



# Sixth Form College Commissioner Assessment of King George V College: Summary and Recommendations

## Introduction

1. A Sixth Form College Commissioner assessment of the college was triggered by an inadequate Ofsted grading following inspection in September 2014. This is in line with the intervention policy for sixth-form colleges outlined in "[Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills](#)". The purpose is to assess the capacity of the current leadership and governance team to lead the college back to an Ofsted rating of good or better at the point of re-inspection, and whether leadership or structural change is required.

2. Ofsted found that:

- the standard of teaching, learning and assessment has deteriorated since the last inspection and too many teachers are not sufficiently skilful at meeting the needs of individual students
- too many students do not make the progress they are capable of, especially on AS courses, which hampers their progression to A level
- the pace of improvement by senior leaders and managers to address weaknesses is too slow, especially the drive to eliminate the culture of low expectations that exists in too many areas
- performance management at all levels across the college is not effective
- course leaders do not always have the skills and expertise to improve their subjects
- the study programme is not successful at developing students' work-related skills, or their mathematical skills
- curriculum planning is significantly influenced by the need to reduce costs and remove underperforming courses and does not meet local needs
- the governing body does not hold senior post holders to account with sufficient rigour.

## Main findings of the assessment

3. In recent years the college's senior leadership team and governors have been distracted from the core business of improving standards of teaching and assessment by the very significant challenge of reducing staff numbers through successive voluntary exit schemes. These have been needed in the context of substantial reductions in student numbers caused by demographic decline, increased competition, and the college refocussing its offer on level three students.

4. The fall in student retention and attainment in the 2012 to 2013 academic year was caused by poor matching of students onto courses, exposing longstanding large variations in teachers' abilities and teaching styles, and the lack of effectively embedded systems for monitoring and challenging students' progress. Some progress in addressing some of these issues had already been made for the 2013 to 2014 academic year, prior to the Ofsted inspection, but these had not yet impacted on validated attainment data. Implementation had also been inconsistent with insufficient improvement in some key subject areas such as science and modern foreign languages, as evidenced by success rates in 2014.

5. The principal now has identified the right changes to improve the college and meet the challenges identified by Ofsted – including by focusing on improving standards of teaching, the performance management of staff, and tracking and challenging students' progress. These are set out in a post-inspection action plan which includes milestones and measures of impact. The principal is sourcing external support where this is required, including from high-performing colleges. The governing body needs to monitor progress closely and hold the senior leadership team to account for rapidly implementing the actions outlined in the post-inspection action plan; securing improvements in students' attainment with particular reference to the 2014 to 2015 current academic year success rates in key subjects such as sciences and modern foreign languages; and a successful Ofsted re-inspection in early 2016.

6. To improve the capacity of the senior leadership team to embed and build on the necessary changes, the college should review the senior leadership team structure and recruit externally a senior manager at vice principal level with proven experience in improving teaching and assessment in the 16 to 19 phase.

7. The college should introduce succession planning for the governing body, and urgently refresh its current membership to ensure that there are more members with recent relevant educational experience.

8. The morale of teaching staff has been affected by the pace and scale of recent changes. Some students have understandably been unsettled by the departure of familiar teachers. The governing body and senior leadership team should increase their efforts to communicate the need for and reasons for change, and develop in consultation with stakeholders a clear vision for the college of the future including excellence in teaching and the college's role in the community.

9. King George V College fills a significant gap in the area as a sixth-form college offering a broad academic and more limited vocational curriculum. It should retain its place in the market provided it regains an Ofsted inspection grade of 2 or better by early 2016 and is thereby strengthened in competing successfully with its local competitors, and provided that it can continue to remain financially viable. However, the continuing demographic downturn in 16 to 19 numbers over the next four years will present significant financial challenges. It is therefore vital that the recommendations outlined are implemented at pace.

## Recommendations

- (i) The governing body should take urgent action to refresh its membership including but not limited to the recruitment of at least two new members with current or recent experience of leadership in secondary or 16 to 19 education.
- (ii) The governing body should review its skills and knowledge, and agree a formal training and development plan. Progress on implementing the plan should be regularly reported at meetings of the board.
- (iii) The governing body should review and change the arrangements that are in place to support and challenge the senior leadership team, and the arrangements for holding the senior leadership team to account through the performance review process.
- (iv) The governing body should ensure that the emerging arrangements to monitor implementation of the post-inspection action plan through its monitoring committee, involving the full governing body, are developed and embedded so that teaching, learning and quality are made a real focus for attention and challenge. The governing body should review whether the separate curriculum committee is needed or whether its responsibilities should be transferred to the monitoring committee at least until the Ofsted re-inspection.
- (v) The principal and the senior leadership team should implement rapidly the key changes set out in the post-inspection action plan in particular in relation to improving teaching, tracking student progress, and performance management of staff, drawing on effective practice in other colleges and schools.
- (vi) The principal should restructure the senior leadership team to increase its capacity and capability to embed and build on the changes now being introduced, including recruiting a vice principal with recent external experience in leading educational improvement in the 16 to 19 phase.
- (vii) The governing body should review progress closely against key performance indicators and hold the senior leadership team to account for delivery of the milestones in the post-inspection action plan, improved student attainment in the 2014 to 2015 academic year including success rates in key subjects such as science and modern foreign languages, and the outcome of the Ofsted re-inspection to take place in the 2015 to 2016 academic year.
- (viii) The governing body and senior leadership team should agree as soon as possible a formal reporting dashboard for the college as a whole using key indicators (for example, learner progress monitoring, teaching observation ratings) that can be used to track progress through 2015 and 2016.
- (ix) To improve risk management the governing body should develop and monitor a college-wide risk register. The post-inspection action plan should include a register of risks to its own delivery, and actions to mitigate them.
- (x) The governing body should lead the development of a clear vision for the college, for example in terms of excellence in teaching and the college's role in the community, that will re-engage local stakeholders and inspire staff, students and parents.
- (xi) The governing body and senior leadership team should continue to access, from other colleges and schools, expert advice and support on topics such as performance management and teaching. All college teaching staff should be twinned where possible with teachers in other colleges or schools with outstanding teaching records, so they can share ideas and good practice.

(xii) The EFA should provide cash-limited financial support towards delivery of the actions described in the post-inspection action plan, and in particular for the costs of securing support from external institutions, with the college expected to meet the balance of costs from its own resources.

(xiii) Regular case conferences should be convened by the EFA with the college in order to track progress. Ofsted, the Skills Funding Agency, and Sefton MBC will be invited to nominate members for the case conferences.

(xiv) The EFA should attend governing body meetings and any other appropriate committees as observers, in order to track progress against these recommendations.

**Peter Mucklow**

Sixth Form College Commissioner

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