

Beacon Centre – Supporting Statement Harrow College

Involvement with Home Group and the Beacon Centre began formally in April 07. There was a need to address the 'Education and Skills' development needs within the community plan and the college approached Home and Harrow Council to establish how they planned to meet their commitments and to form a partnership to ensure residents had access to skills development to support their employment aspirations.

Training for Real was set up as a project in the first instance to offer short skills training courses to assist residents to gain employment.

The college placed a member of staff on site for 2 days each week from April 07 to work with partners and residents at the Beacon, including the residents association. We offered a range of advice and guidance surgeries that individual residents could use to discuss their aspirations and options and we set up an employment fair in July 07 to help residents see the availability of local jobs with local employers. Invitations to the fair were sent to every home and followed up with door to door visits but only 11 residents attended the fair.

We engaged with the residents association informally via the college staff who were based at the beacon centre on a weekly basis however it has been more challenging to agree formal meetings. We have approached various members of the residents association to try and get involved in events they have arranged but have been unsuccessful to date. We are at this time waiting for dates to be confirmed by the residents association to meet with the college team on the estate to agree a route forwards and are hopeful of a positive conclusion.

We have carried out three information leaflet drops to households on the estate over the last year with information about the courses offered and we have carried out a full Training Needs Analysis on the estate calling on all homes and getting direct feedback from 115 families in all. In addition we attend the Rayners Lane Training and Skills Forum along with a range of other professional stakeholders working on the estate. There have been 3 meetings this academic year. The residents association attended the first meeting and gave clear feedback that more basic skills training was required and we have responded positively to this with additional classes. RLETRA sent apologies for the meetings in November and February so further formal feedback has not been possible.

When courses were originally offered it was after 6 weeks of advice surgeries. The original offer was based on the feedback of residents who had attended the surgeries. Courses were scheduled from Monday to Saturday, mornings and afternoons with 'drop in sessions' twice a week for language skills. Once the detailed Training Needs Analysis was completed in September 07 the offer was reviewed and there were further changes to the session times to accommodate a request for more morning sessions. Five members of the residents association were trained to carry out the TNA on the estate with the college team to ensure full resident involvement.

The most obvious need was language development. It was clear that the low levels of language skills of those who wanted to engage in skills training provision was prohibitive and so the college worked with the LSC to identify funding that could support residents to develop their language with a view to progressing to other skills courses at a later date.

Harrow College wishes to offer additional evidence to the panel that full consultation and feedback has taken place with a large and representative group of residents via the Training Needs Analysis, The Training and Employment Skills Forum and the weekly advice and guidance sessions that have been taking place for the last 12 months. The Training Needs Analysis was also presented to the Sustainable Economic Development Committee of Harrow Council shortly after completion.

Currently we have ESOL classes running each morning from 9.30am – 12.30pm with over 45 students enrolled and regularly attending, with a further 23 students undertaking skills assessments with a view to joining a course in the next few weeks. We are continuing to grow and adapt provision based on the emerging needs of the residents and other local people. The college pays for the use of the rooms at the Beacon Centre and is in this way helping to support its financial viability for the future. In addition we have invested in equipment and staffing to support the Beacon Centre and its users. The college has waived fees for classes at Rayners Lane offered under the Training for Real programme to further assist residents to engage in training.

The key challenges that have been more difficult to address have been the requirement of the provision of childcare. The college is aware that a children's centre is planned for Rayners Lane and that this has been somewhat delayed however if an interim solution could be found it would help to engage parents and carers across the estate.

In addition residents are often reluctant to share personal information about benefits and personal circumstances that are required to support their entry on to funded training programmes which has caused some delays in getting learners enrolled.

We also recognise that we could work more closely with RLETRA however we would like it noted by the panel that attempts have been made via the formal channels of the Employment and Skills Group and we remain hopeful that with the kind of co-ordination and further development of the management structure outlined in the report there will be more direct contact with this representative group. We have been more successful in engaging individual members of the residents association on a more informal basis via our on going presence at the Beacon Centre.

In summary the college has responded positively to each challenge presented at the Beacon to ensure that the best interests of the residents are met. Harrow College has, and continues to, commit substantial resources and funding to support the residents of the estate and to further develop the provision at the Beacon Centre in partnership with a range of delivery stakeholders, residents, Home Group and Harrow Council representatives.

Harrow College
1/4/08