New Directions – The Learning and Employment Service for Reading

Community Learning and Skills – Local Authority

Inspection dates	8–11 December 2015
Overall effectiveness	**Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers ensure that the adult learning programmes meet the needs of learners and their communities well, particularly for the majority of learners, who come from the most deprived areas of Reading.
- Almost all learners complete their courses and achieve their learning aims or qualifications on the good range of work-related courses, community learning and employability programmes.
- Learners grow in confidence and make good progress during their programmes, often returning to achieve higher levels of English and mathematics, and increasing numbers achieve GCSEs at grade A* to C.

- Learners develop good inter-personal and work-related skills, which they use effectively when volunteering in work placements, with their families and in their daily lives.
- Tutors facilitate good learning, especially when they use familiar topics to make learning highly relevant and meaningful, and use tasks that motivate and encourage all learners to participate.
- Initial information, advice and guidance are good and support workers and volunteers provide effective support to those with learning needs and/or disabilities.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Tutors do not routinely remind learners how to stay safe online and protect themselves and others from risks such as grooming and radicalisation.

- In a few cases, managers have been slow in taking effective action to address staff underperformance.

Full report

Information about the provider

■ New Directions – The Learning and Employment Service for Reading (ND) is part of the Reading Borough Council's Environment and Neighbourhood Services directorate. ND and its partners provide a range of information, advice and guidance and accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities in a variety of locations across Reading. The range of adult learning programmes offered is designed to raise skills and to enrich the lives of adults, their families and their communities.

■ Reading is a culturally diverse borough with around 47% of children from non-British backgrounds. Over 150 languages are spoken. Over a quarter of children and young people in Reading live in areas in the top 20% of deprived areas in England. Unemployment in the borough is 5.1% compared to the national average of 5.7%.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

■ Update the Information Technology (IT) strategy and policies to help ensure that all learners understand how to keep themselves safe online, and that tutors use IT more effectively and reinforce its appropriate use during lessons.

■ Ensure that managers take prompt action to address underperformance in key areas including:
   – communication between learning support workers and tutors
   – the structuring of the employability programmes to better meet individual needs.

■ Tutors should plan lessons more effectively to ensure that:
   – appropriate high-quality resources are available
   – they take into consideration individuals' learning goals as well as the aims of the qualifications
   – they are aware of the strategies to use with learners who may need additional support to overcome barriers such as dyslexia or lack of confidence.

■ Analyse and use data more effectively to ensure that the self-assessment report is more evaluative and less descriptive.

■ Increase the diversity of people on the advisory board to ensure that learners' and community views are fully represented.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management   is good

- Leaders and managers have developed a good range of adult learning programmes that aligns closely with the council's strategic aims of 'narrowing the gap' and matches local priorities and community needs well. ND offers courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), mathematics and English from entry level to GCSE. This allows learners to progress to higher levels as they develop their skills. ND offers a good range of vocational work-related courses and employability programmes, along with relevant community and family learning programmes.
- Learning centres are carefully located in the most deprived areas of Reading to ensure that courses are accessible. Over half of learners come from these neighbourhoods. Courses are offered at varied locations, times and days to ensure that learners are able to attend. The centres provide welcoming, safe environments where very diverse groups of learners can study and succeed.
- Very good use is made of partners and sub-contractors to provide courses in suitable locations, including 31 children's centres and other community venues. Managers work closely with 39 community stakeholder organisations as part of Reading Community Learning Network to help avoid duplication in provision.
- Leaders and managers have a particularly clear focus on supporting individuals to achieve their aspirations and in doing so help learners to improve their own lives and the lives of those in their local communities.
- Managers carefully review the performance of each course to bring about improvements. Mathematics functional skills at level 2 has been replaced by a GCSE. Courses with historically low achievement rates, such as hairdressing and the award in business administration are no longer offered. The employability programme changed to a more suitable qualification in 2014/15 and further improvements are planned to address the changing profile of learners.
- Leaders and managers promote a culture of continuous improvement. Managers use observations effectively alongside good staff development activities to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and agree actions to improve provision. However, managers do not always gather sufficient information about subcontractors' own observations of teaching, learning and assessment to aid improvements.
- Managers were too slow in taking effective action to address underperformance by a few staff. Changes in staffing have also resulted in insufficient improvement in key areas such as support for learners and the policies and procedures related to the use of information technology.
- The self-assessment report, although accurate in identifying many areas for improvement, is not sufficiently evaluative. Insufficient use is made of data to support the judgements relating to outcomes, and the tracking of learners' destinations does not yet provide robust evidence of progression.
- Record keeping is not always sufficiently robust, hindering effective communication and assessment of learners' progress. Managers do not always note the date actions are completed or record the outcomes achieved.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - Governance is strongly linked to Reading Borough Council's strategic priorities, and the advisory board members effectively challenge managers regarding the curriculum, its quality and financial viability.
  - Governance is not sufficiently broad in terms of representation, as learner and community representatives do not routinely attend board meetings.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective:
  - Appropriate policies are in place and managers adhere to safer recruitment practices.
  - Annual training is provided to staff, volunteers and sub-contractors on safeguarding and more recently on the 'Prevent' duty.
  - Safeguarding officers work closely with relevant agencies to address all safeguarding concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment   is good

- Tutors have high expectations for learners to improve their skills and knowledge, to develop their personal skills and to support community activities. In the best lessons, highly skilled tutors use relevant and familiar topics to make lessons pertinent and enjoyable. In lessons on child development, learners develop knowledge and skills they can use with their own children, or in placements to support the children they care for.
- Tutors use their knowledge of learners' starting points well to plan lessons. In classes for learners for whom English is their second language, individual needs, such as speaking accurately, are reinforced well.

