

DISC

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 51535

Name of lead inspector: June Cramman HMI

Last day of inspection: 7 October 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Developing Initiatives for Support in the Community Limited (DISC) is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Its head office is in Spennymoor with most of its training provision taking place at its new office in Newton Aycliffe. Many previously remote projects have been brought into this new office since the previous inspection. DISC is a specialist agency and works with disadvantaged individuals and groups, particularly foundation learners. Government-funded training accounts for around 1% of DISC's current activities. Other activities include support for the homeless and supported living, alcohol and drugs misuse services and community support services. In the previous inspection DISC had a number of employability programmes that were in scope for inspection. However, these have been phased out.
2. Overall management of DISC is by a chief executive who is accountable to the chair of trustees. Day-to-day management is provided by three executive directors and five operations directors, each responsible for a service delivery unit based on five themes. One of these is support for vulnerable children, young people and families and this unit is responsible for foundation programmes. Foundation learning is led by a manager who is supported by three tutors.
3. Most learners are from Newton Aycliffe and the Durham/Darlington areas. Around 25% of all learners have disabilities and 1% are from minority ethnic communities, approximately half of all learners are women. Unemployment in Durham is comparable with the national situation at 5.1%. The proportion of the population that has no qualifications is 14.4%, and 64.8% is educated to level 2 or above.
4. DISC has a contract with the Young People's Learning Agency to provide work-based learning for foundation learners.

Type of provision	No of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Foundation Learning	87

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 3
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	Grade
Preparation for life and work	3

Overall effectiveness

- Learners gain good confidence and social skills as well as effective workplace skills. The proportion of learners who progress to employment, education or further training has improved steadily in the last three years and is now satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, although learners enjoy a few good interactive sessions. Learners' progress reviews are insufficiently challenging. DISC's management arrangements for meeting employers' and learners' needs are satisfactory with staff tailoring the programme to meet individual needs appropriately. Partnerships are satisfactory and give a good range of extra support services to learners. However, partnerships with schools and wider employers are less well developed. Care, guidance and support are good with DISC using internal and external support agencies well to supplement learner experiences. The foundation team works effectively together and its members are respected by their employers and partners. DISC's overall strategic direction is effective. Data are not always reliable or analysed sufficiently. This often results in weak target setting, especially on foundation programmes.

Main findings

- Attainment of personal and social development goals for learners is good. Progression to work or further training has improved over the past three years and is now satisfactory. Learners' achievement of qualifications is steadily improving from a very low base.

- Most work placements provide appropriate opportunities for learners to develop their employability skills. Learners develop satisfactory skills in customer service and practical skills like shelf-stacking or operating the tills. However, DISC is not working effectively enough with partners or employers to develop wider work placement opportunities.
- Learners feel very safe and have a good awareness of health and safety. Online safety awareness is promoted very effectively and given a high priority because of the vulnerability of the learners at DISC.
- Learners' awareness of their own health and well-being and their contribution to the community are satisfactory. The curriculum promotes healthy eating, sexual health and the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse effectively. Learners make a satisfactory contribution to the community through group involvement in community projects as well as individual volunteering.
- Teaching and learning are effective and functional skills are skilfully integrated into the curriculum. Tutors use a good range of activities and learners generally enjoy the sessions. DISC promotes diversity particularly successfully. However, learners' progress reviews are not sufficiently informed by performance in all aspects of their programme. Data are not used effectively to set meaningful and challenging targets. A few staff are insufficiently trained in the range of functional skills.
- DISC's management arrangements for meeting the needs of the learners are satisfactory and staff tailor the programme to meet individual needs appropriately. Partnerships are satisfactory. Partners work productively with DISC to provide wider experiences and increased support. However, partners including employers and schools are not consulted sufficiently to develop progression routes.
- Support and care are good. Staff are very skilled and experienced in helping learners to share their concerns, establish trust and accept the help and support they need. Information, advice and guidance are carefully integrated into the programme to help learners make informed choices about future occupations.
- The company restructure and accompanying funding cuts have been managed effectively. Team work is good. Strategic planning is appropriate, with managers and the board leading the company successfully from financial instability to a more healthy position. However, DISC managers and trustees place too much reliance on overall corporate targets rather than setting and reviewing targets at the programme level.
- DISC gives a high priority to safeguarding arrangements. Learners feel very safe and appreciate the arrangements that ensure their welfare. They have confidence in the sensitivity of staff and know how to report concerns. Monitoring arrangements of individual cases are rigorous.
- The provider places a high priority on equality and diversity. Staff challenge learners' attitudes and behaviour particularly effectively and make good use of specialist project officers from other areas of the business to explore sensitive issues. However, staff do not analyse data routinely to identify underperformance. In addition, the composition of the board is dominated by White British men and is not representative of the learners in terms of gender, ethnicity or disability.

