

Leeds City Council

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Leeds City Council is contracted by the Skills Funding Agency to deliver adult safeguarded provision in personal and community development learning, first steps, family learning, and neighbourhood learning in deprived communities. The family learning provision includes wider family learning and family learning impact-funded provision. The council's Skills Funding Agency/European Social Fund co-financed Skills for Jobs provision was out of scope. The adult learning programme is predominantly delivered through a commissioning process by a large number of partner providers located throughout the city. These range from large general further education and specialist colleges to small voluntary and community sector organisations that support recruitment from the council's priority target groups. The council has restructured since its previous inspection and the management of its adult learning provision has moved from the Jobs and Skills Service to the commissioning team within the Environment and Neighbourhood Directorate.

At the council's previous inspection in June 2009, its provision was graded satisfactory for all main aspects and good for equality of opportunity. This monitoring visit report focuses on the themes identified, mainly from the key areas for improvement, from that inspection.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the council made in improving the rigour of its self-assessment report and the effectiveness of the report's links to promoting quality improvement? **Reasonable progress**

Self-assessment arrangements were broadly satisfactory at the previous inspection. The council's developments have ensured that these arrangements are well placed within the wider context of quality improvement, with clear links between the self-assessment report and the quality improvement plan. Around half of the monthly quality meetings now focus on self-assessment or review of progress against quality improvement action points. The pace of improvement is supported by an increased frequency of review, from quarterly to monthly, and progress is on target. The self-assessment process continues to be highly inclusive of commissioned partners; review of specific areas for improvement forms a regular feature of their monitoring. Recent developments include an emerging focus on validation processes to establish the accuracy of self-assessment although, currently, this is largely an internal process.

The self-assessment report for 2010/11 and progress described in the quality improvement plan proved largely accurate for the themes investigated. The self-assessment report is more evaluative than indicated at the previous inspection and judgements are now well supported by evidence and data. However, the report is

still long and over-descriptive in parts. The structure of the main findings corresponds well to the revised Common Inspection Framework but these links are less clear in subject area reports.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made to improve outcomes for learners and to ensure that data for non-accredited learning are sufficiently reliable to confirm judgements? **Reasonable progress**

Outcomes for learners were judged to be satisfactory at the previous inspection and overall achievement and retention rates continue to be so. However, while retention for learners on non-accredited programmes remains satisfactory, retention on accredited programmes has improved. Outcomes for learners on employability programmes and accredited family learning programmes are good.

The recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) process is now more robust and tutors' use of the process is reviewed regularly through observations of teaching and learning. Increased confidence in the data ensures that learners' attainment is more regularly and effectively monitored and analysed with partners and swifter actions are taken to resolve concerns where necessary. The council has only recently introduced learner destination data. Where this is a recorded outcome, for example in employability programmes, destination outcomes are good. As yet there is not a full year of data to confirm what proportion of learners progresses to courses at higher levels or to other positive outcomes.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to ensure that tutors set and monitor individual learning targets effectively and use them to inform their planning to provide stimulating teaching and learning? **Reasonable progress**

The setting and use of individual learning targets were judged to be inconsistent at the previous inspection and arrangements to determine precise and measurable learning goals were of mixed quality. Since then, the council has implemented a number of measures to ensure individual learning goals are more effective in planning teaching and learning. Evidence from the routine RARPA audits confirms that effective initial assessment continues to support the planning of teaching and learning. A wider range of quality monitoring actions now takes place to assess the quality and effectiveness of target setting. RARPA audits have been effective in identifying provision where target setting has been less effective. However, the observation of teaching and learning form does not currently specifically identify the quality of target setting. Some partner providers have given specific staff training to spread good practice in target setting. This is now supported by much clearer guidance on target setting and recording learning and progress in the tutors'

handbook. Feedback from learners indicates an improving trend in the usefulness of their individual targets and more interesting learning sessions, but council staff and providers recognise that some work remains to be done to ensure that individual learning plans and targets are consistently fit for purpose to meet learners' needs.

