

# Choices 4 All

## Inspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 51152

**Name of lead inspector:** Penelope Horner HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 24 June 2011

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

**Address:** 3rd Floor  
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## Information about the provider

1. Choices 4 All (Choices) is a private limited company and registered charity operating mainly in the London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow. It provides foundation learning programmes for young people and adults with moderate to severe learning difficulties to improve their independence and help them gain employment.
2. Choices currently has 33 learners. Three of these are on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes and 30 learners are on the foundation learning tier. Seventeen learners are funded by the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA) and sixteen learners are funded by their local borough council. All are in scope of the inspection. The London boroughs from which Choices recruits its learners have very diverse populations; Choices’ student profile reflects this diversity. Two thirds of learners are women but this proportion varies from year to year.
3. Choices’ foundation learning programme consists of a vocational strand in hospitality and catering, a personal and social development strand and a functional skills strand. Four local employers provide work experience placements for learners.
4. A board of trustees oversees the work of the company. Shortly after the last inspection, Choices underwent a number of significant changes in management. An acting chief executive currently manages the provision. She is supported by a team of six tutors, three of whom are agency staff. An additional member of staff supports learners in employment.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
<p><b>Provision for young learners:</b></p> <p>Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment</p>	<p>41 learners</p>

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>
	<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners	4
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	4
Safeguarding	4
Equality and diversity	3
<b>Subject Areas</b>	
Preparation for life and work	4

## Overall effectiveness

- Provision at Choices is inadequate. The new acting chief executive has been successful in making the culture at Choices more open and consultative. She and her staff have maintained provision effectively following significant changes in management. Learners are well supported, enjoy attending the centre and gain good skills in catering and art. However, their functional skills in literacy and numeracy do not improve sufficiently. Choices has too few assessors. It has not assessed learners sufficiently often to enable learners to gain qualifications that recognise the skills they have acquired or the progress they have made. Choices' links with its employers are used well to provide learners with work placements, but there are too few of these to meet the needs of all learners. Managers have not yet developed adequate systems for monitoring the provision or processes to ensure that key aspects of learners' programmes, such as progress reviews, take place regularly. Choices' board of trustees has provided insufficient scrutiny of the provision or challenge and support to managers.

## Main findings

- Learners' achievement of their learning goals is satisfactory. They develop good skills in catering and are able to perform routine tasks competently. All learners improve their communication and information technology skills. They gain in

confidence and communicate well. Some learners develop good skills in art and design. At work, learners are reliable and punctual.

- Learners' on the foundation programme make slow progress towards qualifications that recognise their skills. Qualification success rates are very low. Eighteen learners have achieved units of their employability qualification and eight have achieved an art and craft qualification, but none has achieved functional skills or a life and learning qualification. Learners on Entry to Employment programmes make satisfactory progress.
- Lessons in catering, art and information technology are well planned, vibrant and imaginative. However, a small number of other lessons are insufficiently planned and are lacklustre. Tutors do not always share best practice sufficiently and no tutor is yet qualified in teaching functional mathematics.
- Learners' reviews are unsatisfactory. None were completed between January 2010 and April 2011. The reviews that have been carried out since then are not always complete and the targets set for learners are sometimes too general. They provide inadequate information on learners' progress. Choices recognises this and is taking corrective action.
- Insufficient assessment has taken place on the foundation learning programme. Learners' catering skills have not been assessed since August 2010. No assessment has taken place in citizenship since the course started in September 2010. In functional skills, the first mock tests were only taken in June 2011. An intensive assessment programme is planned to combat this.
- Choices provides training that meets both learners' and employers' needs. Learning programmes cover the three strands of foundation learning satisfactorily, with additional classes in art, African studies and trips to widen learners' experience and skills. Placements are prestigious and well resourced, but currently not enough of them are available
- Choices' staff provide good support to enable learners to achieve their learning goals. Pastoral support is particularly strong. Tutors act effectively as advocates, work well with specialists, help with family life, relationships and independent living, and provide useful advice and referrals on benefits. A job coach provides good support to learners at work. External counsellors offer beneficial additional support.
- Since the management changes in 2010, the acting chief executive and her staff have been particularly effective in creating a culture at Choices which is open, inclusive and consultative. Staff have a clear commitment to meeting learners' needs and value the opportunities they now have to make decisions and use their initiative to help develop and support learners.
- Managers have been successful in maintaining and building on well-established partnerships with Harrow Borough Council. They are making good use of these links to rebuild Choices' management information systems. However, these systems are currently incomplete and do not provide managers with sufficient information to help monitor or make decisions about provision.
- Choices' trustees have provided inadequate scrutiny of the provision or challenge for managers. They have not provided sufficient guidance to the

acting chief executive or identified where she might need additional support in order to rebuild provision following significant management changes in 2010.

