

# Choices 4 All

Inspection report

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Name of lead inspector: Nigel Fletcher HMI

Last day of inspection: 25 September 2009

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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## Information about the provider

1. Choices 4 All (Choices) is a private limited company operating mainly in the London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow. It provides specialised training for young persons and adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities and aims to enhance their ability to move into paid employment. Choices became a registered charity in 1997. Choices contracts with London West Learning and Skills Council (LWLSC) to provide Entry to Employment (E2E) for young people. Choices also contracts with the local authority for Self-Directed Support funding to provide vocational-related training for learners with difficulties and/or disabilities. There are currently 46 learners in training, of whom 16 are funded by LWLSC. Around 80% of their LSC-funded learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with around 35% locally. Unemployment in the area in 2008 was 6.8% compared with 5.7% nationally.
2. The chief executive heads a management team of three who are responsible for five instructors, two assistant instructors, three supported employment staff and one administrator. A board of trustees ('the board') oversees the activities of Choices. Choices offers the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) programme with the vocational strand focusing on hospitality and catering. Choices also operates a social firm that provides catering facilities at selected local events, and has also formed partnerships with a small number of local employers to provide managed work placements for the learners.

Type of provision	Number of learners in 2008/09 (previous year)
Young learner provision: Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment	3 learners
Adult learner provision: Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment	14 learners

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	1
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	1

Subject areas	Grade
Preparation for life and work	2

## Overall effectiveness

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Learners make excellent progress in transferring to employment, or to further education or training, at the end of their programme. Learners develop very good personal, social and employability skills, although they make less progress in improving their numeracy skills. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and the lessons seen during inspection were excellent. Although the use of targets in planning and reviewing learners' progress has improved, this aspect of assessment is inconsistent and not sufficiently developed. Support for individual learners is highly effective and helps them remain on the programme and make good progress. Choices ensures that the welfare and progress of learners is central to its day-to-day practices.
4. The chief executive and her management team provide effective leadership and have made good improvements since the previous inspection. Together with the good quality of their self-assessment, this demonstrates that they are well placed to continue to improve. Choices has an outstanding culture of promoting equality and diversity with staff and with learners, and also in its relationships with employers. It encourages and supports learners to gain a good understanding of different cultures and to appreciate each other's specific needs. Arrangements for the safeguarding of learners are satisfactory. Learners feel exceptionally safe on

site and at their work-experience placements. However, the board pays insufficient attention to discussing safeguarding matters at its meetings.

## Main findings

- Progression for learners into employment, or further education, is excellent. Learners enjoy all aspects of their programme and develop very good personal and social skills, particularly those for independent living.
- Pastoral support for learners is outstanding. Choices also have good links with external agencies to support fully the diverse and challenging needs of its learners.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is excellent. It permeates lessons and the way learners relate to staff and to each other. Choices ensures that all groups of learners have equal opportunity to achieve their potential.
- Learners make good progress in developing vocational and employability skills, including those in literacy and information and communication technology (ICT). However, their improvement in functional numeracy is less well established.
- Learners make a good contribution to the community. Their opinions are readily sought and acted upon to improve provision within Choices, and they participate in various activities in the local community.
- The quality of teaching, training and assessment is good. Teaching and learning in lessons are outstanding, with tutors using a wide range of activities and tasks which suit the full range of learners. However, learners' targets are not always sufficiently specific in assessments and reviews for them to know what progress they are making.
- The extent to which provision meets the needs and interests of learners is good. There is a broad programme that enables learners to develop and improve their employability and independent living skills. However, provision for numeracy is satisfactory.
- Links with employers and other partners are good. They enable learners to gain valuable work experience and provide routes to employment at the end of their programme. There are also good arrangements with neighbouring training organisations for additional teaching support and progression opportunities for learners.
- The Choices management team provides good leadership and continually strives to maintain and improve high standards of provision. They assess any risks to the quality of provision effectively and take appropriate actions to reduce them.
- Choices has good procedures for evaluating its practices. It recognises what it needs to do to maintain high standards, but also how to continue to improve.
- Choices provides good value for money. Accommodation and practical resources are of a high standard. Most staff are appropriately trained. However, there is no one yet sufficiently qualified to coordinate numeracy teaching.
- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are satisfactory. Learners feel extremely safe and readily share their problems and concerns with staff.

However, the board of trustees does not pay sufficient attention to safeguarding matters to ensure that they are fully aware of Choices' policies and procedures.

