

London Borough of Tower Hamlets – Adult and Community and Work- based Learning

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 53148

Name of lead inspector: Richard Moore HMI

Last day of inspection: 17 March 2010

Type of provider: Local Authority
Tower Hamlets Lifelong Learning Service
The Shadwell Centre

Address: 455 The Highway
London
E1W 3HP

Telephone number: 02073 645673

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets (the council) provides adult and community learning and apprenticeships for young people. It manages the former through the Lifelong Learning Service (the service) and the latter through its organisation and development team. Both these parts of the council contract the provision with the Learning and Skills Council London East. The majority of the provision is personal community and development learning. In 2008/09, there were 8,998 learners on adult and community learning courses and 45 learners on apprenticeship programmes. In 2009/10 to date, learner numbers in these two areas of provision are 7,169 and 48, respectively.

The service was inspected in March 2009. The overall effectiveness and most of the main aspects of the provision were satisfactory, as was the provision in the subject areas inspected. Achievement and standards were good. In November 2009, the service transferred from the Children, Schools and Families Directorate to Cultural Services, which is in the Communities, Localities and Culture Directorate. The service is currently restructuring its management and staffing.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit which were key areas for improvement at the previous inspection. They include the two mandatory themes of outcomes for learners and self-assessment and improvement planning. In particular, inspectors explored outcomes on learner responsive provision at foundation level and on apprenticeships.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has the service made to improve its self-assessment process and to develop and implement an action plan based on the judgements from the inspection in March 2009? Reasonable progress

The service has made reasonable progress in improving its self-assessment process and developing an action plan based on the inspection judgements. At the last inspection, the process was well established and the self-assessment report was comprehensive and evaluative. However, some subject grades were too high.

Following a useful review of the process, the service has improved the reporting of the quality of provision through additional moderation of individual curriculum self-assessments. Support for curriculum managers to write effective reports has been good. The service's post-inspection action plan is thorough and updated regularly. The quality improvement group is now more effective, leading the quality improvement cycle and receiving monthly updates on progress against the actions in the post-inspection action plan. The service has extended the use of its management data system effectively to provide a wider range of timely reports. Teaching staff

now have better access to the different types of information available. The most recent self-assessment report, published in December 2009, is suitably self critical, as it was at the last inspection. It draws extensively on the last inspection report and makes suitable use of data available to support judgements. However, there is insufficient evidence in some cases to support claimed improvements since the last report and/or the last inspection. Where actions have taken place, the service does not always evaluate their impact sufficiently.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has the service made in raising work-based learning success rates? Reasonable progress

Reasonable progress has been made in improving work-based learning success rates which were satisfactory at the last inspection. Success rates have continued to fluctuate; they rose significantly in 2007/08 to almost 10% above the national average and then fell by 12 percentage points in 2008/09 to 63% and were well below the national average.

Learners' success rates in the agreed time have shown a similar trend, rising in 2007/08 to just below 70%, when they were almost 20% above the national average. In 2008/09, however, they fell by more than half to just over 30% and were significantly below the national average of 57%. The service recognises that much of this poor performance was due to poor enrolment practices implemented prior to the last inspection.

Since 2008/09, the service has implemented a number of successful changes to improve retention and framework success rates. Chief among these has been a more stringent enrolment process and a revised employer-led approach to ensure all learners are in well-remunerated employment. Of the 27 learners who started in November 2008 and who are due to complete shortly, 70% have achieved their apprenticeship and will receive certification in the very near future. Sixteen of these learners will progress to the advanced apprenticeship, with a consequent higher salary at their place of employment.

What progress has been made to improve success rates on accredited programmes, particularly at foundation level? Significant progress

At the last inspection, overall success rates were satisfactory, but were significantly below national averages at foundation level.

The service has made significant progress in improving success rates on accredited courses. In 2008/09 the success rate for long courses at foundation level was 71%; just below the national average and much higher than in previous years. Success rates at intermediate and advanced levels also showed significant improvement at 84% and 79% respectively and both are well above the national average. The number of learners fell across all the long course provision in 2008/09, significantly so at foundation and intermediate levels.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made to improve the arrangements for recognising and recording progress and achievement and in particular, the use of initial assessment to plan individual learning?

Reasonable progress

Reasonable progress has been made to improve assessment practices on non-accredited courses. Assessment was judged to be too informal at the last inspection; initial assessment was used insufficiently to determine learners' ability levels at the start of their course.

The service has carried out significant amounts of staff development to train staff in the further use of effective assessment practices. A 'staff champion' has provided training and supported the implementation of computer-based individual learning plans. The monitoring of these online plans has provided valuable information to the service. In 2009/10 to date, approximately forty percent of courses are filling electronic learning records, but this practice varies widely between subject areas. Eighty-four per cent of ESOL courses now use the new format, but in other subject areas there is no recorded activity at all. A few staff are resisting the need to implement the service's procedures for non-accredited assessment.

