

London Borough of Greenwich Adult and Community Learning Service

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Adult and community learning

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

The London Borough of Greenwich Adult and Community Learning Service is located in the council's Directorate of Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills. The provision is managed by a head of service with two lifelong learning officers. The service contracts with five local providers for the delivery of all its provision, by far the largest of which is Greenwich Community College (GCC). In 2009/10, there were 5,234 enrolments and 3,657 learners on informal learning courses and 245 learners on Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities programmes.

Greenwich has a population of 226,100. The borough has a rich mix of ethnicity and culture; more than 100 different languages are spoken in the borough, and about one third of residents are of minority ethnic heritage. The proportion of unemployed people in the borough is higher than the London average.

The previous inspection in May 2009 judged overall effectiveness of the service to be satisfactory, as were achievements and standards, the quality of provision, leadership and management, the capacity to improve and equality of opportunity. One subject area, preparation for life and work, was graded and was judged to be satisfactory.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit, which included the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made since the previous inspection in developing quality improvement procedures and the self-assessment process?	Reasonable progress
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Self-assessment was judged to be satisfactory at the previous inspection and the development of a satisfactory quality insurance framework was noted. The service has made satisfactory further improvements in this area. The annual self-assessment report is now in a format that encourages more objective and specific reporting, rather than general summaries of performance. The post-inspection self-assessment focused appropriately on inspection recommendations. The service now monitors the quality improvement plan and self-assessment report well. The overall quality improvement plan is well supported by detailed subject area plans.

The service continues with its regular quality monitoring meetings with subcontractors which allow for good in-year review and discussions on improvements. It continues to use surveys of learners' views extensively and

changes in the focus of the questions provide better information. The number of respondents to questionnaires is high from the main subcontractor, but low from other partners. Senior council managers and elected councillors have offered the contract for subcontracted provision for tender with the aim of improving quality and value for money further. However, this process has led to uncertainty among staff and learners which has had a minor negative impact on the implementation of planned changes.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving learners' outcomes since the previous inspection?

Significant progress

The proportion of learners who complete their courses successfully has improved since the previous inspection. In 2008/09, 80% of learners completed successfully, rising to 86% in 2009/10. Achievement for accredited courses is very high. Although it is too early to judge final success rates for 2010/11, this trend of improvement is being maintained for learners' retention rates which have increased from 89% in 2009/10 to 93% in June 2011 for programmes delivered by GCC.

Learners are very enthusiastic about the support they receive from their tutors and the skills they develop. They enjoy their time in learning sessions and give very positive feedback. Many learners develop good personal skills and improve their self-confidence. They extend their job prospects by gaining employability skills. For example, learners at the Greenwich Park Centre have opened a shop where they sell their own art work, thus gaining valuable experience of selling, pricing and other commercial skills. The proportion of learners who progress to further courses is high for some courses. However, managers do not use information on these progression rates sufficiently to indicate performance across the service.

Quality of provision

How much progress has the service made since the previous inspection in improving the development of learners' language skills?

Reasonable progress

The previous inspection reported that the service paid insufficient attention to the development of language skills in practical, and literacy and numeracy classes. The service now has a strong focus on developing language and literacy skills among learners. The service's Skills for Life policy is a comprehensive document that provides valuable help to tutors on how to ensure that learners understand written material more easily. Staff training has taken place in twilight hours to develop the skills of tutors in using language, and managers plan to disseminate this training to more staff. Some learning materials are available on the service's virtual learning environment (VLE), although currently the service is not developing the VLE due to

difficulties with an external information technology contractor. When learners are identified as having literacy or language needs, they may be referred to other courses or organisations for further support. Currently, no resources are in place within the service to provide additional learning support for learners with literacy or language needs.

Leadership and management

What progress has the service made in taking action to improve the assessment of learning and attainment in lesson observations? Significant progress

The previous inspection highlighted an insufficient focus on learning and attainment in lesson observations and evidence of over-generous grading of lessons. Immediately after the inspection, managers made appropriate minor changes in the focus of the observations, and launched a fuller review of the assessment of learning and attainment, led by GCC. The resulting major changes were particularly well thought through and implemented and have had a significant impact on improving the evaluation of learning by tutors. The revised approach is very comprehensively laid out in policies and procedures that focus on developing teachers' skills and expertise. Graded observations help with quality monitoring and an appropriate proportion of observations are ungraded. These latter observations are less pressurised for staff and staff receive more informal feedback which aids their personal development. Staff training on how to improve learning has been extensive and effective. The grading of observations of learning sessions is now more rigorous. The service is evaluating the full impact of the changes and already has plans to increase the emphasis on learners' attainment.

What progress has been made since the previous inspection in enhancing the use of data for quality improvement? Reasonable progress

The use of data for quality improvement purposes was judged to be insufficient at the previous inspection. Since then, management information data such as learners' retention and achievement rates are more readily available online for use by course organisers and tutors, coupled with effective staff training on the appropriate use of data. Managers draw on information from a useful suite of reports to review overall performance, both for regular quality monitoring activities and at the end of the course. The service is extending the type of data used for quality improvement purposes gradually, and procedures are more rigorous. For instance, the service has improved recording of the outcomes from individual learning plans. Managers have improved their use of data in the more extensive self-assessment process and this informs more detailed and focused improvement planning. Targets for performance are now more clearly laid out, although the service makes limited use of appropriate national averages as part of the target-setting process. The participation by different

groups of learners is routinely reviewed, but this is not coupled with regular evaluation of the success or retention rates for groups.

What progress has been made in ensuring that robust safeguarding procedures are in place?

Reasonable progress

The previous inspection reported that arrangements for safeguarding learners were well defined and adequately promoted with regard to GCC staff, but that the implementation of appropriate safeguarding arrangements with smaller subcontractors was slow. Safeguarding procedures are now widely promoted to all staff and learning providers. They form part of the GCC's service-level agreement with all subcontractors. Safeguarding is a standard feature of the regular monitoring meetings between service staff and all subcontractors. All relevant staff have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check which is renewed every three years. The service maintains a comprehensive single record of these checks and also records relevant training for safeguarding. A risk assessment is carried out for all new staff and volunteers before they are allowed to start work. Well-developed plans are in place for all staff to undertake online training on safeguarding from September 2011.

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