

# Aspire-i

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 51025

**Name of lead inspector:** Jan Smith HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 16 February 2012

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

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## **Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings**

### **Context and focus of visit**

Aspire-i Limited (Aspire-i) is the lead partner in a foundation learning partnership that works across Bradford and District. The company holds a contract with the Young Persons Learning Agency and a sub-contract for delivering Next Step provision; it also delivers privately funded projects and those funded through the European Social Fund and other European Union funding.

Since the previous inspection, Aspire-i has undergone a management restructure, reduced the number of partners it works with from 19 to 14, and replaced its Entry to employment (E2e) programme with a foundation learning programme. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 311 learners.

Aspire-i was inspected in October 2009. The overall effectiveness of provision was judged to be satisfactory, with outcomes, quality of provision and leadership and management all graded as satisfactory. Safeguarding was good. Preparation for life and work was satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit, including the two mandatory themes of self-assessment and improvement planning, and outcomes for learners.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**What progress has Aspire-i made in the use of self-assessment and quality monitoring procedures, including teaching observations, in order to bring about improvements?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, Aspire-i has taken successful action to improve quality monitoring procedures. It involves staff and partners fully in self-assessment. Partners share ownership of the report and have opportunities to comment on and amend the draft. The establishment of a quality development group for the partnership, as well as an in-house quality team, has raised the profile of quality improvement.

Aspire-i has a comprehensive quality improvement plan; it is addressing issues raised at the last inspection effectively. Observation of teaching and learning is robust and carried out consistently by all partners, using Aspire-i's comprehensive guidance. All observations result in a detailed action plan agreed between tutors and their manager. Aspire-i operates a buddy system where weaker tutors receive support from the more able. Where low grades are given, additional observations following support have resulted in the awarding of a higher grade being awarded. Aspire-i shares good practice both internally and with its partners. Joint observations have

contributed to greater confidence in the consistency of grading across the partnership.

Following improvements to monitoring arrangements, Aspire-i has a better understanding of partner performance. It is working to introduce risk-based monitoring of individual partners.

## Outcomes for learners

**What progress has been made towards improving outcomes for learners following the transition from E2e to foundation learning, including functional skills?** **Reasonable progress**

At the time of the previous inspection, progression rates on E2e were satisfactory and improving. They fell slightly in 2009/10, E2e's final year of operation, a drop that Aspire-i attributes to the weakened economic climate and the high local unemployment rate. The introduction of qualifications as a measure of success on the foundation programme proved challenging for some learners and is seen by the provider as contributing to the high number of early leavers in the programme's first year.

Retention has improved significantly in the current year. The work of three specialist advisers, appointed by Aspire-i in October 2011, has played a key role in this improvement. They work very effectively with partners to follow up concerns over learners' attendance or welfare, making a home visit to the learner when necessary, to resolve issues. Aspire-i is in the process of appointing two additional advisers to further strengthen support for learners.

Aspire-i's data for the current year indicate an increase in success rates. This includes an improvement in the low success rates on information and communication technology (ICT) programmes, following work carried out by Aspire-i to strengthen the delivery of ICT integrated within construction.

## Quality of provision

**What progress has been made towards integrating literacy and numeracy within the new foundation learning programme?** **Reasonable progress**

Aspire-i encourages partners to integrate the delivery of each functional skill within other elements of the programme, believing this to be less daunting and demotivating for learners than discrete delivery. The partnership has strengthened its capacity to share good practice, taking opportunities at the regular partnership meetings to discuss approaches and materials to use when delivering functional skills.

Aspire-i integrates functional skills well, both within topics and across elements of the programme, giving learners good opportunities to apply functional skills in different contexts. For example, a session on wartime rationing was used effectively to develop learners' ability to scan extended passages of text for information and to develop their mathematical skills when calculating the cost of a week's shopping. Partners integrate mathematics and English into the vocational element of the programme, but most continue to also deliver separate topic-based sessions of functional skills. Aspire-i recognises the need to improve the delivery of integrated functional skills across the partnership.

**What progress has been made towards ensuring that the foundation learning programme meets the individual needs of learners?** **Reasonable progress**

At the time of the previous inspection, Aspire-i had planned and developed the introduction of the foundation learning programme well. The programme is now in its second year of operation, providing access to qualifications across the five elements of foundation learning, including qualifications in 10 vocational areas.

Aspire-i has strengthened arrangements to ensure that learners can access a programme relevant to their needs. The recently appointed specialist advisers conduct detailed initial assessments. They guide learners in their choice of provider and arrange interviews and taster days with several different partners if the learner is unsure which to choose. This improves learners' chances of completing their programme.

At the time of the previous inspection, access to work placements, enrichment activities and community projects within the E2e programme were judged to be insufficient. Aspire-i continues to encourage learners to engage in community activities and has recently introduced an improved and more structured enrichment programme, which will enable learners to benefit from a wider range of activities. However, opportunities for work placements and work tasters have become increasingly difficult to find in the current economic climate. Aspire-i continues to seek ways of increasing work-experience opportunities.

**What progress has been made towards ensuring that learners' progress reviews include formal sharing of information across the full range of their individual programmes?** **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, learners' reviews did not focus sufficiently on formally evaluating all aspects of their programmes. Aspire-i has introduced a common set of documents that all partners use, ensuring a consistency of approach.

Reviews take place every four weeks, although some partners feel this is too frequent as the process is time consuming and it is sometimes difficult to record progress made over such a short period. However, tutors discuss and record progress towards targets set at the previous review fully. Improved reviews now cover the full range of activities within learners' individual programmes, including functional skills, vocational training and wider enrichment activities. In addition, learners' knowledge of equality and diversity, safeguarding and health and safety, is tested and recorded during each review. Learners are encouraged to comment on their progress on review forms.

Aspire-i conducts quality audits of partner organisations' review paperwork to ensure compliance and consistency. It recognises the need to develop the review process further and plans to introduce observations of reviews as part of the quality improvement procedures.

## **Leadership and management**

### **What progress has been made towards strengthening partnership arrangements?**

### **Reasonable progress**

At the time of the previous inspection, Aspire-i did not manage some aspects of its partners' work sufficiently. Since then, it has made good progress in strengthening partnership arrangements, particularly in the way it consults with partners, shares good practice and monitors performance. It has appointed a manager to oversee all aspects of partnership working, including quality improvement and performance management. Partners speak very highly of the improved consultative arrangements introduced over the past 12 to 18 months. They believe that arrangements now add considerable value to the programme, providing a wide range of shared support. Monthly partnership meetings provide an effective forum for sharing good practice, knowledge and expertise. Partners share the Aspire-i brand and work together in areas such as quality improvement, recruitment and marketing. Learners benefit from the improved relationships and are now better able to move between partners to access to their choices of vocational options. The appointment of specialist advisers to support learners in danger of leaving the training programme has improved retention across the partnership.

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