- Choices has a clear commitment to safeguarding learners. It carries out suitable checks on staff and has appropriate procedures for recording and following up concerns expressed by learners or staff. Learners feel safe and know how to use Choices' complaints procedure. However, Choices has not yet implemented all the recommendations made by the Harrow Adult Safeguarding Team.
- Choices does not currently have a quality-assurance and improvement programme that draws on data or an evaluation of key aspects of learners' programmes. Its most recent self-assessment report correctly identifies some strengths and weaknesses, but other strengths are over estimated and not sufficiently supported by evidence.

### **What does Choices 4 All need to do to improve further?**

- Develop and implement procedures for key aspects of training such as individual learning and lesson planning, progress reviews and target setting, to ensure that these take place effectively, help chart learners' progress and improve outcomes for learners.
- Accelerate the staff development programme to increase the number of assessors and internal verifiers so that more frequent assessment can take place to increase achievement of qualifications and recognise learners' achievement.
- Strengthen the board of trustees to provide better challenge and direction for managers.
- Develop management information systems to provide routine reports on learners' achievement and progress in order to monitor the impact of provision more effectively.
- Address recommendations identified in the Harrow Adult Safeguarding Team report to strengthen Choices' safeguarding arrangements.
- Ensure that all teaching staff are working towards a teaching diploma, or its equivalent, and that specialist staff are available to teach numeracy.
- Widen learners' experience and employment opportunities by substantially increasing the number of placements.

### **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

#### **What learners like:**

- making lunch for the centre
- enjoyable lessons and having fun at the centre
- the work experience they have
- having access to a counsellor
- the helpful staff, who provide good support

- learning new computer skills.

**What learners would like to see improved:**

- none identified.

**No employer views were received.**

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 4**

6. Following a period of considerable management disruption, managers have been very effective in changing the culture at Choices so that it is now more open and consultative. Staff have been successful in ensuring that learners remain well supported throughout this period. They have improved liaison with parents and carers. Learners and staff enjoy being at Choices and now find it a more welcoming and secure environment in which to learn or work. Managers and staff are keen to develop provision and are responsive to suggestions for improvement. However, systems and procedures for monitoring and evaluating provision are incomplete. Key aspects of learners' programmes have not been provided systematically. Managers and staff have not provided sufficiently frequent or regular assessment of learners or reviews of their progress. Action to tackle areas for improvement in Choices' safeguarding arrangements has not taken place. The board of trustees has provided insufficient scrutiny of provision to help guide managers' actions or identify where additional support would be beneficial. The quality of provision has declined since the previous inspection.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 4**

7. Learners' make slow progress towards the achievement of qualifications that reflect the skills they have developed. Since the introduction of the foundation learning tier, no learner has achieved a functional or a life and learning skills qualification. Only eight learners have achieved an art and craft qualification. Eighteen learners have achieved between one and three employability units, but none has yet achieved a complete qualification. Achievement rates for the three remaining E2E learners are satisfactory. Although their progress has been slow, they are due to move to further education or employment in July. Last year, only four learners left the programme but all progressed to further education or employment.
8. Learners' achievement of their learning goals is satisfactory. They produce high standards of work in catering and art. Learners gain good employability skills in catering and are able to perform routine tasks competently. All learners improve their communication and information technology skills. They achieve strong gains in confidence and communicate well. Some learners are developing skills in design. At work, learners are reliable and punctual. Their work in literacy, numeracy and information technology is satisfactory.
9. Learners feel safe and understand the complaints procedure. They work safely and have an acceptable understanding of internet and computer behaviour including cyber bullying. They develop a good understanding of healthy eating and lifestyle choices. Where appropriate, they are set suitable targets for hygiene or social behaviour but insufficient attention is given to updating learners' sex and health awareness.

## The quality of provision

## Grade 3

10. Lessons in catering, art and information technology are good. They are well planned, vibrant and imaginative, with some very good use of art as an enrichment exercise, a high standard of food preparation and exciting computer-based exercises that relate to learners' everyday experiences. Choices make good use of its well-designed kitchen to develop learners' catering and independent living skills. Its computer room is well resourced and used very effectively to widen learning opportunities. In a few lessons activities are lacklustre and not linked to developing learners' skills. The resources are not always adequate to meet learners' needs. Tutors do not share good practice sufficiently and use different formats to plan lessons. Choices has not yet been successful in recruiting a tutor with suitable qualifications, or in qualifying existing staff, to teach functional mathematics.
11. Learners' progress reviews are unsatisfactory. For 15 months prior to April 2011 no reviews were completed fully. Since then, some reviews have taken place but paperwork is not always complete. Some targets are too general and lack sufficient challenge. Learners' progress is inadequately recorded and Choices has insufficient evidence of learners' non-accredited progression. Choices recognises this and is taking steps to remedy it.
12. Learners have inadequate opportunities for assessment. They often generate good evidence in lessons, but are not assessed. Their catering skills have not been assessed since August 2010. The moderation of some assessments has taken too long. No assessments have taken place in citizenship since the course started in September 2010. In functional skills, learners' first mock tests were only taken in June 2011. Choices is introducing a more rapid programme of assessment to correct the situation.
13. Choices' provision meets learners' and employers' needs satisfactorily. Its learning programmes are appropriate for the three strands of foundation learning. Choices provides additional classes in art, and beneficial trips are organised to widen learners' experience and skills. For example, learners visit the library regularly to encourage their independent reading. Work placements are prestigious and well resourced, however only four learners currently have placements.
14. Choices has well-established links with Harrow College and more recent links with Middlesex University. It has strong and valued links with employers and communicates with them well. Learners contribute well to the development of provision through their elected internal advisory committees. They also participate well in various consultative forums run by Harrow Council.
15. Learners are given good support to enable them to achieve their learning goals. Pastoral support for learners is particularly strong. All Choices' staff are very committed to supporting learners. Learners hold staff in high regard, and all feel well supported. Staff provide beneficial advocacy for learners, help with family and domestic life, good guidance on independent living and on personal