In many cases, initial assessment is more thorough, with better recording of learners' previous experience and individual targets. Learner surveys show that they now have a clearer understanding of the value of initial assessment in monitoring their progress and in providing self-motivation. The observation of teaching and learning process includes a thorough review of individual learning plans. Many tutors adapt group-learning goals to differentiate between learners with different individual targets, a process well understood and appreciated by the learners.

What progress has been made to improve the promotion of courses and to make progression routes clearer?

Reasonable progress

Progress to improve the promotion of courses and to make progression routes clearer is reasonable. The service did not always carry out course promotion well at the time of the last inspection and progression routes were not suitable in some subject areas.

The overall trend in declining learner numbers has continued since the last inspection, but the service has carried out a number of actions to improve the promotion of courses and to make progression routes clearer. Course outlines containing helpful advice about progression routes are now available online and there is better promotion of programmes through the council's Ideas Stores. A number of initiatives have taken place to ensure that provision for ESOL learners and Skills for Life courses better reflects the needs of local communities. ESOL courses now feature in the service's main prospectus.

Many subjects have both an introductory level course and a programme for those who wish to progress beyond this level. The service advertises taster courses at a price level to encourage new learners to enrol. Development of progression routes

for learners on community development, family learning, ESOL and Skills for Life courses is strong. The service works with external partners in these subject areas to refer learners to the most appropriate provider, as well as to avoid duplication of provision. However, the service does not yet have a marketing plan which brings together these discrete actions. During the current restructure, a significant minority of learners have concerns over the future of some of the provision and the centres they use.

Have the arrangements for advice and guidance improved, and in particular careers advice for learners? Reasonable progress

The last inspection identified the insufficient development of advice and guidance services as an area for improvement. In particular, careers advice was insufficient.

The service has made reasonable progress to rectify these weaknesses in its provision. Prospective learners now make better use of a dedicated 'advice line' e-mail address which provides improved communication between them and the service. Advice and guidance staff in the council's Ideas Stores can now readily obtain course details and timetables. The service's prospectus is available online. Tutors in subject areas continue to provide appropriate individual advice to learners through pre-enrolment interviews. Teaching staff note the more productive discussions they have with potential learners, who are more knowledgeable about courses. However, learner surveys in 2009/10 show a decline in learner satisfaction with the accuracy of course information in the current year.

The service has made reasonable progress in advising current learners about their progression opportunities. It links effectively with other community organisations in the area, with the borough's 'Skills Match' service offering advice on employment, and with local colleges. Improvements in the collection of recruitment data are beginning to provide a more systematic review of the needs of local residents. This is having a positive effect upon the strategic planning of courses.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made to implement fully the observation of teaching and learning process and to rectify the areas for improvement in teaching and learning identified at the last inspection? Reasonable progress

The service has made reasonable progress to implement fully its observation of teaching and learning process and to rectify areas for improvement identified at its last inspection. At the time of the last inspection, the service had recently revised its observation process, but the grades given by observers were too high in some cases and teaching and learning were only satisfactory.

The revised observation process ensures that the service observes a greater proportion of tutors earlier in the year. Most tutors met during this visit have been observed at least once since September 2009 and value the process. Most observations carried out so far in 2009/10 show a much clearer focus on learning and skills development. Observers' notes demonstrate clearly in most cases what

learning is taking place and how they arrive at the key judgements about the lesson and an overall grade. Action planning for tutors following observation is much more detailed and specific, with clear actions and timescales. The use of information and learning technology by tutors is improving.

The proportion of good and better teaching and learning as judged through the observation process has declined in 2009/10. The service sees this is a positive move in the long-term as it presents a more accurate picture of the quality of the provision and more closely matches the findings of the last inspection.

Moderation of observation grades is an informal process at the moment involving individual feedback to observers, but this ensures that observers receive immediate support to improve their practice where necessary. This arrangement is appropriate, given the current restructuring within the service.

Have the arrangements for the evaluation of staff development and performance review for part-time staff improved?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

The service has made reasonable progress to improve its evaluation of staff development and performance review for part-time staff. It does not yet carry out any formal overall evaluation of the impact or value for money of staff development. There is clear evidence that training for staff since the last inspection is starting to have a positive effect, particularly in important areas such as teaching and assessment.

Staff development now targets specific activities to develop managers' and tutors' expertise or to rectify areas for improvement. For example, a recent staff development day focused on setting clear expectations for tutors judged to require improvements in their teaching practice.

Offering part-time staff the opportunity for performance review meetings is extremely challenging for the service, given the high proportions of part-time and hourly-paid staff. Some tutors do have occasional face-to-face meetings with subject area managers to review their performance, but this is not standard practice across the service. Mentors who are often experienced full-time members of the teaching team support many tutors. Tutors value the system of peer review through which they can share good practice. However, the main way in which performance is reviewed remains the lesson observation process with its greater focus on supportive action planning.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010