in relation to safeguarding requirements.
20. The College is still grappling with establishing a data management system that is fit for purpose and provides the intelligence and analysis required to monitor learner progress effectively.

Recommendations from Further Education Commissioner

1. The College needs urgently to put in place new and effective monitoring arrangements for working in partnership with its subcontractor, the National Extension College, to improve learner performance, progression and completion of courses to achieve qualifications. Targets should be set, and if not met, the College should consider a change in provider.
2. The College needs to recognize the split between the subcontractor's responsibility for academic tutoring and the College's responsibility for pastoral support and monitoring progress, and put in place more effective systems for ensuring learners are supported to progress.
3. The College should review its curriculum provision and consider packaging programmes more appropriately to meet learners' levels of ability and needs, so that there is a better chance of learners succeeding at one level before proceeding to the next.
4. The Leadership team should develop closer links with the FE sector by working with a College that understands their situation and can advise them on how to manage learners and their progress better to raise standards of course completion and achievement.
5. It is understood that Ofsted will continue to work in support of the College over the coming months to ensure the Action plan targets are realized. Whilst the Skills Funding Agency grant for learning support and resources is not significant, the College should be aware that this funding may be reviewed by the Agency.
6. A review of progress by the FE Commissioner should be scheduled for July 2015.

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