What progress has been made to establish the improvements to information, advice and guidance identified during the previous inspection and to ensure consistently good quality information about progression opportunities at all partners? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, information, advice and guidance were judged to be satisfactory and improving. However, information about progression opportunities varied in quality between partners. Since then, the council has carried out good work to better tailor information, advice and guidance for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including more appropriate signposting about progression opportunities across the whole provision. Questions on information, advice and guidance are now raised as part of the learner satisfaction survey; feedback confirms an improving picture. Teaching observation procedures now include evaluation of information, advice and guidance. The council took effective action to rectify concerns with one partner when teaching observations indicated that information, advice and guidance sessions were not being recorded. Recent developments include information, advice and guidance forming part of the commissioning and monitoring procedures for partners and the development of a framework progression pathway across the whole provision. These developments are new and have yet to be reflected fully in the consistency and quality of information, advice and guidance given to learners.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in analysing and using data showing the comparative performance of learners from different groups? Significant progress

At the previous inspection, little data existed on how well specific groups of learners achieved in comparison with all groups. The council now regularly collects and analyses comparative data on learner outcomes and can demonstrate that there is no discernable difference in the performance of different learner groups. The council uses demographic data proactively to target provision across the city. Equality measures are effectively highlighted during the commissioning process to plan and ensure programmes are delivered where they will make the most difference according to community need, and to meet different funding criteria. The council has developed an appropriate action plan in relation to equality and diversity measures and where any differences in comparative learner outcomes are highlighted reasons for these are promptly interrogated at monitoring meetings.

What progress has been made in fully establishing the Skills for Life strategy across the provision? Reasonable progress

The Skills for Life strategy was insufficiently developed in most areas of provision at the previous inspection. It is now better established and supported actively at strategic level through council commitment in a range of related initiatives. Questions about the Skills for Life strategy form a central part of the commissioning process; its implementation is monitored regularly. Partners report favourably about the council's commitment to support tutors, developing their awareness and understanding about the identification of need and support for learners with literacy, language or numeracy development needs. Tutor and provider packs, issued at the start of each year, contain useful advice about Skills for Life. Partner providers illustrate good examples of embedded Skills for Life in informal learning using creative learning activities that support learners' development of literacy, numeracy and communication skills, including visual literacy.

The collection of impact data about progression into Skills for Life provision from informal learning and progression from Skills for Life programmes is at an early stage. The council and its commissioned partners intend to implement this from the next cycle of data collection. However, one partner has begun the process, generating data showing that most of its learners attending Leeds City Council commissioned programmes progress onto other learning activities at the same or higher levels, including 40 onto discrete Skills for Life provision.

What progress has the council made to develop and establish highly effective quality assurance arrangements to promote consistently good practice across its provision? Reasonable progress

The council's quality assurance arrangements have improved. A clear quality framework outlines each process and a quality calendar shows how these are coherently planned throughout the year. In particular, the observation of teaching and learning process has emerged as a robust, supportive and developmental tool that integrates the review of priority areas. Tutors no longer receive prior warning of an observation and the sample size has increased significantly to around 50% of tutors. Around three-quarters of planned observations have taken place this year, much higher than previously, and the council is on target to complete its schedule. Effective links with partners' own observations reduce potential duplication and support consistency. Moderation is thorough and now results in developmental feedback for observers. Inspectors were satisfied that the process generates accurate judgements and grades. The process provides effective links to other aspects of quality assurance and has extended the range of methods used to gather learners' views. However, records of tutors' observation history and grade profile are maintained separately, making it difficult to gauge trends or support the sampling rationale for each successive year.

Other aspects of quality processes, such as the sharing of good practice and performance monitoring of commissioned partners, have similarly improved. Provider monitoring is now sufficiently frequent and well structured. Monitoring effectively identifies development points enabling council staff to intervene earlier than previously to promote more rapid improvements.

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