

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Date of visit: 12 November 2008

### Context

Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFBC) became a unitary authority in 1998. The lifelong learning team offers community and family learning which is part of the Social Care and Learning department, a change of department since the previous inspection. Most learning takes place at the Brakenhale open learning centre but other provision is delivered in local schools, outreach centres and a mobile learning vehicle. The learning centre at Brakenhale is currently being extended to include significant new buildings and resources. BFBC subcontracts specialist provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to The ARK Trust Limited. BFBC is funded by Thames Valley Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

During 2007/08 BFBC enrolled 2338 learners. Approximately 60% of the provision is allocated to community learning and the remainder to family learning. In 2007/08, 66% of learners are new to BFBC. The lifelong learning team is made up of four full-time staff, four part-time staff and 60 sessional tutors and early years staff.

At the previous inspection in 2007, the overall effectiveness of the provision was judged to be satisfactory. The capacity to improve, leadership and management, and equality of opportunity were judged to be satisfactory. Achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and the sector subject areas of community learning and family learning were judged to be good.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve achievement and standards since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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BFBC has made reasonable progress to improve achievement and standards since the previous inspection. Achievement and standards were judged to be good at the previous inspection and BFBC has maintained this level. Some 73% of learners attending family learning courses chose to take the externally accredited assessment and of these 94% passed. The achievement rate for learners using the learning bus is 80%. Retention rates for PCDL are 100% and for the family learning courses are 96%. The previous inspection noted that insufficient data was available to assess the progression into further education, employment or voluntary work. BFBC has collated

learner progression information from a variety of sources including postcard contact with family learning learners and monitoring learners who return for more courses or who are recognised at the local college. While definitive progression data is not available, BFBC has noted good individual examples of progression. These include learners becoming teaching assistants, school governors, and accessing college courses in midwifery, psychology, nursing and social work. One learner with particular personal difficulties has become the chair of a parents teachers association.

What progress has been made to improve the use of data since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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BFBC has improved the use of data since the time of the previous inspection when the council's demographic data was found to be out of date. A report commissioned in January 2008 found that the profile of learners engaged in learning were a good match with the local population in general. BFBC conducted a thorough analysis of a learning survey but the response rate was very low. BFBC analyse attendance and other data regularly and report on any emerging trends. Decisions about the management of the provision are informed by data. BFBC changed the day of an IT course with low recruitment to meet the needs of potential learners. BFBC monitor targeted marketing to assess the extent to which new learners are actually coming from the areas targeted. BFBC is currently completing an analysis of the areas of deprivation within the borough to decide upon the distribution of promotional material. BFBC has commissioned some modifications to the management information system to enable the recording of achievement data from learners on non-accredited courses.

What progress has been made to improve the planning of the curriculum and the skills for life strategy since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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BFBC has made reasonable progress in improving the curriculum planning and the skills for life strategy. BFBC have a comprehensive curriculum strategy which focuses on the five strands of adult learning approved with the borough council. These strands are mapped against the LSC's contractual framework which further identifies the policy drivers and determine the programme structure for the year and the range of the curriculum. The planned curriculum is also linked to the various progression routes available to learners. BFBC plans the curriculum carefully to meet identified learner needs and also to match the needs of the community especially in areas which are classified as being deprived. BFBC has found two new funding streams to meet community needs. One of these is a NLDC grant to extend preparation for life and work to 300 learners through 66 new sessions. The second source is from the family learning impact fund (FLIF) for 131 families to engage in a variety of courses. BFBC did not have a skills for life strategy at the time of the previous inspection. It has developed a comprehensive strategy which is clearly identifiable but also well

established in the curriculum strategy. The strategy includes the identification of learners with skills for life needs which will be delivered as a staff training day in January. Also included are providing support, seeking advice and referral to specialist organisations to help learners with these particular needs.

What progress has been made to develop the partnership arrangements since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in partnership arrangements. This was identified as an area for improvement at the time of the previous inspection. BFBC is actively involved in many partnerships with other organisations. Partnerships are well used to develop understanding between organisations of each other's roles. BFBC uses partnerships with schools and with other organisations such as 'Home Start' to recruit learners onto family learning courses. Potential curriculum developments are discussed with schools. 'Next Step' advisors regularly visit the learning centres and have a full understanding of the progression possibilities for learners. A local PCDL partnership has now been established to co-ordinate work across the district in line with the policies of the Economic & Skills Development Partnership and the Local Strategic Partnership. These partnerships are new and to date, the planning of curriculum provision is not co-ordinated between the local providers. BFBC's curriculum planning is in accordance with an agreement with the principal local further education college. However, BFBC's curriculum planning cycle is later than that of the college and is responsive to the colleges published plans.

What progress has been made to develop arrangements to assess and record learners' progress and achievements since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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BFBC has made reasonable progress towards full, appropriate use of RARPA. BFBC has worked hard to put into place the appropriate documentation and procedures for RARPA and is in the process of fully implementing the system. All courses have clearly defined aims and tutors assess how well these aims have been met at the end of the course. BFBC asks learners on courses which last eight or more hours to assess how well the aims of the course have been met at the end of the programme, but this is not always done on taster courses. As part of the teaching process learners are asked to identify their individual aims but this is not always recorded in a form which would enable the successful outcome of the course to be easily analysed. The tutors and managers often assess achievement on short courses based on anecdotal evidence and learners views without hard evidence of the learners successes in relation to individual learning plans. BFBC is supporting and awaiting the development, by their MIS supplier, to improve the recording and analysis of achievement data. This has not yet been implemented. Some professional development of staff understanding of appropriate assessment and recording of

learners' progress and achievement has taken place and more is scheduled for next term.

## Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made to make effective use of the self-assessment and post-inspection planning processes since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Progress on self-assessment and planning for improvements has been reasonable. Self-assessment takes place in a planned cycle throughout the year. Tutors on all courses now evaluate the programme at the end of the course and this evaluation contributes to the departmental self-assessment process. Learners' evaluations of the courses are taken into account but there are many taster courses where learners evaluations are not formally collected. The senior staff meet to produce a combined self-assessment report for Adult and Community Learning. BFBC has strengthened the programme of observation of teaching and learning. More use is made of observers from outside the organisation to verify the grades being given.

The BFBC's subcontractor independently conducts its own evaluations of its programmes and produces its own self-assessment report. The subcontractors' self-assessment is the basis of a review conducted jointly by the subcontractor and BFBC. The results of this review feed into the BFBC's self-assessment report. Improvement planning is comprehensive and leads to a wide range of clear action plans. BFBC regularly reassess the action plans to ensure continuing progress. There is evidence that some improvements identified following the previous inspection have been implemented. Other action plans are still in progress.