

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: London Region Ufl
Date of visit: 27 June 2007

Context

London Ufl region has awarded contracts to 60 providers for delivery at 123 learning centres. The provider network includes private training providers, voluntary and community based organisations, further education colleges, local authority learning services, a prison and a faith organisation. Between August 2006 and April 2007, 66,842 learners had enrolled on learndirect courses through London Ufl region's learning centres. Approximately 50% of learners are from a black or minority ethnic background, 81% of learners are taking skills for life courses, 16% are taking ICT courses and the remaining learners are mainly on business and management courses. A very low proportion of learners have declared they have a disability. Most of London Ufl region's learners are within the 24 to 44 age range.

London Ufl region was established in August 2006 and has not previously been inspected.

Achievement and standards

How effective have the steps been that London Ufl region has taken to improve the overall success rates?	Reasonable progress
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London Ufl region has higher overall success rates than those for England and other Ufl region rates. Skills for life and business and management overall success rates are satisfactory or better. Overall success rates are low on ICT and other courses. Success rates for diverse groups are comparable, although slightly lower for black learners, learners with a disability and learners aged over 55. Overall success rates have declined slightly over the year, in line with the national trend and the increase in learner numbers.

The Ufl region recognises the low success rates, particularly in ICT. The region closely monitors overall success rates and the proportion of learners exceeding their planned end date or not regularly accessing their learning. Focus groups have been held with high performing learning centres to identify what they do well. The region

has held training sessions to improve the quality of information, advice and guidance. Some learning centres identified insufficient employer engagement to support learners through the ITQ (Information Technology National Vocational Qualification). The region is working with learning centres to share effective practice in supporting ITQ learners to complete and achieve. A training provider that has been successful in taking ITQ learners through to achievement has shared their initiatives with learning centres.

Quality of the provision

Is the quality management system, including the observation and review processes, improving the learners' experience?	Reasonable progress
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The region carries out comprehensive and objective quarterly reviews of each provider against the national quality framework. Senior and Regional Performance Managers (RPMs) include observations of learning and talk to learners during reviews to ensure the focus on the learners' experience. Data is used well to monitor learner satisfaction and performance. The region has developed the role of the performance manager well, being viewed as a critical friend, rather than an auditor. Following each review, providers have a precise action plan, which feeds into their self-assessment process. There is clear evidence of effective action to deal with poor performance.

The region has developed a suitable observation system. All UfI staff have received observation training, which they have recently cascaded to learning centre staff. An effective solution has been identified for learning centre staff who found it difficult to make critical judgements when observing colleagues. Learning centre staff observers are now encouraged by the RPMs to observe and give feedback to staff at a different learning centre. Where recurring issues are identified through observations, the region provides suitable training, for example in target-setting. The observation system is relatively new, so it is too early to demonstrate sustained improvement or analyse impact. The observation records vary in quality. Some identify clear strengths and weaknesses, coupled with time bound and measurable actions. Others are insufficiently evaluative and show aspects that are no more than normal practice to be strengths. Follow up actions are not always linked to identified weaknesses.

What is the impact of the external partnership work on the provision being offered?	Reasonable progress
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The region's two partnership managers link effectively with key stakeholders to influence regional strategies and raise awareness of learndirect. There has been good involvement in developing learndirect online accredited provision within custodial settings in London. Effective links have been developed with sector skills

councils. Learning centres have benefited from a joint marketing initiative and development of best practice models.

The region is successfully broadening the capacity of the learning centre network through offering additional alternative funding routes and initiatives. Learners have access to a much broader range of courses to suit their needs and individual circumstances. Providers are able to offer a more holistic learning programme, with increased progression routes. In areas where the region has identified a higher demand for courses than mainstream funding has allowed, for example in skills for life or ESOL courses, alternative funding has been successfully used to increase and enable participation. Appropriate feedback and support is given to help providers develop their capacity for delivering provision outside the mainstream learndirect funded courses. External funding and partners have been used well by the region to host a disability awareness workshop for their provider network.

Leadership and management

How effective is the quality of the support for the provider network?	Reasonable progress
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The region recognises in self-assessment that in 2005-06, before they were established, there had been insufficient staff development. Not all learning centres have the requisite tutors qualified at level 3 in numeracy or literacy to respond to the needs of the learners and fulfil their contractual obligation. The region is on track to meet their demanding target of 70% of tutors having a relevant level 3 qualification by the end of 2006-07.

The region has completed an audit of learning centre staff qualifications to identify the learning and development needs for the region. A regional development centre has been set up to provide appropriate training. External funding has been accessed to substantially subsidise courses for learning centre staff. The region has developed a programme of training, which is very flexible and wide ranging. RPMs are very responsive to the needs of the learning centre staff. A provider forum, which meets regularly and is hosted in turn by each training provider, was organised following feedback that providers had few opportunities to meet and share ideas. The region has recently initiated a process for learning centre staff to be more proactive in informing them of their training needs.

How effective is the performance management framework in improving the performance of providers?	Reasonable progress
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The performance management framework is being used effectively to improve the performance of providers. The region's monitoring records show that many providers have moved significantly up the performance scale. The number of providers in the

lowest performing category has halved to three, while the highest has increased from 10 to 23. The region has successfully improved both the number of learner complaints and time taken to deal with them.

Ufl's regular learner survey shows a good level of improvement in overall learner satisfaction since the start of the year. Learning centre staff are routinely informed about regional strengths and issues from the survey and inspections. Good practice is effectively shared by learning centres across the region, and is improving practice, for instance in more efficient use of tutor time and better record-keeping. Good initiatives used by some learning centres to improve completion rates for questionnaires have been effectively shared. The region has increased the number of learners responding to the questionnaire.