relationships. They give helpful advice and referrals on the benefits to which learners and their carers are entitled. They work very effectively with outside and specialist agencies to provide additional support where necessary. Two external counsellors attend the centre to offer helpful additional support. A job coach gives learners good, structured support in placements and employment.

## Leadership and management

## Grade 4

16. During 2010, three managers, including the chief executive, left the organisation in circumstances which were difficult for Choices. Following their departure, key paper and electronic records could not be located, including systems for providing management information and data. Since then the acting chief executive and her staff have been particularly effective in building a culture at Choices which is open, inclusive and consultative. Staff have a clear commitment to meeting learners' needs, and value the opportunities they now have to make decisions and use their initiative to develop and support learners. Managers have been successful in maintaining and building on existing partnerships and are making good use of these links to rebuild Choices' management information systems. However, these systems and procedures are currently incomplete and managers are unable to use data on learners' progress or outcomes to monitor or plan the provision. Managers have not re-established processes to ensure that key aspects of the provision, such as individual learning plans and progress reviews, take place. Choices has too few qualified assessors.
17. Choices' trustees have provided inadequate scrutiny or challenge for managers. Minutes of meetings make insufficient reference to topics such as the quality of provision, outcomes for learners, self-assessment, or equality and diversity. Although the acting chief executive now provides more detailed reports to the board than it received hitherto, these reports still provide insufficient information on all aspects of provision. The board has not monitored Choices' response to recommendations made by Harrow Adult Safeguarding Team. Trustees have not provided sufficient guidance to the acting chief executive or identified where she might need additional support in order to rebuild provision.
18. Choices has a clear commitment to safeguarding learners. Its policy gives helpful guidance on safeguarding vulnerable adults. It carries out appropriate checks to help ensure that staff and volunteers are all suitable to work with vulnerable adults. Choices' safeguarding officer is suitably trained and experienced and has provided training for almost all staff. Learners understand how to report concerns and are not afraid to do so. Choices has suitable procedures for recording and following up concerns and takes appropriate action in response. However, it has not yet implemented Harrow Adult Safeguarding Team's recommendation to ensure that each learner has an individual care or support plan.
19. Choices has good links with local and community groups and makes effective use of these to promote provision and participation. Its student population reflects the population it serves. Its premises are accessible and secure.

Learners are given suitable training in equality and diversity. They treat one another with respect, have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity and have learned to celebrate different cultures and traditions well. Managers and staff take learners' complaints seriously, and where necessary they take action to tackle any inappropriate behaviour. They are inclusive and involve learners well in activities such as producing promotional material for the centre or participating in local and community events. However, staff would benefit from additional training to update their knowledge.

20. Choices has an active student council that makes good suggestions for the development of provision. Most recently, it has prepared a list of trips and visits for Choices' summer programme. Choices has improved its liaison with parents and carers to keep them well informed about learners' programmes and the additional support available to them. Parents and carers now feel more welcome at Choices than before and able to contribute. Managers and staff are responsive to parents', carers' and learners' suggestions for improvement.
21. A draft of Choices' most recent self-assessment report was provided for inspectors during the inspection. Its preparation involved staff satisfactorily in discussion about the quality of provision. Choices' lesson observation process is thorough and helpful in identifying action for improvement for tutors, but observations are insufficiently frequent, and actions are not followed up promptly. However, self-assessment is not part of a quality-assurance and improvement programme that analyses and uses data on participation or outcomes for learners, or includes processes to monitor the impact of activities. Managers do not evaluate the extent to which processes are implemented effectively, or assess sufficiently the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Although the draft self-assessment report correctly identifies some strengths and weaknesses, other strengths are over estimated and not sufficiently supported by evidence.

## Information about the inspection

22. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's acting chief executive, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
23. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**Choices 4 All**  
**Learning types: 14 – 16:** Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b>			
Full-time learners			
Part-time learners	33	17	16
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	4		
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	4		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3		
How well do learners progress?	4		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3		
How safe do learners feel?	3		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>			
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	4		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2		
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>4</b>		
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	4		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	4		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	4		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	4		

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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