

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Ufi London Region

Date of visit: 16 April 2008

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in December 2007 at which Ufi London Region was graded as satisfactory for its overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, leadership and management and for its arrangements for equality of opportunity. It was judged satisfactory for achievement and standards, and quality of provision.

Currently, 63 providers are contracted to operate 122 learndirect centres and outreach locations, which is eight more providers and 10 more centres than at the previous inspection. Providers are managed by eight Ufi performance managers and two senior performance managers reporting to the regional performance director. A network development manager and management information co-ordinator support the region. Two regional partnership managers liaise with five local Learning and Skills Councils in London for planning and strategy.

Up to the end of the 2nd quarter (December 2007) there were just over 40,000 enrolments. By the monitoring visit the number of enrolments in the 3rd quarter had risen to 62,300. Most enrolments are on skills for life programmes.

Seven centres in the region were inspected before the previous inspection. One further centre has been inspected since, and judged inadequate overall.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made by Ufi London in implementing actions to improve achievement and standards in the region?	Reasonable progress
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Ufi London region has made reasonable progress in implementing actions to improve on the satisfactory levels of achievement and standards identified at the previous inspection. In the intervening period there has been a focus on improving the quality and consistency of providers' underpinning systems for supporting learners. It is too early to identify the impact of these actions. However, regional performance managers (RPMs) have worked very closely with providers to improve their systems for learner monitoring, the identification and improvement of under-performance, and strategies to support individual learners. There is evidence of some productive interventions by individual RPMs to improve success rates within their portfolio of providers, although the extent and rate of performance improvement is not consistent across of all RPM staff.

Success rates in the region for all course sectors are currently very slightly under the average rates for England, but not significantly so. For example, the England success rate for skills for life at the end of the 2nd quarter was 73.3%, compared with London's 71.9%. Skills for life remains by far the region's largest course provision at 82.5% of the total. The current success rate for skills for life within the 3rd quarter, is 74% for London and 75.3% for England, a very slight improvement in the differential.

Leadership and management

What further improvements have been made to the region's performance management system?	Reasonable progress
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The region has made reasonable progress in further improving its approach to, and the outcomes of, its performance management system. This framework was judged to be good at inspection although at the time a few of its elements, such as the frequency of visits to providers, were not fully established.

A key improvement is the developmental quality of regular visits between the RPMs and providers. These take place at least monthly. There has been a particularly strong focus on improving providers' conformance to the production of effective individual learning plans and tutors' notes. A key measure of improvement is the extent of the financial penalty imposed on non-conforming providers, and the total financial 'claw back' across the region. In October 2007, the total regional penalty was £400,000 but by April 2008 this had reduced to £31,000.

Arrangements for quality assurance and improvement of RPMs' work with providers have also developed. At least once a month, each RPM is now accompanied on a provider visit by one of two senior RPMs. The senior RPMs note individual or collective professional and network performance issues promptly and identify appropriate training or development needs. Seniors also now have their own portfolio of providers and centres to visit. An increase in the number of visits provides senior RPMs with a broader view of providers' performance in the region. Overall, four providers' contracts have been terminated since the previous inspection and additional providers appointed.

What steps are being taken to increase the number of trained literacy and numeracy tutors in centres and outreach locations?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in increasing the number and spread of trained literacy and numeracy tutors. Funding secured by Ufi is being used by providers to contribute towards tutor training to achieve level 3 and level 4 literacy and numeracy

qualifications. RPMs have worked hard to promote the benefits of training and have been careful to ensure that tutors are enrolled on appropriate courses in a timely fashion.

Since the previous inspection 76 tutors have enrolled on appropriate accredited courses. Now 85% of literacy tutors and 78% of numeracy tutors are either qualified or are working towards qualifications. Whereas 16% of centres had no literacy or numeracy tutors at all, this has now reduced to 9%. Most of these centres are waiting to enrol tutors on level 4 qualifications in July 2008. Tutors have been allowed time to complete the qualification in agreement with providers. Plans to assess the impact of this training in terms of learner experience, success rates and OTL grades have now been established.

How has the Ufi London Region observation scheme been improved?	Reasonable progress
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Ufi London region has made reasonable progress in improving the quality of the observations of teaching and learning. Progress to date has been timely and reviews of progress have been thorough.

A new comprehensive system for monitoring the quality of observations of teaching and learning is in place. Schedules and schemes for observations at all centres, and their effectiveness, are monitored closely at regional level. The number of centres with schedules deemed acceptable by RPMs has risen from 59% to 77%. As more providers are taken on, a new target of 85% has been set.

The quality of observations is improving with more judgemental feedback on monitoring forms, and a specific judgement regarding the adequacy of the lesson. Plans to grade observations on a 1 – 4 scale are in place and being introduced to meet the differing needs of centres. The regional quality manager collates the observations and these are reviewed and moderated by the national quality manager. Joint observations have taken place, which have also been moderated.

Observations are beginning to identify areas for improvement in the quality of teaching, such as poor target-setting. Consequently, a training package in target-setting is being rolled out to all centres.

What progress is being made in contributing to the wider London skills development strategy?	Reasonable progress
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Ufi is making reasonable progress in its contribution to the wider London skills development strategy. Existing training activity with larger employers has been further promoted and extended. New employers have been contacted and specific training packages developed. For example, Ufi is now working with a supplier whose clients have learning difficulties, with a view to providing skills for life training for

these clients. Transport for London, the London Underground and the Metropolitan police have been approached and plans developed to train staff.

Negotiations are taking place with the 2012 Olympics delivery authority to provide learning packages for volunteers' skills for life needs. Regional partnership managers are working closely with the London development agency and are continuing to establish good links with prisons, lone parent schemes, and employability training.

The region is working with the Home Office in the provision of 'Life in the UK' programmes. The region has a good working relationship with Jobcentre plus at regional and strategic levels and, although links at provider level continue to be productive, they remain fragile. RPMs are now actively promoting more sustainable working relationships between providers and Jobcentre plus.

What progress has been made in ensuring that the next self-assessment report is more evaluative than previous versions?	Reasonable progress
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The region is making reasonable progress in improving its self-assessment process and report. The development plan has been expanded to include actions arising from the inspection. The plan contains sufficiently timely and measurable actions.

Inspectors judged the self-assessment process as satisfactory but the report was insufficiently evaluative, poorly written and difficult to understand. A direct response to most of these issues now forms the core of a 2-day 'back to basics' self-assessment training programme for all regional programme directors, due to be delivered in the last week of April 2008.

The programme has been devised centrally by Ufi. Its aims are to create a common understanding of what needs to be done in practice for effective self-assessment. This will include the type of information that needs to be collected and how it is used, identifying common issues and focusing on developing and applying evaluative techniques rather than descriptions. The aim is to enable each region and centre to produce self-assessment reports that contain regional flavour and characteristics but which are consistent in process, practice and the quality of reporting.