

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Dudley Metropolitan Borough
Council
Date of visit: 16 October 2008

Context

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) is one of four metropolitan boroughs in the Black Country region of the West Midlands. The Adult and Community Learning Team within the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing services (DACHS) manages the adult and community learning provision. Future Skills Dudley, another department within the Directorate of the Urban Environment, manages work-based learning. A further contract is held with the Black Country Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for social care apprenticeship programmes. These are delivered by DACHS, within the Directorate of the Chief Executive, and the skills for life provision is provided by the adult and community learning team within the programme.

DMBC subcontracts some adult and community learning provision to two local colleges: Stourbridge and Halesowen. Approximately one third of the work-based learning provision is subcontracted to a private training provider, Pertemps People Development Group. A wide programme of vocational and non-vocational courses is offered, in 12 sector subject areas, through a network of 15 centres.

DMBC receives its funding from the Black Country LSC.

The previous inspection was 16 November 2007. The organisation's overall effectiveness, leadership and management, the approach to equality of opportunity and quality improvement were judged to be satisfactory. Outcomes for achievement and standards were good. Arts, media and publishing and family learning were judged good. Retail and commercial enterprise and preparation for life and work were judged satisfactory. Leisure, travel and tourism was judged to be unsatisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Has DMBC continued to improve achievement and standards?	Significant progress
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Outcomes for achievement and standards were good at the previous inspection in 2007. The provider has undergone significant restructuring since then, but with no impact on learner success. Standards have been maintained and improved. Between 2006/07 and 2007/08 retention rates on accredited short courses have improved from 92% to 97% and achievement rates improved from 94% to 97%. On non-accredited short courses, retention and achievement rates are maintained at 93% and 88% respectively. The rate of learner participation in accredited provision has significantly increased by 60% between 2006/07 and 2007/08.

In the same period, the rate of participation of learners from minority ethnic groups has increased from 12% to 18% against a borough-wide rate of 6.8%. The learner achievement rate in leisure, travel and tourism, inadequate at the previous inspection, has improved from 70% to 90%. Good development of skills was identified during the monitoring visit.

At the previous inspection, the standard of skills in music and dance was unsatisfactory. The recent recruitment of specialist staff has led to an improvement in recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) processes, which focus on the development of technical skills. The employability skills programme and foundation programmes have also maintained achievement outcomes.

Quality of provision

What progress has DMBC made in implementing an effective system for assessment and recording of learner progress?	Reasonable progress
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DMBC has taken prompt and effective action to support a more comprehensive and thorough system for assessment and recording of learner progress. A standardised set of documentation is now in place, which clarifies all aspects of initial assessment and recording of learner progress. The documentation was developed by senior managers and cross-sector subject area representatives and signed off by the quality team. Use of the paper work is formally monitored by specialists in each curriculum area. Effective recording of initial assessment, learning goals, formative and summative assessments is checked. The quality of recording on individual learning plans is much improved with learners' statements now reflecting the learning attained. Tutor comments are constructive and give learners guidance for improvement. The new documentation also tracks learner progress from initial assessment to final review.

Observations of sport and fitness during the monitoring visit reported that strategies for differentiation are now in place. Good use is made of learner diaries to record individual learner progress. An innovative method of measuring progress through

quantitative methods was observed in a pilates classes. Tutors across programmes are exploring more effective ways of using the documentation. The new systems have yet to be firmly established across all sector areas.

What action has been taken to improve the unsatisfactory teaching in leisure, travel and tourism programmes?	Reasonable progress
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The provider has taken effective action to improve unsatisfactory teaching and inspectors observed satisfactory teaching or better based upon a small sample. Inspectors also observed good development of skills and good attention to individual learners, but some aspects of lesson preparation and delivery and the pace of lessons were considered areas for improvement. The provider has reviewed and rationalised provision in this area. Many classes have now progressed to independently financed community or club provision. The appointment of the new curriculum lead with subject specialist background and expertise has improved support to tutors and provided a much clearer vision of the future direction of the department. Cross-curricular links to other relevant subject areas are established and thorough observation of teaching and learning is in place. Strategies for sharing good practice are effective and a teaching and learning champion is providing good support for tutors. Learners value provision in this area very highly indeed, with 90% of learners rating provision as good or better.

Has the inadequate reinforcement of safe working practices in leisure, travel and tourism been promptly addressed?	Reasonable progress
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The Head of Service took prompt action in response to previous inspection findings and a much more thorough and consistent approach has been taken to health and safety and risk assessments. Guidance to staff and learners is improved and no areas of concern arose from inspection observation during this visit. The self-assessment report has identified that some tutors need additional training to support good practice delivery, reinforcing safe working practices, correction of techniques and identification of risks as an integral part of session delivery. The curriculum lead is providing good support in this area.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in addressing weak curriculum leadership and management?	Significant progress
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DMBC has made significant progress in addressing aspects of weak curriculum and management an area for improvement at the previous inspection. It has demonstrated good leadership and vision in implementing the new organisational structure and focusing the teamwork to support the previous weaknesses. Improved strategic and operational management structures have efficiently and effectively facilitated the work of the new curriculum leader posts in skills, sports and fitness

and arts. The new structure provides frequent formal and informal opportunities for meetings at all levels, cross-curricula working and sharing of good practice. Support and guidance at senior management level are very good. Already sector subject curriculum leads have demonstrated impact in providing a clear focus for the future development of the curriculum area, establishing positive working relationships with tutors, and in effectively supporting the embedding of RARPA and improvements in teaching and learning. Formal plans and visions for the sector subject area are developing well with learners involved in appropriate local and national initiatives and projects. Data reports are now used more effectively at curriculum level to monitor retention, achievement and attendance.

Are quality improvement arrangements now more rigorous and complete?	Significant progress
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DMBC has significantly improved its arrangements for quality improvement and adopted a whole organisational approach. It has made effective use of external consultancy to carry out staff training in observation processes. Improved staff guidance on observation criteria, making judgements and carrying out grading has better supported tutors' capacity to grade effectively. Annual observations are now planned for all staff, and all staff have been observed. Senior managers work well with curriculum leads to identify areas of weakness and to plan improvements.

Observation now has more rigour and the overall teaching profile is improving. A cross-service team carries out moderation. External peer group support is in place. The system effectively supports improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and identification of staff development needs. Tutor action plans are in place for all grades. Good practice is identified and shared, and effective and sensitive support given for grade four sessions. Formal self-assessment and quality improvement plans are supporting improvements in all sector subject areas, with regular monthly updates and position statements. Plans are detailed with clearly allocated responsibilities. Previous weaknesses in staff teaching qualifications have been completely addressed and clear criteria now available for the recruitment of new staff.

Is development planning effective in making improvements?	Reasonable progress
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The post inspection report in January 2008 clearly outlines strengths and areas for improvement. It is self-critical, detailed and self-evaluative, and key strengths and areas for improvement are supported by underpinning evidence. All sector subject areas have a detailed self-assessment report and quality improvement plan which effectively covers all key questions. Data are used well and the provider has demonstrated a strong response to improvement.

The self-assessment report for leisure, travel and tourism is written well and has made effective use of observations and learner feedback to identify key areas for improvement. The quality improvement plan for the area is highly detailed with prioritised actions, clear timescales and clearly allocated responsibilities for implementation and senior management monitoring. Observations carried out during the monitoring visits suggest the sector area improvement plan is working well and that the quality of teaching in learning is satisfactory.