

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Doncaster Metropolitan Borough
Council
Date of visit: 17 June 2008

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in October 2007 of Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council's (DMBC) adult and community learning (ACL) and work-based learning provision. At that inspection, all aspects of work-based learning provision were good and its capacity to improve was outstanding. However, whilst achievement and standards were satisfactory in ACL, all other aspects of the ACL provision, and the provider's overall effectiveness and capacity to improve, were inadequate. The focus of the monitoring visit was therefore mostly on ACL.

Achievement and standards

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| What improvements have been made in achievement and standards, including the continued improvements in timely success rates in work-based learning? | Reasonable Progress |
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Data for ACL generally indicates an overall improvement since the inspection, when retention was poor for a large proportion of the provision. On accredited courses from 2006/07 to 2007/08, retention improved from 76.5% to 95.9% and achievement from 87.8% to 92.6%. For non-accredited courses, retention improved from 90.8% to 94.5%, but in-year achievement declined from 98.5% to 92.2%. Poor retention in family language, literacy and numeracy and wider family learning has improved markedly to over 90%.

Wide ranging strategies to improve the work-based learning timely success rates show early signs of effectiveness. Recent provider data on overall and timely success rates indicate improvement over the last three years and an increase between planned and actual completion dates. Currently 81% of advanced apprentices, who were planned leavers for 2007/08, achieved their framework and 76% of these were timely, compared with 53% for 2006/07. In-year data for planned leavers in 2008/09, shows all five leavers as timely and 11 out of 17 still in learning. For apprentices, in 2007/08, 70% achieved their framework and 77% of these were timely, compared with 45% in 2006/07. Currently six planned leavers for 2007/08 are still in learning; three leavers from the 2008/09 leaver group are early completers while 47 out of 58 are still in learning.

Quality of provision

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| What actions have been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning in ACL? What impact have they had? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection, many aspects of the observation of teaching and learning process were inadequate in ACL. The newly developed system to measure the quality of teaching and learning is now more thorough. All observers are trained. Early indications show improvement in teaching and learning observation grades. Staff training to tackle development themes identified through lesson observations is used to promote improvement, for example, to further develop individual learning plans and the recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA). Newly developed, detailed guidelines inform tutors about the process. However, they do not clearly outline the process if staff receive an unsatisfactory grade. In a minority of cases, staff feedback on their lesson observation was not within the service's timescales. Observers do not yet use observation of teaching and learning effectively to identify best practice to share with other staff. Observer's comments on some grade one observations do not match the grade given. Action plans produced following observations are collated and monitored by curriculum managers.

Leadership and management

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| How have strategic, operational and curriculum planning in ACL improved since the inspection? What is the impact? | Reasonable Progress |
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The ACL service has restructured and improved its lines of communication and management. Clear personal and curriculum improvement targets for staff are regularly monitored during individual line manager meetings. A good emphasis on staff development and away days raises staff awareness of individual responsibilities in improving the quality of provision.

Almost all vacant ACL positions are filled and final appointments have imminent start dates or interviews. The appointment of 12 additional tutors, with six allocated to information technology, will support delivery of the provision.

Detailed ACL curriculum strategy and delivery plans link local learning and wider priorities. Feedback from outreach contributes to programme planning. The number of withdrawn and cancelled courses has nearly halved. Good partnership working, identified at the inspection, has continued. A range of network meetings helps to share local intelligence and avoid duplication in programme planning. The service's engagement in the development of the Doncaster Learning Gateway will provide learners with access to course information for all learning providers in the Doncaster area.

Changes to ACL curriculum delivery now provide opportunity for longer courses than before and clearer progression opportunities. Skills for life learners now enrol and learn flexibly. Skills for life has a higher profile within the council and forms part of the corporate staff induction. Council staff are allowed some work time to attend sessions. Changes to the family learning programme will help meet the needs of families who speak English as a second language.

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| How accurate is the management information systems data in ACL and how well is it used? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection, the accuracy and use of management information for ACL was weak. Centrally held data was unreliable and difficult to understand and use. Data for 2006/07 was inaccurate. A data cleansing exercise has been completed and DMBC staff are now confident in its' accuracy. Data officers have improved understanding of data analysis and its use, and produce meaningful management information. Communication between the data manager and senior managers is effective. Curriculum managers receive detailed data on retention, achievement and success rates by course, staff member and venue in a range of formats. Managers are more confident in using data to monitor course and staff performance. However, attendance reporting remains poor. Registers for short courses are collected from tutors after courses finish leaving no time take appropriate action if attendance is poor. The service is aware of this and plans to pilot a weekly electronic attendance data collection within Skills for life. The upgrade of the management information system is planned to be fully operational by August 2008.

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| What improvements have been made in the quality assurance, improvement and sharing good practice arrangements in ACL? | Reasonable progress |
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Quality assurance arrangements in ACL were weak at the previous inspection. A new draft quality handbook and best practice guide now outlines the service's approach to quality improvement. A number of procedures support this, but mainly focus on administration processes. A quality cycle has been developed for 2007/08 and 2008/09. Four audits have taken place to measure the effectiveness of procedures but focus mainly on compliance in the completion of documents. No audits have taken place to assess the quality of provision.

Sharing good practice has improved. Work-based learning was good at the previous inspection, but at that time, no links existed between work-based learning and ACL staff. Close working links between managers for the two teams have developed, and they now meet regularly for support and to share good practice. Visits to other ACL providers help the service to learn from successful practice and identify where it can be adapted. A good practice guide for tutors is in development but most examples focus on administration. Further development of the guide to support teaching and learning is planned.

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| Has the promotion of equality of opportunity improved? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection, the promotion of equality of opportunity was good in work-based learning, but inadequate in ACL, where learners had inadequate understanding of equality of opportunity and staff training was insufficient. A senior manager now has overall responsibility, supported by a curriculum manager who co-ordinates the service's approach to equality and diversity. The curriculum manager regularly attends regional equality and diversity network training. A number of staff training events have taken place to improve staff awareness. Doncaster MBC provide online training that is now mandatory for all staff. Tutors are encouraged to analyse data by gender and ethnicity to see if they are meeting their targets to recruit under-represented groups. The service is developing a strategy to embed the themes of *Every Child Matters* into the service and plans training in July 2008 about the protection of vulnerable adults.

The service is updating its equal opportunity policy in line with the DMBC's corporate equality framework. A council member has planned a service-wide equality and diversity audit to identify areas for improvement.

A review of course guides, and other publicity ensures that information for learners is inclusive, appropriate to its target audience, and contains the service's quality statement. Learners have the opportunity to have information translated into a range of different languages and formats. All venues are checked annually to ensure that they are accessible. Equality and diversity is a standard agenda item at meetings. A bi-monthly newsletter promotes equality and diversity. However, information in the quality handbook's good practice guide is insufficient. It defines bullying and harassment but does not give staff information on current equality and diversity legislation.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

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| How effectively are the self-assessment and post-inspection action plan/improvement plan used in driving improvements? | Reasonable Progress |
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It is too soon to assess the ACL self-assessment report as it still reflects the findings of the previous inspection. The next cycle of self-assessment is to start soon. However, the post-inspection action plan is used systematically to promote improvement; it is regularly monitored and updated. The many examples of improvement activities show good pace and urgency. All managers are actively involved and regularly share information about developments with part-time tutors. An informative newsletter supplements the well-attended bi-monthly meetings.

The good self-assessment process for work-based learning, identified at the previous inspection, has been maintained. Their post-inspection action plan shows a high degree of focus on learner support strategies to improve timely completion rates.