

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Exchange Group - Putney Library
learndirect centre
Date of visit: 2 April 2008

Context

The learndirect centre in Putney Library is one of a network of 28 learndirect centres throughout the United Kingdom operated by Exchange Group. This monitoring visit follows the inspection of January 2007 at which the learndirect centre was awarded satisfactory grades for overall effectiveness, quality improvement and preparation for life and work. Leadership and management were good, as was the organisation's approach to equality of opportunity. Between August 2007 and January 2008, 154 learners enrolled at the Putney Library learndirect centre on skills for life courses and 54 on information and communications technology (ICT) courses. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 21 skills for life and 8 ICT learners, which is similar to the number of learners at the time of the previous inspection. Since the inspection, the staff at the Putney Library learndirect centre, including the centre manager, have all changed.

Achievement and standards

How effective have the actions been to improve overall success rates in ICT?	Reasonable progress
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The success rate for learners on ICT courses was low at the previous inspection, at 40%. Since then, the Exchange Group has made reasonable progress in improving the overall success rates in ICT. By the end of 2006/07, the success rate had increased slightly to 48.2%, which was just below the rates for the region and England. The centre has a target to increase success rates in ICT to 75%, which was exceeded in the first quarter of the current year. Although the rate has dipped slightly in the third quarter to 71.8%, this is a significant improvement on the previous year and well above the rate for the region. Withdrawal rates are higher than last year, and are currently 12.7%. This has decreased over the last few months. The operations manager and centre manager have a good awareness of the reasons behind the increase in withdrawal rates and this is recognised as an area for improvement in leadership and management. Tutors now take a more stringent approach to enrolment, ensuring learners have a more appropriate learning

outcome. The induction programme has been improved to increase learners' awareness of what is involved in the ICT course.

Have the good skills for life success rates been maintained?	Insufficient progress
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Success rates for skills for life learners were good at the previous inspection, at 73%. The Exchange Group has made insufficient progress in maintaining the good skills for life success rates. These rates fell slightly to 71.5% by the end of 2006/07, which was just below the rates for the region and England. In the current contract year, success rates for skills for life learners have declined to 61.8%, but have shown some improvement between the second and third quarter of the year. Skills for life success rates this year are much lower than the centre's target and the rate for the region. Since the appointment of the new centre manager, withdrawal rates, which had increased slightly this year, and achievement of national tests by learners are both improving. Learners' feedback has been sought and used well to identify what motivates them to achieve. The Exchange Group has introduced a range of incentives, which have had some success, and resources at the centre have been improved. Tutors have worked hard to re-engage learners who were making slow progress into a more structured and regular learning routine. It is too soon for these initiatives to demonstrate a sustained improvement on success rates.

Quality of provision

Have the actions taken improved the recording of target-setting and progress reviews?	Reasonable progress
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The recording and setting of targets for learners has improved since the previous inspection and reasonable progress has been made. Tutors have received some effective training in establishing and setting goals with learners. Tutors make use of clearly written guidance that contains effective descriptions on how to set appropriate and realistic targets. The quarterly managers' meetings are used effectively to share and cascade information to the centre manager and tutors. Tutors have improved the recording and use of target-setting and progress reviews. Learners now complete an appropriate and straightforward progress reporting sheet at the end of each session. Tutors and learners use this effectively to promote learning during the next session. Learners now have clear learning and personal goals and targets, which are appropriately discussed and recorded. The Exchange Group's quality team regularly checks and reviews learning goals to ensure that they are appropriate and accurate.

Leadership and management

How effective have the actions been to reinforce learners' understanding of equality of opportunity?	Insufficient progress
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Progress to improve learners' understanding of equality of opportunity has been insufficient. The reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality and diversity remains insufficient at induction and during their programme. During induction, learners receive copies of equality and diversity and health and safety policies, but do not have time to read and understand the policies. Learners complete a relatively straightforward, recently revised questionnaire, which tests their general understanding of some elements covered in the induction. The questionnaire is an improvement on previous questionnaires but is too complex for entry level learners. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is not sufficiently reinforced at progress reviews both during and at the end of their course.

What improvements have been made to the arrangements for observation of training and support and how the centre evaluates the overall quality of teaching and support?	Insufficient progress
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Despite improvements across the organisation, insufficient progress has been made at the Putney centre. The Exchange Group has strengthened the observation process across the organisation. Each tutor is now observed every three months, with unsatisfactory observations being repeated a month later. The grading process has been further extended to allow good and outstanding grades to be awarded. Although staff have been trained on the criteria for these grades, they do not have access to formal guidance to support grading. The quality and compliance manager effectively monitors the frequency and quality of observations, the resulting action plans and moderates the outcomes during quarterly quality inspection visits. Training needs identified through the observation process are now being collated centrally and used to inform national training initiatives.

During the change in the staff team, some of the Exchange Group's observation systems have not been fully effective at the Putney centre. The quality and compliance manager has accurately identified problems at the centre, and this is reflected in the latest self-assessment review. The new centre manager at Putney has been trained as an observer and has recently carried out observations. In the most recent observation, the same issues that were identified for a tutor in September by the previous centre manager still exist. The observations of tutors are not effectively planned, and have either gaps or too many in a short period of time. The grading system lacks consistency, with records showing strengths and areas for improvement that do not always reflect the grade. The centre is not yet in a position to evaluate the results of the observation of teaching and learning system and use this for quality improvement.

How effectively has the Exchange Group managed change at the Putney centre?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made on managing change at the Putney centre. The operations and quality and compliance managers were very swift in recognising a decline in the quality of the service at the Putney centre last year. Managers used data, learners' feedback and observations effectively to manage the previous tutors at the centre. Since the inspection, the team at Putney has changed and all the staff are new to the Putney centre. Change has been managed very well. Managers have set improvement goals for each tutor, which are monitored regularly. Following each new appointment, outcomes have improved. Managers have appropriately focused the improvement systems on those that impact significantly on learners as a high priority. The operations manager has given a good level of support to the new centre manager. Systems for withdrawing inactive learners are now much tighter. The self-assessment report recognised the need to have staff qualified in ICT. One of the new tutors has been trained, and has now qualified, in an appropriate ICT qualification to support learners. The Exchange Group has strengthened its systems, including the target management system, to provide earlier indicators of learning centres at risk.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How effective has the self-assessment and centre development plan been in improving the provision and have the judgements about the Putney learning centre improved in clarity?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in self-assessment and improvement planning. The current self-assessment report contains judgements that clearly relate to the Putney learning centre. Data has been used effectively to analyse trends and identify areas for improvement, for example, in the need to reduce the high timed out rate. The self-assessment report for 2006/07 fairly accurately reflected the provision at that time. The self-assessment process has been strengthened through the introduction of a quarterly self-assessment evaluation. This is very inclusive, particularly in how it involves learners. Appropriate strengths and areas for improvement are identified. This evaluation is very specific to the Putney centre and has resulted in improvement. The operations and centre manager routinely and closely monitor the development plan through monthly meetings.