

# Reading Borough Council New Directions

Focused monitoring visit report

---

Unique reference number: 54075

Name of lead inspector: Lynda Cole HMI

Last day of inspection: 29 July 2010

Type of provider: Local authority

Address: Reading Borough Council  
West Reading Centre  
Wilson Road  
Reading  
Berkshire  
RG30 2RW

Telephone number: 0345 842 0012

## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

New Directions is part of Reading Borough Council's (RBC) Education and Children's Services and is funded by Berkshire Skills Funding Agency. New Directions provides adult education in three RBC-owned centres, one leased centre and a number of outreach centres in the borough. Most learners are enrolled on non-accredited learning. A small amount of Train to Gain provision is offered to RBC employees.

Reading is one of the principal regional and commercial centres of Thames Valley. Minority ethnic groups account for over 13% of the population. While the town has an image of relative prosperity, one ward is among the 5% most deprived in the country.

At the inspection in 2007, New Directions was found to be inadequate. At the re-inspection in January 2009, overall effectiveness and capacity to improve were satisfactory as were the sector subject areas. Leadership and management and equality of opportunity were inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit, which included the two mandatory themes of outcomes for learners and self-assessment and improvement planning.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has been made in making self-assessment sufficiently self-critical leading to quality improvement?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

At the last inspection achievement and standards and one area of learning had been improved. The self-assessment process was judged to be satisfactory and the report had a reasonable range of evidence and involved staff. Aspects of the report were insufficiently informative, although the work leading to the report was more detailed and helpful. The process led to a detailed quality improvement plan.

The current quality improvement plan, following the 2008/09 self-assessment, does not focus well on the impact of actions on learners. Development actions identified are sometimes useful and a few commentaries use quantitative data to show improvements. However, monthly progress reports monitor very specific actions that too often do not show how the actions improve the overall objective, such as improving retention and achievement.

RBC has improved self-assessment processes for the 2009/10 academic year. The format of the report has changed considerably, with an increased focus on the impact on learners. New headings relate more directly to the learners' experience from recruitment through to completion. Tutors use these headings to give managers

a more detailed and specific overview. Curriculum managers identify outcomes using data more routinely to inform judgements and review provision more critically. Grades seem realistic and are based on evaluative evidence.

### Outcomes for learners

How much progress has been made in improving success rates particularly on Adult Learner Responsive (ALR) provision? Insufficient progress

The last inspection, at the mid-point of 2008/09, judged that outcomes for learners were generally satisfactory. However, at the end of that year actual success rates for ALR provision finished well below the previous year's rates. The level 1 long course rate fell by 21 percentage points, with falls of 11 and 8 points for short and level 2 long courses respectively. The main problems were with retention in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. This was recognised in self-assessment and some changes were immediately introduced, such as revised examination arrangements, with other changes including new delivery models planned for 2010/11. In-year retention is already much improved. New Directions is reasonably forecasting better success rates in nearly all courses for the current year, although some results may still be below minimum levels of performance. Adult safeguarded learning rates improved in most areas in 2008/9, and have been maintained or bettered in the current year. The small Train to Gain provision is now better managed and resourced leading to improved performance; published timely rates are still low but many recent completions are improving this position.

### Quality of provision

What progress has RBC made in improving the way teachers assess, monitor and record learners' progress including how well they use initial assessment? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection planning and assessment of learning remained a key area for development from the previous inspection. Since then RBC has improved the processes to plan, assess, record and evaluate non-accredited learning. In the best practice, teachers write specific and measurable aims and write useful feedback for learners on their progress. Managers have introduced an effective validation system that identified that not all teachers are setting sufficient measurable aims or capturing their learners' progress adequately. Records show that teachers in ESOL provision have improved their teaching and learning and are using varied approaches to help learners recall their learning. Learners on modern foreign language courses are using learning diaries well to record their progress. However, on leisure learning courses, too many teachers do not record sufficient information about initial assessment.

RBC has improved arrangements to ensure initial assessment is used appropriately to place learners on the right course. New Directions has recently achieved the MATRIX

award for initial advice and guidance. Management information systems have been refined and now capture information about learners on enrolment that can easily be shared with tutors. Training for front line staff has helped ensure learners' specific individual needs are met more routinely.

### Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in using MIS by staff at levels effectively? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection management information was not used sufficiently by managers. Some managers were using the improved recording system but others were not routinely using it for identifying trends and concerns. Managers at some levels did not receive data that were sufficiently useful for quality improvement purposes.

The availability of data on routine matters has been improved, and is now being used effectively by staff for improvement activities. Managers now routinely and regularly receive data about performance in a number of important areas including retention and achievement to monitor provision. The data include information from a wider range of sources and are presented in a useful and informative format. Not all staff understand all elements of this data, but the review process and discussion are improving action planning. Managers are improving the way they use data for equality monitoring and improvement, but this aspect is still being developed. Staff and learners are using the service's virtual learning environment to access information more effectively. Innovative work on using web-based documents to exchange information is helping to improve the speed at which data are exchanged, although this is currently mainly in the computing course area.

How well has RBC updated staff on issues relating to equality of opportunity and safeguarding and what progress has been made in developing a wider understanding across the service? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection equality of opportunity was inadequate. RBC was in the process of checking all staff in relation to the vetting and barring scheme and there was a planned programme of staff training. However, procedures for safeguarding learners did not meet government requirements.

RBC's safeguarding arrangements are much improved and meet, and in several respects exceed requirements. RBC's checks for Criminal Records Bureau disclosures are now comprehensive and thorough. All staff receive appropriate awareness training, with staff identified as working routinely with vulnerable adults receiving additional training. A designated manager handles any notified incidents well and he and other staff use specialist borough resources very effectively. The concept of safeguarding is well promoted to staff and learners and staff understanding is now good. RBC has recently introduced a system of reviewing, by subject area, the performance of differing groups of learners. Improvement actions have been

---

identified through this and other systems. Equality and differentiation are better covered in teaching observations. New staff now receive basic, but helpful, equalities training. The service is formally covered by borough equality schemes. These are out of date but are being revised into a single equalities scheme. The service is developing its own strategy to ensure it meets its specific duties. Good partnership working, to meet needs of disadvantaged groups, continues to expand.

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](mailto: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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2010