

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Birmingham City Council
Date of visit: 5 March 2008

Context

The monitoring visit follows the inspection of Birmingham City Council (BCC) in May 2007. At the inspection, BCC's independent learning and leisure skills sector subject area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The other 10 sector skills areas inspected were found to be satisfactory or good. Arrangements for leadership and management, equality of opportunity and the effectiveness of the provision were judged to be good. A reinspection of independent learning and leisure skills is due to be carried out in September 2008.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving learners' independent learning and leisure skills success rates?	significant progress
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There has been significant progress in improving learners' independent learning and leisure skills success rates. Since the previous inspection, BCC has reviewed the monitoring and recording of achievement data. More effective procedural changes have been introduced to secure accurate data collection. A good range of methods have been used to improve tutors' understanding of the importance of recording learners' achievement and the processes they must use. Individual tutors' contribution to overall data management is suitably monitored. Where staff are not complying effectively with required data collection processes, appropriate help and support is given that leads to improvement. Data is now analysed and monitored at programme level. Adequate quality assurance is carried out through audit and monitoring of course files three times per year.

Success rates for accredited courses have improved. At the previous inspection, they were judged to be low at 32%. In the subsequent academic year, this rate had more than doubled to 69%. Success rates for non-accredited courses show an improving trend.

The quality of the provision

How much progress has been made in improving the use of initial assessment and planning to meet individual needs of independent learning and leisure skills learners?	reasonable progress
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There has been reasonable progress to improve the use of initial assessment and planning to meet individual needs of independent learning and leisure skills learners. Effective analysis of other providers' initial assessment arrangements has been used to formulate a strategy for improving initial assessment. Appropriate staff training needs analysis and support are planned to ensure that the milestones are understood by all tutors. In the interim, tutors have received support to improve the implementation of existing initial assessment processes. An improved individual learning plan has been created and is planned to be introduced in the next academic year. Through the observation of teaching sessions there is an adequate process in place for checking aspects of the quality of the learning plans, the effectiveness of target-setting and the use of recognising and recording progress and achievement. However, BCC recognises the need to further develop staff and procedures to ensure that target-setting is effectively tailored to meet individual learner abilities and needs.

What progress has been made in widening the range of independent learning and leisure skills qualification and progression routes?	reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in widening the range of independent learning and leisure skills qualification and progression routes. Appropriate research into potential qualifications and progression routes has been completed as part of the work of a steering group. This activity has suitably informed curriculum developments and includes the introduction of a work awareness learning module for current learners. In the next academic year there are well developed plans to allow learners' improved access to a range of ASDAN-related provision. However, it is too early to assess the impact of other work being carried out by BCC to establish suitable learning opportunities that are both relevant to learners' needs and are financially sustainable.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in improving independent learning and leisure skills curriculum development, management and monitoring?	reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving independent learning and leisure skills curriculum development, management and monitoring. Much work has been

carried out to clarify management roles and responsibilities. In addition, a review of job descriptions is due to be completed shortly. Arrangements for curriculum development are now more co-ordinated and suitably check progress in achieving agreed targets. Adequate use is made of data for monitoring purposes. Improvements have been made to more effectively identify issues related to learners with disability across the curriculum delivered by Birmingham Adult Education Service. However, it is too early to make a judgement on the effectiveness. Adequate action has been taken since the previous inspection to develop and improve work with external partners that benefits learners. Arrangements have been enhanced to give more direct control over staff allocation.

What progress has been made to further secure effective quality assurance arrangements?	reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made to further secure effective quality assurance arrangements. Tutors now benefit from a wide range and frequency of communication activities. They are able to engage in enhanced opportunities to share good practice. For example, each geographical area has held or is due to hold a staff development event focusing on the service's ILT strategy. Standardisation meetings are held and when tutors cannot attend these, alternative events are made available to them instead. Tutors' teaching sessions are observed at least once every two years. Observation reports are detailed, include the views of learners and are appropriately used to quality assure teaching sessions. However, it is too early to judge the full impact of these and other arrangements that have been introduced to further secure effective quality assurance.

What progress has been made to improve the overall number of tutors with appropriate teaching qualifications and specialist training in learning difficulties?	reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made to improve the overall number of tutors with appropriate teaching qualifications and specialist training in learning difficulties. Since the previous inspection, staff qualifications have been audited and areas for improvement identified. An action plan to remedy identified shortfalls has yet to be compiled. Plans to assess tutors' specialist training needs and encourage participation in professional development are well advanced. Observations of teaching sessions effectively identify development needs and actions to progress improvement. Tutors have had access to relevant training to update and enhance their awareness of equality and diversity issues as they relate to learners with disability. Targets have been set in the improvement plan for tutor training participation rate that are challenging but realistic.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made to ensure the self-assessment process and development plan drives forward improvements?	reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made to ensure the self-assessment process and development plan drives forward improvements. The self-assessment process now more effectively ensures that issues relating to learning difficulty throughout the service are better identified and addressed. A steering group effectively review the action plan produced from the self-assessment report to assess progress in completing the identified actions. The action plan targets are relevant and usually suitably time bound. However, actions to maintain the strength identified at the previous inspection are not included in the action plan. In addition, some areas for improvement are not always detailed enough to fully address all issues identified at the previous inspection.