### What does Choices 4 All need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that meetings of the board of trustees place a greater emphasis on the safeguarding of learners so that Choices maintains a safe and secure environment for learners.
- Ensure that there is a suitably qualified member of staff to coordinate numeracy provision and so enable learners to develop additional functional skills in numeracy.
- Improve the consistency of target-setting for learners so that they can identify more accurately their progress in all subjects during monthly reviews.

### Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

#### What learners like:

- learning how to work as a team
- helping each other in their learning and social interaction
- gaining help to find good work placements and employment
- the very good teaching and enjoyable lessons
- bringing out skills they did not know they had
- feeling exceptionally safe at Choices and at their work
- the helpfulness of all the staff
- learning how to speak English properly.

#### What learners would like to see improved:

- nothing identified.

#### What employers like:

- seeing the progress that learners make while gaining some work experience; it is clear that they are well supported
- working with Choices who are always there to help when they are needed
- the team at Choices who provide a 'fantastic' resource for young people looking to develop skills that will further support them in accessing the community
- the strong relationships with the team at Choices - they are always at hand to phone or make visits
- the pleasure of working with both the learners and the mentor.

#### What employers would like to see improved:

- understanding the difficulties that some voluntary organisations have in providing a suitable work placement for learners.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

5. Choices has demonstrated good improvement since the last inspection. Weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been fully or partially addressed. The management team sets clear targets for improvement in all aspects of its provision. Managers make good use of extensive and accurate data to manage and monitor performance. Choices has substantially increased the success of its learners; almost all progress into employment, or to further education or training. Learners' personal and employability skills improve considerably.
6. Arrangements for improving the quality of provision are good. The self-assessment process takes good account of the views of staff, learners and stakeholders to improve the provision. Choices is fully aware of its strengths, and the identified areas for improvement mainly reflect the inspection findings. Actions for improvement are planned and effected promptly. Significant investment has been made in accommodation and learning resources to meet the needs of the business and learners. Choices' response to equality of opportunity and the promotion of diversity is outstanding.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

7. Progression for learners is excellent. Over the past three years, almost all learners have progressed into employment or further education. In 2008/09, although the progression rate dropped to 67%, all but one learner who left did so due to serious personal problems. Achievement of units towards full qualifications is high and progress is consistent with the programme objectives agreed with learners. Those who progress to further education join a course at a higher level than they might have without their work at Choices.
8. Learners enjoy all aspects of their programmes and the excellent pastoral support they receive. They are treated as adults and encouraged to respect each other and their environment. Learners develop very good personal, social and work skills. For example, one learner improved his independent living skills sufficiently to enable him to move out of a supported environment into his own flat. Another was able to start his own car-valeting business. Learners' communication and teamworking skills improve considerably. However, a few learners make less progress in developing their numeracy skills. The inconsistency of target-setting means that learners are not always stretched sufficiently.
9. Progression rates and the levels of success in the learners' acquisition of vocational, personal and functional skills across different groups of learners including age, ethnicity and gender are essentially the same.

## The quality of provision

## Grade 2

10. The quality of the lessons observed during inspection was outstanding. They were imaginative, interesting, varied and fun. Learners greatly enjoy their sessions and work hard to achieve the lesson aims. The excellent teaching styles range from highly effective individual coaching to well-organised group work that includes peer support. Learners are encouraged to contribute to lessons and to comment on what worked well and what did not. Tutors have a good knowledge of their subjects. Interesting teaching materials link learning to everyday events. In most lessons, varied activities are appropriate to the needs of individual learners, although they are not always shown on lesson plans.
11. Tutors make very good use of the excellent resources. Learners are trained in a kitchen designed to a good commercial standard. They prepare lunch each day for the centre and also provide lunches and buffets for charitable and commercial events. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very effectively in lessons to promote learning. Learners enjoy using the interactive whiteboards and develop good ICT skills.
12. The assessment of progress on units towards qualifications is good. However, target-setting for learners lacks consistency. While specific short-term targets are set during some reviews, in others they are more general. Literacy and social skills are developed well in all lessons. However, the coordination of numeracy teaching is underdeveloped. For example, although numeracy is integrated into the catering sessions, there are fewer opportunities for learners who do not take that option.
13. The range of courses for learners to improve their skills is good. Regular sessions on European studies, art, crafts, citizenship and music, and trips and visits, are well appreciated and provide learners with a wider view of life. The varied topics spark discussions and good team exercises, and contribute to building confidence and improving communication and presentation skills.
14. Employers appreciate the high quality involvement of Choices' job brokers to ensure smooth working arrangements with the learners. Good links with neighbouring training organisations enable learners to progress onto further education with very little disruption.
15. Pastoral support for learners is outstanding. Staff are highly committed to learners' safety and welfare. They work unstintingly with learners, and outside support agencies if necessary, to overcome any problems. Recent examples include accompanying learners to court hearings, attending external meetings with specialist advisors, and mediating in domestic issues. Information, advice and guidance are effective. Prospective learners attend a two-week taster programme, during which they attend classes and complete comprehensive initial assessment tests. Any additional learning needs are identified and support is provided where necessary. Learners receive regular advice and guidance on further education or employment opportunities available to them.



