

Blackpool Adult and Community Learning

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Marina Gaze HMI

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Type of provider: Local authority
Blackpool Borough Council

Address: Progress House
Clifton Road
Blackpool
FY4 4US

Telephone number: 01253 476823

Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Blackpool Adult and Community Learning (BACL) deliver learning programmes using their own staff and subcontractors. The main subcontractor, Blackpool and the Fylde College, provides 32% of the provision and three smaller subcontractors from the voluntary and community sector provide 7% of the provision. Most of BACL's funding is from the Skills Funding Agency's learning for social and personal development budget.

BACL delivers provision in information and communication technology, preparation for life and work, and family learning. The main subcontractor delivers other curriculum areas with the smaller subcontractors mainly delivering volunteering training, parenting or employability. In 2010/11, 3,357 learners made 5,621 enrolments on BACL's courses.

Following a restructure, BACL moved in 2011 into the council's Community and Early Intervention Division. The previous inspection in February 2010 found all aspects of the provision to be satisfactory.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has BACL made in ensuring that its self-assessment process and resulting quality-improvement plan make and sustain improvements?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection found that the judgements in the self-assessment report were generally accurate, although most grades proposed were higher than those awarded by inspectors.

The self-assessment process is inclusive and has been further improved by giving more ownership to curriculum managers and tutors. The self-assessment report is now reviewed each term and is a continually updated document. Staff talk knowledgeably about the service's strengths and areas for improvement and defend the self-assessment grades well. However, the self-assessment report is overly descriptive, does not demonstrate the impact of new initiatives and does not contain robust evidence to support the outcomes grade. Some of the data used in the self-assessment report are inaccurate. A recent peer review of the self-assessment report resulted in accurate and constructive feedback, but it is too soon for BACL to have acted on the feedback.

The quality-improvement plan is used well to drive improvements. BACL has made good progress to rectify the areas for improvement identified by the last inspection, with the exception of data management. Training for staff has resulted in targets in

this year's quality-improvement plan being more specific and measurable than in previous years.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has BACL made in improving outcomes for learners? **Reasonable progress**

The previous inspection found that learners' attainment was satisfactory. BACL's data, based on the recognition and recording of progress and achievement, were unreliable.

Good, improved initial assessment, target-setting on individual learning plans and the introduction of reviews of learners' progress, have increased the rigour and reliability of the recognition and recording of progress and achievement process. The good soft skills learners develop are now recognised and recorded. Partnership working is having a significant impact on reducing teenage pregnancies.

Retention has remained the same for the last three years and is over 90%. Achievement on non-accredited programmes increased from 80% in 2008/09 to 85% in 2010/11. However, BACL's measures of retention and achievement are low and unchallenging. Learners are considered to have fully achieved if they successfully complete 50% of their learning goals. However, many learners do achieve all their learning goals.

Externally accredited courses have increased since the last inspection and currently account for 10% of the provision. Achievement on externally accredited provision is good in life skills and English for speakers of other languages, but is low in personal skills. The range of progression routes has increased, with learners in information and communication technology and family learning now progressing to level 2.

Quality of provision

What progress has BACL made in improving initial assessment and subsequent target-setting for learners? **Significant progress**

At the previous inspection initial assessment was over reliant on the use of a check list and learner self-evaluation, which was inaccurate and misleading. Since the previous inspection the service has provided clear leadership and training to improve initial assessment. Tutors now use appropriate diagnostic tests to identify individual learner's needs and to identify valid starting points for learning. Initial assessment is more individualised, staff have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and learners know how to access support. Tutors are now clear about the needs and ambitions of learners. Where needed, support is now promptly provided and better tailored to specific needs.

Targets are now much more specific and significantly more relevant to individual learners. Staff confidently vary the number and types of targets set, rather than set the same targets for all learners. Excellent use is now made of evaluation of learning to set the next target and to plan learning for groups and individuals. Despite this, targets for a few learners do still not provide robust challenge to improve performance or progress.

What progress has BACL made in extending the range of provision?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection progression routes for learners were insufficiently coordinated. Since then a key priority for BACL has been the development of a more comprehensive range of programmes and progression routes. Close working with a wider range of partners, including the Women’s Centre and The Richmond Fellowship has resulted in learners, particularly the most vulnerable, having access to a good range of provision from pre-entry to level 4.

Programmes are now more carefully planned to provide a wide range of activities that ensure that all learners are challenged to perform highly. A broad range of learning opportunities that includes confidence building, literacy, numeracy and employability skills are beginning to have an impact on the significant deprivation issues faced by the local population. Accreditation opportunities have increased. The introduction of an electronic recording system is more accurately monitoring the courses that learners are taking, preventing learners taking too many courses at the same level. Importantly, in an area with a high level of transience, this improvement in recording is ensuring that learners do not have to start from the beginning of a course again when moving to new provision in a different area of the authority.

Leadership and management

What progress has BACL made in ensuring that the observation of teaching and learning process improves the quality of teaching and learning?

Reasonable progress

The previous inspection found that the outcomes of observations of teaching and learning did not adequately challenge tutors to improve. Arrangements to observe teaching and learning have been refined and now place a greater emphasis on learners’ experiences. Observers make good use of documentation from previous observations and appraisals to ensure tutors are making progress towards addressing key issues. Verbal feedback to tutors is clear, but written summaries do not always record specific actions for improvement that focus on learning.

Tutors new to teaching receive good support through the induction process to improve their teaching and learning. They have good opportunities to observe experienced colleagues. Although at a relatively early stage of development, peer observations are being used well to share best practice and to support staff to

further develop ideas and strategies to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Since the previous inspection BACL has developed stronger links with three other local authorities to ensure greater consistency and robustness in the observation process. However, this is at an early stage and the full impact is yet to be seen.

What progress has BACL made in using data to influence management decisions and improve learners' outcomes?

Insufficient progress

At the previous inspection BACL did not use management information systematically to influence management decisions. Data were not used well enough to plan interventions and improve learners' outcomes. Staff targets were insufficiently challenging.

BACL now use data produced by partners and other divisions of the council to effectively plan and target provision in areas and to groups where there is most need, for example, to different minority-ethnic groups. However, the data BACL generates and uses for quality-improvement planning are still unreliable. Some data in the self-assessment report are contradictory, incomplete and inaccurate. Different subject areas report data in different ways. Managers have not challenged the data in the self-assessment report. Data are not audited for accuracy.

BACL's definitions of retention and achievement are very low and lack challenge. BACL plans to benchmark with other local authorities offering similar provision but this has not happened yet. Retention and achievement targets set for tutors are meaningless and not differentiated. All tutors are set retention and achievement targets of 80% despite BACL's data showing retention and achievement are consistently higher.

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