

South Tyneside Council

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

South Tyneside Council Adult and Community Learning Service (STCACLs) is part of the Transition and Well-being Service of the Children and Families Directorate. The service contracts with Tyne and Wear Skills Funding Agency to provide Skills for Life and adult and learner responsive programmes. In 2009/10 over 6,000 learners were enrolled on these programmes, including some 200 learners who were enrolled on Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes. Over 80 partners, including voluntary and community organisations, colleges and private training providers deliver the majority of the programmes on behalf of STCACLs.

The most recent inspection report was published in May 2009. STCACLs was graded good for overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners and quality of provision. Three sector subject areas were inspected. Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages, (ESOL), community learning, and employability training were all judged to be good. This report focuses on the themes explored in the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving quality assurance arrangements and the use of development planning to strengthen provision?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection self-assessment was broadly accurate and generally inclusive. However, there were weaknesses in the implementation of the quality assurance arrangements. The self-assessment process is now thorough and inclusive. All partners are involved in the self-assessment process. Learners' views are regularly sought and used to improve provision. This process contributes to more effective quality improvement plans for the service. Commitment to continuous improvement is a high priority for all staff.

New, comprehensive arrangements are ensuring improvements in the quality of provision across all partners. Service-level agreements are more sharply focused, and associated targets updated. The provider monitors rigorously partners' performance against targets. Staff targets are linked to service priorities and this gives them a better understanding of what they need to do to improve provision. STCACLs has significantly strengthened its arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning. Observations are unannounced and feedback to teachers is detailed with clear personal targets for improvement. More thorough support is given to teachers and support workers. These actions have led to improved teaching across the service. Outcomes of observations are linked closely to the service's improvement plans and focus on actions such as assessment and the monitoring of learners' progress.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in ensuring the continued improvement in success rates?

Reasonable progress

Success rates at the previous inspection had improved and were above national rates at all levels. Rates have continued to improve and remained above national rates in 2008/09. Current data for 2009/10 shows a continued trend of improvement: overall success rates on accredited courses remain high at 87%. Retention rates on all courses also continue to improve and are consistently high at over 96% for most courses. Overall and timely success rates for apprenticeships and Train to Gain were also some 10% above national rates for 2008/09.

Outcomes are now monitored carefully and specific actions taken have led to improvements in the progress of different groups of learners and learners from different providers. Senior managers have a very good understanding of variations in success rates across different groups of learners and understand the reasons for this. As a result of this they are able to respond rapidly to any signs of declining performance.

What progress has been made in improving the consistency, thoroughness and accuracy in the recording and assessment of achievement in non-accredited learning?

Reasonable progress

STCACLs has improved the thoroughness and accuracy of the recording and assessment of achievement in non-accredited learning. Recognising and recording prior achievement is now well established and used systematically to measure the individual progress of learners. Personal learning plans are used well to record the outcomes of initial assessment and the prior knowledge and achievement of learners. Support needs are recorded carefully and are used to plan lessons more effectively. Learners' progress is closely monitored through their personal learning plans. They assess their own progress towards their personal and learning goals at the start, mid-point and end of their programmes. Individual progress is recorded by learners at the end of each learning session but they often describe what tasks they have carried out rather than what they have learned or the progress they have made. Although learners' personal goals are clearly identified in most session plans teachers do not take sufficient account of these when planning learning activities.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in ensuring the consistency of targets set for all learners?

Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection most tutors have received training in target-setting. Recording of targets and progress is now more closely monitored by the quality team. Most recent individual learning plans now contain appropriate learner targets

that are updated regularly. In the better plans, learner targets are precise and realistic, and progress towards them is monitored systematically at subsequent reviews. Learners understand clearly what they need to do to improve further through the clear links between their identified targets and the progress they are making. On apprenticeship programmes, targets set during reviews are often too broad and insufficiently specific or measurable. Progress against these targets is not followed up systematically at subsequent reviews and learners are not kept fully informed of the progress they are making. Learners and employers are not always clear about what action is needed to complete units. In learning sessions tutors use personal targets well to meet the needs of individual learners. However, they do not check sufficiently thoroughly the knowledge and understanding of each individual learner.

What progress has been made in monitoring and recording learners' progression into employment and further training? Reasonable progress

STCACLs has started to record and analyse progression, a key priority in its self-assessment. Progression from apprenticeship programmes is tracked and recorded well and outcomes used to plan future work placements and employment opportunities. Most apprentices complete their qualification and gain permanent employment through their placement. Tutors monitor closely many aspects of learners' progress on programmes for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) programmes, including developments in literacy, numeracy, short qualifications and the Duke of Edinburgh award. Progression rates and the achievement of accredited learning goals are good. Over 35% of the service's 133 NEET learners have progressed to further education, training or jobs. Progression of these learners is recorded well but not analysed systematically to identify trends or aid future planning. The monitoring of learners' progression from non-accredited programmes is less well developed.

The council refers to the priority given to progression opportunities for apprentices in several key policy documents including its Children and Young Peoples Plan 2010-2013. STCACLs has piloted extensive arrangements to manage and monitor the work of subcontractors. These include specific references to the quality of reviews and target-setting for learners, and accurate analysis of learner progression information.

Leadership and management

What progress has the service made in ensuring that the provision continues to meet local needs during a time of significant budgetary reductions? Significant progress

Particularly strong and motivational leadership ensures STCACLs continues to provide high-quality provision that meets local needs. Frequent and honest communication,

combined with regular individual meetings, is keeping staff well informed of changes. Future developments are grounded in careful budgetary analysis and an excellent understanding of local and national needs. Excellent partnerships ensure the curriculum is responsive and flexible, providing progression from foundation learning to level 4 in South Tyneside. Commitment to professional development remains a key priority for the service enabling teaching staff to continue to deliver high quality learning. Significantly improved contract management and monitoring is supporting STCACLs to evaluate value for money exceptionally well and to plan its future provision. Highly effective use is beginning to be made of social clauses, ensuring that new investment in South Tyneside benefits local people by increasing apprenticeship and employment opportunities. Excellent use is made of strong links with other council departments, and key partners to support the development of apprenticeships. For example, close collaboration with the social housing provider provides some 25 apprenticeships annually. Most learners interviewed spoke very positively about the opportunities they had and the skills they are developing. In the words of one learner, 'It has given me my life back'.

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