

North Lincolnshire Council

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

North Lincolnshire Council (NLC) is an adult and community learning provider of learner-responsive and adult safeguarded provision. It has an administration centre in Scunthorpe and provides learning programmes through a network of four main centres and 17 community-based venues located across North Lincolnshire.

A head of service manages the provision, supported by two senior managers. One of these has line management responsibility for six curriculum managers who manage the tutors. The other senior manager has responsibility for all support services, including centre management, learner support and marketing.

The monitoring visit follows the reinspection that took place in January 2010 and which focused specifically on information and communication technology (ICT), preparation for life and work, and family learning. At the reinspection overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision, and leadership and management were all judged as satisfactory. Inspectors judged ICT to be good, preparation for life and work to be satisfactory and family learning to be inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit, including the two mandatory themes of outcomes for learners, and self-assessment and improvement planning.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in strengthening the effectiveness of the self-assessment/quality improvement arrangements to secure and sustain improvements?	Reasonable progress
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At the reinspection the self-assessment report (SAR) and self-assessment process were judged to be satisfactory. Since the reinspection, NLC has focused on moving self-assessment from an annual event to a continuous process. The SAR for 2009/2010, although still in draft format, provides a self-critical and honest picture of the provision. Managers now monitor action plans more rigorously and closely. The learner voice continues to be effective in improving provision and one learner has won a national 'leading the learner voice' award for 2010. Aspects of the quality improvement system that NLC previously approached in an opportunistic or reactive way are now part of a well-structured, systematic process. The provider now has a schedule of quality improvement activities and a structured timetable of events. These are enabling much improved sharing of good practice and are helping to ensure regular contributions to the self-assessment process. NLC is planning a peer observation process to enhance the current arrangements to observe teaching and learning. It has implemented recommendations arising from the reinspection by ensuring that family learning is now part of the observation process. Managers have

completed some observations of family learning which have led to the development of individual action plans.

Outcomes for learners

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

Reasonable progress

Outcomes for learners were judged to be satisfactory at the reinspection. Since then only the provider's own data are available to measure progress. However, these are showing a steady upward trend across almost all of the learner-responsive provision. Overall success rates on accredited courses at the time of the inspection in 2008/09 were at the national average of 77%. The provider's data show a steady trend of improvement in 2009/10. For example, success rates on ICT were high at 83% in 2008/09 compared to a national average of 75%. Available data show that success rates in 2009/10 should at least match this rate and will probably exceed it.

At the reinspection, learners between the ages of 16 and 18 did not succeed as well as those aged over 19. Their success rates remain below those of their counterparts who are aged over 19. In addition, learners' performance on a minority of courses is low. NLC is very aware of underperforming provision and has a number of actions in place to bring about improvements. Learners continue to improve their economic well-being. They use safe working practices and work as volunteers, so becoming active within their communities.

Quality of provision

What improvements in the recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) process has NLC made in both Skills for Life and family learning provision?

Reasonable progress

At the reinspection, the RARPA process was comprehensive although its application remained an area for improvement. NLC has now strengthened its moderation and internal verification processes. Each sector subject area has a 20% interim assessment sample as well as a 100% sample at the end of all programmes. Curriculum co-ordinators moderate the results of all internal verification judgements. Tutors and co-ordinators are involved in standardisation of assessment criteria. NLC is planning cross-provision moderation as part of its improved quality cycle.

Moderation processes have successfully highlighted concerns around target setting and the sufficiency of evidence, and they are leading to further support and training. In Skills for Life programmes, managers identified a lack of precision in target setting; they gave some internal support and training to staff and are now looking for further external training.

Success and achievement rates appear more realistic. Analysis is beginning to reveal differences in performance across sector subject areas. However, NLC has not yet collated data for the year and is still resolving discrepancies in recording.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of provision in family learning?

Insufficient progress

During the reinspection, inspectors judged family learning to be inadequate on a number of issues including: slow learner progress, insufficient access to qualifications, inadequate initial assessment and individual planning of learning, and inadequate curriculum management.

Responsibility for family literacy, language and numeracy provision (FLLN) now lies with a different curriculum manager, with wider family learning (WFL) retained by the original co-ordinator. The new FLLN co-ordinator has begun to re-start provision. NLC has planned some courses for the current year, with a small number of classes already in place. One early years course in a rural isolated children's centre has been successful, with all learners progressing onto both literacy and numeracy classes.

Some new materials for initial assessment in family learning have been used in one course. However, these are not being universally trialled or used. While NLC applies the RARPA processes in family learning, there has been insufficient provision so far to assess the effectiveness of targets set within individual learning plans.

The FLLN co-ordinator has an individual development plan. However, this is insufficiently co-ordinated with WFL. Strategic planning or activity at a senior level insufficiently supports the operational development of family learning.

What improvements has NLC made to the delivery of information, advice and guidance across provision?

Reasonable progress

Since the reinspection, 19 staff have achieved the National Vocational Qualification at level 2 in advice and guidance. Mandatory training to raise the awareness of other staff is planned. NLC has worked hard to achieve consistency in the standard of information, advice and guidance offered across its centres. A programme of pre-enrolment information sessions during the summer included representatives from other local training and education providers. NLC plans to improve progression advice through advisers systematically visiting classes later in the term. NLC is improving the provision of information, advice and guidance in more isolated rural areas in conjunction with a range of partners through the use of a converted bus.

The provider has improved the management of course enquiries. It is developing online enrolment in response to learner feedback. Staff display well-designed posters in all classrooms to promote awareness of progression routes. Marketing staff have redesigned promotional materials to inform prospective learners of local provision. NLC has improved the publicity materials on the council website to provide more timely and accurate information. Although NLC has started to use an appropriate range of indicators to measure the effectiveness of information, advice and guidance, it is too early to judge the overall impact of these arrangements.

Leadership and management

What progress has NLC made in actively promoting equality and diversity, tackling discrimination and, in particular, narrowing the achievement gap?	Reasonable progress
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Arrangements for equality and diversity were satisfactory at the time of the reinspection. NLC has now achieved the Investors in Diversity award, being the first in the country to do so.

NLC continues to make good use of large plasma screen displays in public areas of the main centres to raise awareness of aspects of equality and diversity. It has strengthened arrangements to identify and provide more timely support to all learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also to non-vocational learners. The success rates of those accessing support show a continued upward trend for 2009/10.

Managers use data well to identify achievement gaps, for example among migrant workers and learners aged between 16 and 18. They are continuing to take action to address the issues identified through data analysis. The promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum is an area for ongoing development during 2010/11. Staff are planning tutor training and sharing good practice on how to embed equality and diversity. NLC has redesigned both session plans and the system for observing teaching and learning to focus more on aspects of equality and diversity.

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