

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Reading Borough Council ACL: New Directions

Date of visit: 24 September 2008

### Context:

Reading Borough Council's ACL provision, called New Directions, is based in the Education and Children's Services Directorate. It was last inspected in October 2007. The overall effectiveness of the provision was judged to be inadequate. Capacity to improve, quality of provision and equality of opportunity were judged satisfactory. Leadership and management and achievements and standards were judged inadequate. Of the five sector subject areas inspected, ICT was judged to be good, arts media and publishing, modern foreign languages and family learning were satisfactory. Preparation for life and work was judged inadequate. Accredited provision accounts for about 45% of learners on long courses, though only 25% of learner numbers overall.

At the time of the previous inspection, the service was at the start of a process of restructuring. This was finally completed in April 2008. A new head of service started in July 2008. The new structure has clear accountabilities in relation to the delivery of the service. The new arrangements have effectively been in place since April, and the pace of implementation of actions identified in the quality improvement plan has increased significantly in the past few months.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in maintaining or improving, learners' achievement and standards, particularly in accredited courses?	Insufficient progress
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At the previous inspection achievements and standards were judged unsatisfactory. Standards of work were generally good and retention rates were high on non-accredited provision. The success rates for accredited courses were, however, low. Revised figures for 2006/07 indicate accredited success rates at 59% rather than the 45% recorded a year ago. The initial data for 2007/08 shows insufficient progress. At the time of the monitoring visit the data had not been finalised; however interim results indicated that overall success rates for accredited provision had fallen back significantly to 47%. On long accredited courses the drop was even greater, falling to 39% from the previous year's 64%. Retention rates have also fallen, from a revised figure of 86% in 2006/07 to 69% in 2007/08. However, retention on non-accredited

courses has been maintained at 86% and achievement rates in non-accredited courses remain satisfactory, at around 80%. Enrolments for 2007/08 fell by just over 30% compared with the previous year. A few results are still to be received. Learners' progress on Train to Gain provision was judged slow at the previous inspection. Around half of the learners have now achieved, with others making slow, but continuing, progress. The reasons for the decline in participation, retention and achievement rates are not clear, and managers are still investigating.

### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in the processes for initial assessment and target-setting for learners?	Reasonable progress
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The service has made reasonable progress in taking action to improve the quality of initial assessment and target-setting, which were areas for improvement at the previous inspection. Senior staff and tutors have had training in this area. Managers are encouraged to develop assessment methods that are appropriate for the subject and the types of learners. On accredited FE courses this is satisfactory, but on some non-accredited courses more work is needed to ensure that the assessment identifies what learners can do in relation to the courses they are undertaking, particularly where the classes are of mixed attainment. Similarly, target-setting is more effective where the course content is clearly defined. Targets in some non-accredited provision continue to need further refinement, so that they are meaningful for learners, measurable and appropriate for the course. Managers are working with course tutors to improve the effectiveness of these processes in the new semester, which is about to start.

What progress has been made in the arrangements for recording and recognising achievement?	Reasonable Progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in the arrangements for implementing and moderating recording and recognising progress and achievement (RARPA) processes for non-accredited provision, which were inconsistently applied at the previous inspection. A practice for moderating the process has been developed very recently, and, following a successful pilot, will be introduced in the current semester. RBC plans to observe all tutors, and, at the same time, use the opportunity to moderate the RARPA paperwork and standards of work seen in class.

## Leadership and management

What progress has been made in performance management, including the observation of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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Changes in the staffing structure provide clearer line management responsibilities and accountabilities. Managers and all fractional teaching staff have monthly supervision meetings with clear targets, which are recorded, and all have annual appraisals. Sessional tutors do not have termly supervision meetings, but are invited, and paid, to attend team meetings.

The grading sheets from the current observation of teaching and learning scheme are moderated, and observers have to justify their grading at moderation meetings. In the small sample of observation records seen during the monitoring visit, the grade was justified by the evidence recorded. In 2007/08, 58% of tutors were observed and 74% of lessons were graded as good or better, which is slightly lower than the previous year. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed, which is an improvement from the 2006/07 results. Managers plan to observe most tutors during the first term/semester. The format for the observation of teaching and learning scheme for the forthcoming semester has been enhanced, following peer reviews across Berkshire.

What progress has been made by Reading Borough Council in the understanding and use of data?	Insufficient Progress
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Both the RBC's 2007 Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and the inspection report judged that management information was poorly recorded and insufficient use was made of the few reports produced. Since then the management information system (MIS) has been enhanced, data is more widely available to all levels of management and can be examined. An improved electronic register system and a system for on-line registration are nearly ready for implementation. The content and quality of reports have improved. However, most of these changes are only just coming into use, and several are still to be completed. There have been a number of improvements in the way that data on achievements have been recorded, particularly with respect to the end dates for learning, but some problems with basic activity such as verifying class lists still exist. Little significant change in the use of data in the 10 months of the year following inspection took place, and the current arrangements have yet to be implemented.

## Self-assessment and improvement planning

What improvements have been made to the self-assessment process and to improvement planning?	Reasonable Progress
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The previous inspection recorded concerns over the overall effectiveness of steps taken since the 2004 reinspection. Reasonable progress has been made in further improving the quality improvement process since then. Tutors and learners are well involved in the SAR process, with an increase in the use of customer satisfaction feedback. A larger number of delivery-lead managers provide specialist, constructive inputs into reviewing course and programme outcomes. Their views and evidence are collected in area reports which are properly reviewed by managers and contribute well to the overall SAR. The Quality Improvement Plan, which in 2007/08 was merged with the post-inspection action plan (PIAP), is a detailed and useful document in a format that aids management review. It is subject to regular examination, and now is properly linked with individual targets and performance management. The effectiveness of last year's PIAP was reduced by the challenges of maintaining continuity during the protracted restructuring process.