## Leadership and management

## Grade 2

16. The management team has established clear priorities for improvement, which are understood and demonstrated by all staff. Communications with staff and external partners are effective. Choices responds well to local and national priorities. It piloted the development of the E2E programme into that of the foundation learning tier. Although there has been some difficulty in introducing the new programme, Choices has sought and found solutions that have enabled a successful transition.
17. Choices manages its resources well and provides good value for money. Staff are adequately qualified or working towards appropriate qualifications. However, since a previous arrangement with a local college declined, Choices has been slow to ensure that there is a suitably qualified staff member to coordinate numeracy teaching. Staff development needs, raised by individual staff or by managers through appraisal, are supported where appropriate. Choices has moved premises since the previous inspection. The new centre is well resourced and furnished throughout to a very high standard. ICT resources are good, and the kitchen, designed to commercial standards, is of a high quality and well managed.
18. The board of trustees fulfils its statutory duties. However, while it provides very good challenge and support to the chief executive in aspects such as financial management, human resource management and health and safety, its attention to learners' progress is only satisfactory.
19. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. All staff that may come into contact with learners have Criminal Records Bureau checks and are provided with relevant training to deal with learners and their specific needs. Choices maintains strong links with other agencies to safeguard learners, and ensures that work placements provide a safe environment. Learners have a good understanding of issues such as bullying and discrimination, and internet safety is reinforced regularly. However, the board does not pay sufficient attention to safeguarding policies in its meetings to ensure that all required procedures continue to remain in place.
20. Choices has established a good reputation in helping disadvantaged young people into learning and employment, and promotes equality and diversity in all aspects of its operation. The provider has a strong ethos of offering educational opportunities to individuals whatever their learning disability. Provider reports support the conclusion that, with high progression rates, there is very little difference between the success of different learner groups. Choices' staffing profile reflects the diversity of the learners which it serves.
21. Choices has established a strong culture of respect. Staff continually promote amongst learners an understanding of cultural differences and the needs of others with different disabilities. This is readily encouraged in the employers with which it works. Relationships between learners are exemplary, and in the rare situation when a learner's behaviour may decline to less than good, immediate, effective and sympathetic actions are taken, often using a restorative justice

approach. Marketing materials and lesson content reflect well the wide diversity of the learners. For example, learners prepare lunches that take into account the dietary needs of visitors of any religious background. In a citizenship lesson observed, music was used extremely well to promote a discussion about cultural differences.

22. Strategies to improve the quality of provision are good. Choices uses comprehensive and accurate learner data and regularly seeks feedback from the partners with which it works. Learners' views are particularly sought and effectively acted upon, with learners encouraged to comment on the quality of lessons. A representative of the student committee has a standing item on board agendas.
23. Lesson observations are carried out twice a year by an external consultant. These identify strengths and areas for improvement, and actions arising from them are reviewed at the next observation and through performance management. Tutors share good practice to help improve their teaching and support skills. The self-assessment process is good and inclusive; it involves all main partners and the staff. Although the self-assessment report is more descriptive than evaluative, the resulting development plan and action plan are detailed and effectively prioritise the actions which need to be carried out to improve the provision.

## Information about the inspection

24. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's Training Development Manager as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Framework for Excellence indicators, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
25. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gather the views of learners. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had completed on behalf of the provider. They also visited learning sessions, assessments or progress reviews.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Choices 4 All

Learning types: 14-16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	16	0	4	12	0
Part-time learners	0	0	0	0	0
Overall effectiveness	2	n/a	2	2	n/a
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	1	n/a	1	1	n/a
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1				
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	1 2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1				
Do learners feel safe?	1				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	n/a				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2				
Quality of provision	2	n/a	2	2	n/a
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1				
Leadership and management	2	n/a	2	2	n/a
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	1				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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