

Newcastle City Learning

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Local Authority

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Newcastle City Learning (NCL) is the training arm of Newcastle upon Tyne City Council, which is a large metropolitan local authority in the northeast. It delivers the council's learning and skills provision across 16 sector subject areas. The Skills Funding Agency funds NCL to deliver adult and community learning for adult learner responsive provision, adult safeguarded provision, and work-based learning employer responsive provision in apprenticeships, Train to Gain, Entry to Employment, and European social funded employability provision, under a single contract. At the inspection in May 2009, the overall effectiveness of NCL's provision was good. Outcomes for learners were good as was the quality of provision. Leadership and management were good and equality and diversity was graded satisfactory. NCL had good capacity to improve.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in strengthening the effectiveness of self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements?

Significant progress

NCL has made significant progress in strengthening the effectiveness of both its self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements. At the recent inspection, it was judged that the implementation of quality improvements arrangements was incomplete. Since that inspection NCL has merged two management groups to form a single 'E+Qualities' group which monitors and reviews all service protocols for robustness and appropriateness. Curriculum team leaders follow up observation reports in a more detailed way. Performance management of staff now receives much greater attention. Regular meetings, at both one-to-one and team level, now carefully monitor performance against more challenging targets. Systems for providing support to learners have improved and barriers to learning are identified and acted on more effectively. An observation of teaching and learning standardisation group now reviews and moderates all observation reports, especially grade 1 outcomes, to ensure they are rigorous and fair. The service makes good use of feedback from the increasing number of responses received since the process was moved online. A new academic board advises managers on curriculum development and review. Since the recent inspection, retention rates have increased and success and achievement rates have improved.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in maintaining or improving the outcomes for learners?

Significant progress

NCL has made significant progress in improving learner outcomes. At the recent inspection, achievement and standards were good. Outcomes were good in work-based learning. Overall success rates were high, and timely success rates had improved significantly from a low base. Apprenticeship success rates have improved and are now very high at over 90%. Success rates for Train to Gain learners are still high, and the number of those finishing within their planned timescale has improved significantly and is high at nearly 90%. The achievement of Entry to Employment objectives had improved but was still too low at 39%. This has improved significantly to 69% in October 2010. Success rates in accredited adult and community learning provision were satisfactory but retention was low at 79%. This has improved to 85% in 2009/10, and success rates have increased to 80%. Managers use data well to monitor performance and have a better awareness of its use as a management tool. Success rates of particular target groups are monitored carefully, and identified differences are addressed well. Non-attendance by learners is now addressed well by tutors, and plans are in place to ensure that the registration system better facilitates closer monitoring by managers.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve the use of learners' targets to support planning for teaching and learning?

Reasonable progress

NCL has made reasonable progress in improving the use of target-setting to improve teaching and learning. At the recent inspection, learners' individual targets were insufficiently used to support planning for teaching and learning. Since then, curriculum area teams have included a clear and direct focus on actions to improve the use of targets in their development plans; however, several areas use the same wording. Individual learning plans are constantly under review and in a few areas, such as lower level ESOL provision, some creative models have been developed. The information and communication technology department is currently piloting an electronic version of the individual learning plan. This is being well received by their learners. Most lesson plans now include clear and specific targets. NCL makes good use of weekly reflective diaries and monthly tutor reviews to monitor learner progress against these targets. Staff development days have included sessions on improving the use of targets for learners. Feedback from learners indicates that they have an improved understanding of their own personal targets. Some of the individual learning plans sampled however, have targets, which remain too focused on actions: what will happen, or needs to happen, rather than on the intended outcome.

What progress has been made in improving arrangements for learning support and information advice and guidance?

Significant progress

NCL has made significant progress in improving arrangements for learning support and Information Advice and Guidance (IAG). At the last inspection, support for learners and IAG arrangements were satisfactory with NCL working towards gaining Matrix accreditation for the provision of IAG, and improving systems to better identify learners with support needs. Support in sessions for learners with particular needs was satisfactory and arrangements for additional learning support were generally satisfactory. NCL has now achieved Matrix accreditation and many staff have successfully completed IAG qualifications up to level 4. The service has restructured and refocused its support for the most vulnerable and learners are better prepared for the challenges ahead. NCL has improved the initial information given to learners, which is now well presented and informative. A standardised and robust initial assessment now effectively identifies individual learner needs. Tutors are now more aware of the specific needs of their learners. The service uses a range of external partner organisations very effectively to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable are met. Learners overwhelmingly value the guidance and support they receive during their programmes. Managers recognise that they need to continue to build the confidence of some tutors to ensure that all learners' support needs are met well.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the promotion of equality and diversity?

Significant progress

Significant progress has been made in improving the promotion of equality and diversity. Arrangements for equality of opportunity were satisfactory at the last inspection although tutors seldom promoted equality of opportunity in the curriculum. Social inclusion and widening participation initiatives were good and targeted some of the most deprived communities. The service now gives equality and diversity a very high priority. Partnership work to attract and support the hardest to reach learners has improved and is particularly effective, for example, working with local agencies and community groups to integrate recent immigrants into the community. Equality and diversity are now routinely promoted through naturally occurring opportunities within sessions, and this is monitored through the observation of teaching and learning. Training and awareness of staff has improved. Tutors have a better understanding of the needs of particular learners, and learners feel very well supported. Equality and diversity is embedded in all aspects of work, for example, in celebrating learners' success. Data on equality is carefully analysed and action taken to address anomalies, for example, increasing male participation through a partnership with the local football club.

What progress has NCL made in developing strategies to meet current funding changes?**Significant progress**

NCL has made significant progress in developing strategies to meet current and possible future funding issues. At the last inspection, the strategic management was judged to be good. It remains so. All managers have a clear strategic focus and understanding of the pressures on the service. Their understanding of both the threats and the opportunities funding changes present is good. The service maintains and develops strategies to improve outcomes, feedback processes, partnerships, performance review, sharing good practice and developing full cost recovery programmes. All staff, including course tutors, take ownership and accountability for their programmes. Actions taken to date have been successful at managing the funding reduction during the last year, maintaining the core provision in order to meet key strategic priorities. An active and highly effective strategy group drives the service's key plans. NCL is currently participating in a council-wide corporate review of future operating processes. Strategies are explored systematically, identifying both the strengths and weaknesses of each. Strategies clearly deal with reduced funding and include efficiency savings and income generation.

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