

# Westminster Adult Education Service

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Alex Falconer HMI

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Type of provider: Local Authority

Address: Amberley Road Centre  
Amberley Road  
London W9 2JJ

Telephone number: 020 7297 7297

## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) provides adult and community learning for adults living and working in the London Borough of Westminster. It is a service of Westminster City Council. Westminster is socially, culturally and economically diverse, with areas of wealth interspersed with other areas of extreme poverty, some of which are among the 10% most deprived areas in England. The population of the borough is rapidly increasing and it has the second largest proportion of older people in Inner London. Around 80% of the service's learners belong to minority ethnic groups, compared with 48% in the local community. A large number of national and international commercial companies are located in Westminster, along with many small and medium-sized enterprises. WAES is funded by the London Central Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

The service's provision is taught in three main centres, at Amberley Road, Ebury Bridge and Frith Street, and up to 70 much smaller community venues. It comprises daytime, evening and weekend programmes at a variety of levels from entry level to level 4. Courses are mainly part-time, either through year-long courses or shorter provision. Over half of the curriculum offer is within the Skills for Life subject area, with a significant number of learners also studying arts, media and publishing. Courses are offered in ten subject areas. Currently the service has around 12,000 enrolments with approximately 7,500 learners. Train to Gain provision is growing rapidly, with 2,024 learners in 2008/09.

At the last inspection, in spring 2009, the service was found to be good overall with good capacity to improve. Achievement and standards in adult and community learning were found to be satisfactory and good in the Train to Gain provision. The quality of provision was also found to be good as were leadership and management and equality of opportunity. Curriculum inspectors found health, public services and care; arts, media and publishing; and, preparation for life and work to be good. The provision for leisure, travel and tourism was judged to be satisfactory.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

<p>Question What impact are the self-assessment process and the post-inspection action having on the capacity of the service to make and sustain improvements?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Self-assessment procedures and post-inspection action plans are making reasonable progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Quality assurance has been strengthened and the annual curriculum reviews are now more rigorous. The recently appointed quality manager ensures that progress on improvement plans is followed up and actions implemented. Learners'

success rates have improved slightly and the lesson observation system is more thorough. Train to Gain staff have been introduced to the observation scheme and this provision is now fully part of the observation cycle. Employer engagement has continued to develop and the business development unit has strong links across the borough of Westminster. There is a greater focus on the accurate initial assessment of learners' needs to inform Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA). However, distance travelled, progression and destinations are not always effectively recorded. Service managers have put in place strategies and programmes to encourage more participation by male learners; these are beginning to have a positive impact.

### Outcomes for learners

Question What improvements have been made to learners' success rates, particularly those for learners on Skills for Life programmes and short accredited courses? Reasonable progress

Learners' success rates have continued to improve. Overall success rates for further education funded learners improved slightly and in 2008/09 were 69%. Qualifications pass rates improved by three percentage points to 81%. However, retention slipped back a little to 85%, a decline of two percentage points. Adult safeguarded learning success rates were 83% in 2008/09 and overall Train to Gain also improved. Timely achievement on Train to Gain remains a concern. Almost half the trainees exceed the end date for their qualifications. Managers across the service have appropriately focused on retention and attendance and improvements are beginning to be recorded. Following analysis of learners' success rates by ethnicity, the service identified learners for Pakistani, African and White Asian backgrounds as making less progress than their peers. Focused support and guidance were put in place and increases in completion and achievements have been recorded. However, it is too soon to judge the full impact of these measures.

### Quality of provision

Question What progress has been made in monitoring learners' progress? Reasonable progress

Improvements in tracking and monitoring learners' progress are in place. A new electronic individual learning plan has been developed and will be used by staff in the very near future. This web-based initiative has some well-considered links to schemes of work and curriculum planning. Paper individual learning plans (ILPs) are currently in place and their use is good in some curriculum areas and poor in others. NVQ portfolios and learning plans in health and care show clear, well-organised tracking with quantitative targets and completion dates. However, in one sample from English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners, the ILPs were not used as intended and the learners derived no benefit from completing them. Good initial and diagnostic assessments are effectively used to guide learners to the appropriate level and qualification. Additional support is clearly identified and is flexibly provided to meet specific needs. Progression data are held at curriculum

team level and well understood at that level. However, the service is still developing methods by which the data can be summarised and analysed at a strategic level.

### Leadership and management

Question What improvements have been made to allow full access to all accommodation? Reasonable progress

The overall thrust of the accommodation strategy remains sensibly focused on three main centres located across Westminster to allow optimum access for service users. In addition, there are 71 community venues that continue to meet specific local needs. In the summer of 2010 the service will be operating in two new centres that represent considerable improvements to the current accommodation. To that end, the unsuitable accommodation in Frith Street is to be closed very soon and will be replaced by accessible, and centrally located, accommodation in a West End location. This location is close enough to Frith Street to allow continuity of use by current clients, some of whom have mental health issues. The new centre in Pimlico is nearing completion and, when it opens in summer 2010, will be a modern and attractive addition to the facilities for learners in the south of the borough. However, plans to replace the Amberley Road centre and to build new accommodation have been disrupted as external funding did not materialise. Amberley Road is a converted Victorian school and while it has ample accommodation, it is not accessible above the ground floor to those with physical disabilities. WAES is continuing to seek funding to take forward the accommodation strategy and Westminster local authority is collaborating with the service to find ways of developing the accommodation.

Question What strategies have been put in place to improve quality assurance and target setting at curriculum level? How are the outcomes from these strategies monitored to assess impact? Reasonable progress

Quality assurance and self-assessment have continued to develop and are now more embedded in service practices. Curriculum reviews and annual evaluations are more rigorous and consistent. Managers monitor improvement plan progress termly. This has ensured that actions are completed and has had a positive impact on the quality of provision. Managers understand data more thoroughly and short-term targets are more focused, flexible and effective. The lesson observation system has been revised and staff training completed. Moderation meetings take place and all teaching staff will be observed by the end of the year. In Train to Gain, staff have been trained and developmental observations have taken place. Graded observations in Train to Gain will start before March. Surveys, courses evaluations and focus group meetings have taken place to ascertain learners' views. The results from these are in the process of being incorporated into improvement plans.

Question What progress has been made in ensuring that criminal record checks are complete for all staff? Reasonable progress

Reasonable progress has been made in ensuring that criminal record checks are completed for all staff. The majority of Criminal Records Bureau checks have been completed. Those outstanding will be completed by the end of March. Awareness training on safeguarding and child protection for staff, learners and employers is in progress. Policy and procedures for safeguarding and child protection are being reviewed.

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

T: 08456 404040  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
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