- The self-assessment process is inclusive of staff views and some learner feedback. However, a minority of judgements, including the judgement on progression rates and equality and diversity are based on inaccurate data and inspectors did not agree with all the grades. The quality improvement team focuses on individual performance and this has been successful in identifying issues associated with the review process, leading to DISC arranging a number of training and development sessions to improve reviews. The observation process is good and the revised process for internal verification is satisfactory.

What does DISC need to do to improve further?

- As a priority, implement systems to ensure that data are accurate and analysis of these data is detailed and used to inform target setting. Improve ongoing monitoring systems of data input so that managers have confidence in their reliability.
- Ensure that targets in learners' progress reviews are challenging and measurable so that learners' progress can be monitored frequently and effectively.
- Provide further training and support for teaching and learning staff, including specialist functional skills tutors, to enable them to better develop learners' skills in all aspects of the foundation programme.
- Develop more effective systems to capture the contribution of all partners, especially employers and schools. Use this feedback to help expand work placement opportunities, progression routes and to ensure better coherence in planning the provision for learners.
- Ensure senior managers and trustees communicate a clear direction, use data to analyse and evaluate existing performance and construct action plans with sufficiently challenging targets to improve outcomes for learners.
- Further improve arrangements for equality and diversity. Analyse key performance data to identify and act upon gaps in achievement. Work to ensure that the composition of the board better reflects both the work of DISC and the wider community it serves.
- Increase the rigour of self-assessment through: Continued improvements in the quality improvement processes and monitoring systems; the provision of accurate data that are used effectively and systematically at all levels to evaluate performance, including learner performance.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the approachable, friendly and supportive staff
- that without DISC, many would be in prison or other trouble
- being treated as an individual with respect, but also as part of a wider family
- the good fun and help
- learning a lot and gaining qualifications
- making new friends and socialising on the foundation programme.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more teachers or assistants
- less written work and functional skills and more practical work activities
- the number of quieter sessions.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

6. Staff have made an effective transition from previous programmes to the new foundation learning programme. They have maintained a steadily improving trend in progression rates to a current satisfactory rate. Since the last inspection, where too few learners gained accreditation, DISC has developed a range of certificated programmes, including functional skills that learners find very motivating. Learners gain good personal and workplace skills
7. Judgements in the self-assessment report, apart from those based on insufficiently robust data, such as outcomes and equality and diversity, are largely accurate. DISC use quality improvement plans arising from the self-assessment effectively. Staff are closely involved in the self-assessment process. Foundation staff have developed a good process for the observation of teaching and learning and the internal verification processes are now satisfactory.
8. Since the last inspection, while some improvements in corporate quality systems have been implemented and have been effective in leading overall direction and cross-business working, some issues remain. DISC uses data in the foundation programme to plan and develop provision. However, the data used are insufficiently accurate to enable managers to set specific performance targets for foundation staff over and above corporate targets.
9. Leaders and managers have skilfully managed a significant re-organisation and funding reduction and they enjoy the support of staff. Despite this funding reduction, DISC has maintained the provision for foundation learners as well as developing more internal support services for them. Staff are motivated and enthusiastic. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Value for money is satisfactory.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

10. Progression to work or further training has improved over the past three years and is now satisfactory. DISC introduced functional skills in the last year and learners are now achieving accreditation in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Learners' achievement is satisfactory.
11. Learners' attainment of personal and social development goals is good. They become more self-confident and self-aware. Learners enjoy learning and most make satisfactory progress given their low levels of prior attainment. However, targets in learning plans are insufficiently specific or measurable to drive progress at a faster rate.
12. Most work placements provide appropriate opportunities for learners to develop their employability skills, with the majority of learners attending one or more

work placements. Learners become more confident and develop customer service skills as well as a range of practical skills, such as operating a till. DISC, however, does not work sufficiently with partners and employers to develop a wider range of work placement opportunities.

13. Learners feel very safe and use safe working practices. Learners have a good knowledge of online safety awareness. This is particularly important given their vulnerability. A range of external speakers help learners to identify potential hazards and become more safety aware, for example, in relation to the dangers of fire and weapon crime.
14. DISC promotes health and well-being satisfactorily. Programmes promote healthy eating, sexual health and the dangers of drugs and alcohol misuse effectively. Chlamydia screening is offered and taken up by many learners and all learners are now able to talk about sexual health in a safe environment. DISC's smoking cessation programmes, however, have had limited success.
15. Learners make a satisfactory contribution to the community. They are involved in a number of community-based projects, including work with homeless young people and older residents in a care home. Three service users are volunteering after completing their work placements.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