For entry-level learners, listening skills are developed effectively through discussions around the work of different charities.

- Tutors are appropriately qualified and work well with learners, using a good range of activities and techniques to ensure that all participate and make good progress. Skilful questioning by tutors helps learners work out correct answers to problems for themselves. This helps build their confidence and encourages them to try different methods for calculating answers. Homework activities are a regular feature of many lessons and learners find the marking and feedback useful in helping them improve.

- Tutors develop and enhance learners' confidence, encouraging them to use their mathematical skills outside the classroom. For example, a learner used her newly acquired mathematical skills to accurately measure and mix food and medicines for her sick child. Another learner confidently calculated percentage reductions when asked by customers in the shop she manages.

- Highly effective support from personal health support workers, volunteers, learning support assistants and peers enables learners to make good progress and gain confidence. Learners have a good understanding of why the development of good English and mathematical skills are important for their career and employment aspirations.

- In a minority of sessions, tutors fail to plan sufficiently well. In a few courses, such as the award in employability, plans focus on the delivery of the qualification aims rather than linking the topics to the development of learners' personal and employability skills. In a lesson for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, the generic targets did not ensure that learners with complex needs made sufficient progress in developing their life skills.

- In English and employability sessions, tutors do not systematically encourage learners to identify their own specific targets and areas for development, such as lists of spellings which they need to know and practise. Photocopies of learning materials are occasionally of poor quality.

- Tutors do not always use information communications technologies sufficiently well to develop learners' skills. For example, in an English class learners were required to practise writing emails on paper. In another lesson, materials presented on the interactive display were too small to read and the vocabulary used was too complex for many learners.

- Learners' work occasionally reflects their chaotic lives. A small proportion of learner files are poorly organised and work is not dated or in chronological order, making it difficult to understand how well a learner is progressing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

- Learners take great pride in their work, developing self-esteem and improving confidence as they acquire new skills or learn subject-specific knowledge. Most learners recognise how their training improves their own, and their families', lives by, for example, giving them skills to help with a child's homework, pass a driving test or gain employment.

- Learners receive very good, high-quality, impartial advice and guidance prior to, and during, enrolment. This ensures that they choose the most appropriate course for their needs, and are aware of how to access higher-level programmes. One learner who started doing functional skills mathematics is now working towards a GCSE in mathematics with a view to starting an Open University diploma next year.

- Across the provision, learners gain useful employment related skills. This helps prepare them well for volunteering and placement activities. ND staff organise and manage high-quality work-experience opportunities where learners are able to relate their theoretical knowledge to practical activities.

- Learners demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning and appreciate the support they receive. Learners are proud of their achievements, recognising how their achievements contribute to the class and help the local community. For example, in ESOL sessions learning focuses on improving language to allow individuals to be independent when attending meetings with health professionals or be confident in a range of social situations.

- Support for learners with high needs is effective, with good use made of specialists such as signers for learners with a hearing impairment. Learners on supported learning programmes develop independent living skills such as cooking and understanding nutrition in order to follow a healthy diet.

- Learners' attendance is good and has been good over time. Tutors follow up non-attendance effectively and most learners remain in training and make good progress. Punctuality is good and a majority of learners are so keen to start sessions that they arrive early.

- Work to identify and support learners with dyslexia is good. However, support staff do not systematically inform tutors of learners' support needs or devise strategies to ensure that the correct resources are available in classrooms.

- Learners feel safe and understand the arrangements to protect them or make complaints. Staff and learners create an environment of strong mutual respect and learners from different communities and

cultures support each other well. However, in locations where learners access the internet there are no reminders about internet safety and staying safe online. Learners have insufficient awareness and understanding of how to use social media safely or how to protect themselves and others from risks associated with grooming or radicalisation.

Outcomes for learners   are good

- The vast majority of learners successfully complete their courses and achieve their learning aims and personal goals. Those working toward qualifications make good progress and ND's own data show increasing numbers achieving qualifications in 2014/15.
- Learners who speak English as a second language develop good English language skills and a very high proportion gain qualifications. The majority progress onto higher-level qualifications in English or work-related subjects.
- Achievement of qualifications in English and mathematics was above the average for similar providers in 2014/15. The pass rates for GCSE mathematics are very high and the majority achieve an A* to C grade. Achievement of English functional skills qualifications at level 1 and below are much improved, although results at level 2 and GCSE remain static.
- A significant minority of learners progress from entry-level qualifications to higher levels and often become volunteers in the training centres and other community venues. Several children's centre staff started as learners with ND, progressed to a volunteering role, gained additional qualifications and became employed.
- An increasing proportion of learners on employability programmes complete a level 1 award and feel more confident in applying for jobs. Accurate data are not yet available on the proportion that progress into employment, volunteering or further learning, although case studies demonstrate good progression by many individuals.
- Previous differences in the achievement for male and female learners have been addressed. Both performed equally well in 2014/15. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do as well as those with no additional learning needs. However, differences in the achievement for a small number of learners from minority ethnic groups, who perform less well than their peers, are evident and managers are conducting further analysis to explore the reasons for this.
- The service is aware of the few courses where achievements are low and actions are in place to make improvements.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	4,203
Service Manager	Mr Barry Wren
Website address	www.newdirectionsreading.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
		1,107		81		4		

Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+

Number of traineeships	16–19	19+	Total
		2	

Number of learners aged 14–16	

Funding received from

At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:

Skills Funding Agency (SFA)

- Workers Education Association
- Berkshire Autistic Society
- Readipop
- Reading Community Learning Centre
- Graft Thames Valley
- Reading Your Way
- MAPIS
- Pearl Education Foundation

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Joy Montgomery, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Hughes	Her Majesty's Inspector
Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Clary	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the curriculum and quality coordinator, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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