16. Teaching and learning are effective and staff take care to integrate functional skills into the curriculum. DISC promotes diversity very successfully. Training rooms are satisfactory. Tutors use a good range of activities to stimulate learners. Learners enjoy the sessions and are generally responsive to the activities. Tutors use appropriate assessment methods. Initial assessment is effective and used well to inform individual learning plans. Learners' progress reviews do not adequately bring together all the information about how well learners are doing. Targets are not sufficiently challenging or broken down into manageable actions to make them more motivating to the learner. Staff are insufficiently trained in functional skills.
17. The curriculum meets the needs of learners adequately and is sufficiently flexible to meet learners' preferences. All learners complete the same core units but find individual challenge through the range of activities they choose. The vocational units and work placements meet learners' interests, with sufficient choice in different vocational areas for those who are undecided about their career. DISC encourages learners to make suggestions regarding their programme: However, current methods to obtain and use this feedback are not fully effective. The provider does not consult partners and employers sufficiently, especially in helping to develop wider progression routes for learners.
18. DISC has satisfactory links with the local community. Partners give good extra support and development opportunities to learners. They take part in challenging and engaging activities with existing partners, such as the local fire service, that widen their experience and offer other qualifications such as first

aid. DISC works productively with its internal partners including those who support young mums, help with independent living and guide learners who have been involved with weapons and crime. Internal partners contribute to the curriculum, providing extra sessions as well as wider support for learners with complex needs. However, DISC's range of partnerships is limited, particularly for vocational experience and it has not developed sufficient partnerships with schools to widen progression routes into the programme.

19. Support and guidance are good. Staff assess learners' individual support needs thoroughly and offer personalised support that is very effective in removing barriers to learning. Staff are very skilled in helping learners to share their concerns, establish trust and accept the help and support they need. Learners who need individual teaching or extra support attend sessions on non-teaching days. Information, advice and guidance are skilfully integrated into the programme. Vocational choice and knowledge are part of learners' core vocational units. All learners take part in a session designed to help them make choices about future occupations.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

20. DISC has gone through a period of major funding changes and restructure of staffing. Managers have led this change effectively. Teamwork is good. Strategic planning is appropriate, with managers and the board successfully leading the company from financial insecurity to a position of stability. Staff have a satisfactory understanding of how their own targets contribute to the provider's aims. Managers routinely analyse and discuss key performance indicators at monthly meetings and the quality department monitors individual performance. However, DISC places too much reliance on overall corporate targets rather than tailoring targets to present a specific challenge to foundation staff.
21. The board of trustees gives sound strategic and effective financial guidance to DISC. While the board's skills are fully representative of the provision, its composition is insufficiently representative of the learners in gender, ethnic mix and disability. Although the board satisfactorily monitors performance across the company, the progress of foundation learners is not always sufficiently monitored.
22. DISC gives a high priority to safeguarding arrangements. A working group leads developments very successfully. Learners feel very safe and appreciate the arrangements that ensure their welfare. They have confidence in the sensitivity of staff and know how to report concerns. Risk assessments are thorough. DISC liaises closely with appropriate agencies and internal partners to ensure they strongly support learners' health and well-being. All staff have completed appropriate training in safeguarding with a number completing higher level and specialised training. The provider handles complex cases and any issues that arise sensitively and very effectively. Arrangements to monitor cases and actions taken are rigorous.

23. Equality and diversity in DISC are highly prioritised, with a group of diversity champions leading developments. The company has a rigorous monitoring system for complaints. Staff challenge learners' attitudes and behaviour effectively and make good use of specialist project officers from other areas of the business to explore sensitive issues. The company has an innovative and effective project, the 'Reverse mentoring project' where managers act as mentees, to staff or learners. This is very effective at breaking down barriers and perceptions on both sides. Policies and procedures are satisfactory.
24. Staff have used their knowledge of their learners effectively to identify and support the increasing number of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on programme. Close working with the specialist DISC learning difficulties and disabilities team ensures that this vulnerable group maintain their performance. However, staff do not use data routinely to evaluate performance and identify areas where improvements are needed.
25. DISC has a useful learner focus group that has had some impact, particularly in developing retail and ICT programmes. However, processes to collect information from partners and employers are insufficiently developed.
26. The self-assessment process is inclusive of staff views and some learner feedback although some judgements are based on inaccurate data. Inspectors did not agree with all the grades. However, the quality team monitors individual performance and has been successful in identifying, for example, issues with the review process. The observation of teaching and learning process is good and the revised arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory.
27. Value for money is satisfactory. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Financial management is effective. The foundation programme has not been recruiting the numbers of learners it promised in its contract with the funding body and has had its contract reduced slightly.

Information about the inspection

28. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of DISC's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
29. 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, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from across the programme in the subject area DISC offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Developing Initiatives for Support in the Community Limited

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 using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	87	87
Part-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	3 3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<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>	3	
Quality of provision	3	
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
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	
Leadership and management	3	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
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?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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