

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Voluntary and Community Sector Learning and Skills Consortium

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Voluntary organisation

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Voluntary and Community Sector Learning and Skills Consortium (Enable) is a voluntary sector organisation which operates from an office within a voluntary action centre in Nottingham. It promotes basic skills and employability for people living in the most deprived communities. It holds a contract with the Skills Funding Agency for the provision of adult safeguarded learning. At the time of this monitoring visit Enable had awarded sub-contracts to 22 local organisations and had 143 enrolled learners. Since the inspection the organisation's quality lead has returned from maternity leave. The provider has also retained the person employed as maternity cover for the post.

Enable was inspected for the first time in April 2011. Overall effectiveness and all aspects of the provision were graded as satisfactory except for capacity to improve, which was graded as inadequate. Although the provider has a contract to deliver apprenticeship training there were no learners at the time of the inspection. The inspection was therefore confined to its adult safeguarded learning provision and focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made against the targets in the post-inspection action plan and self-assessment?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, the self-assessment report was recognised as being broadly accurate, although the process was not sufficiently inclusive. The provider has now revised the self-assessment process with support from an external consultant. Actions are taking place to involve Enable's sub-contractors more effectively in the process. A useful position paper was submitted for review at the monitoring visit. The first draft of a post-inspection action plan was devised in May 2011 and version nine was in use at the monitoring visit. The plans have clear actions relating to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection in April 2011. Target dates for achievement of these actions, milestones, persons responsible, resources required and success indicators are given and the level of detail has increased with successive versions. A highly visual progress key using red, amber and green indicators clearly shows the rates of progress against action points. While completion target dates mostly provide rather generous timescales, some, such as improving sub-contractors' collection of learner feedback and managers' use of learner outcome data have already been partly achieved ahead of targets.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made to improve success rates on longer courses? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection outcomes for learners were judged to be satisfactory overall. However the team identified two areas that Enable needed to improve. The first was to improve success rates on longer courses by identifying the reasons for poor performance and taking corrective actions. Actions taken to address this issue have included the removal of Level 1 provision, which represented most of the longer course provision, from the contracts of a number of sub-contractors. Enable has given all sub-contractors strong reminders of the importance of their monitoring and reporting of retention, achievement and success rates for their learners. A number of sub-contractors had been judging their own success on the number of learner enrolments rather than their successful course completion or achievement. These sub-contractors now understand how to judge their success rates correctly; however, it is too early to judge the impact of any actions they have taken.

What progress has the provider made in improving attendance through the better monitoring and follow up of unauthorised absence? Insufficient progress

At the previous inspection, attendance was poor on many programmes. All Enable's provision continues to be delivered by the sub-contractor members of its consortium. Enable still does not have a process for collecting attendance data to effectively manage the provision and, for example, to monitor trends such as learners at risk of leaving their programmes, retention and efficient class sizes. Enable is unaware of what systems are being used by its sub-contractors to collect attendance data and has not as yet investigated these. Enable's managers are exploring the introduction of a computerised system for collating, analysing and evaluating attendance data across its sub-contractors. In the meantime, Enable staff record attendance during teaching and learning quality assurance observation visits and the provider has included the requirement to follow-up non-attendance in the 2011 revised service level agreements. Reviews of learners' attendance are now included in contract monitoring visits. The board of directors does not require managers to present attendance data at board meetings in order for directors to review trends and be well informed the effectiveness of the provision.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in supporting sub-contractors' teachers in improving the quality of learning sessions? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, teaching, learning and assessment were satisfactory. The many positive aspects to lessons, included; engaging learners well, providing timely constructive feedback on their work and praise and encouragement. However, effective planning of some aspects was identified as needing improvement. These

included; insufficiently challenging learning activities, learners not encouraged to work together, slow paced lessons with insufficiently challenging and individualised tasks, and tutors talking for too long and failing to involve learners. Enable has introduced a most comprehensive and supportive quality assurance process to assess and improve schemes of work and lesson plans used by its sub-contractors. This was extremely well executed by Enable's Quality Improvement Leads along with the Curriculum and Accreditation Lead. However, the process identified much inadequate practice when it assessed the submitted work against its newly devised criteria. Re-submissions to date, despite being few, have shown the process is highly supportive. As a result, teachers' observation grades have mostly improved to good and one to outstanding. The revised teaching and learning observation procedure is clear and detailed. It includes Skills for Life specialist observations and peer observations in addition to those done by quality improvement observers.

What progress has been made in introducing an effective new strategy to improve the proportion of teachers of literacy, language and numeracy with relevant specialist teaching qualifications?

Insufficient progress

At the previous inspection most teachers had a teaching qualification but few had an appropriate literacy, language or numeracy qualification. This has not changed. Enable is unaware whether or not any of its sub-contractors' teachers have enrolled onto appropriate courses. The provider has carried out a comprehensive audit of teachers' qualifications. This identified that 40 of the 106 teachers teach Skills for Life subjects. Of these 40, all have a teaching qualification, but 17 have yet to gain the diploma level award to achieve qualified teacher status. Only eight of the Skills for Life teachers hold a specialist literacy, language and/or numeracy qualification and the remainder still need to achieve a qualification in the subject(s) they teach. Managers hold information recording which teachers are currently 'active', but have not analysed it to prioritise support and course enrolments. To date Enable has not decided how to support teachers to gain the required qualifications. Although it has researched local providers and course costs, Enable has not yet fully explored the financial implications. The 2011-2014 Skills for Life (Language, Literacy and Numeracy) Strategy was approved during the week of the monitoring visit. It requires all teaching and assessing staff to hold relevant specialist qualifications to deliver discrete literacy, language and numeracy provision.

What progress has the provider made in supporting sub-contractors to implement more robust initial assessment processes?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, initial assessment and diagnostic assessment of specific learning needs was often weak and not always used effectively to place learners on appropriate programmes. Inspectors judged that Enable needed to support sub-contractors to implement more robust initial assessment processes. Since the inspection Enable staff have conducted a comprehensive survey of the procedures and processes being used by the sub-contractors in this area. Simultaneously they

investigated best practice examples from other providers. As a result Enable produced standards against which it then graded each sub-contractor's processes giving action points for improvement. Enable is currently conducting follow up monitoring visits to observe the processes in action and to revise the grades and/or actions required to improve them. It is however still too early to judge the impact on the learners although sub-contractors claim to now recognise the need to place learners on courses which best suit their needs and capabilities.

Leadership and Management

What progress has the provider made in promoting better participation of subcontractors in contributing to improvements?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection sub-contractors did not participate fully in self-assessment nor did they always gather learner feedback consistently or effectively. There are clear requirements in the service level agreement with each sub-contractor to produce its own self-assessment report (SAR) in order to contribute to Enable's overarching SAR and to obtain evaluative feedback from learners. Enable has strongly reminded sub-contractors of these requirements indicating non-renewal of sub-contract for non-compliance. At the same time the provider strongly encourages sub-contractors to become involved in quality improvement activities such as questionnaire design. However, sub-contracts have already been awarded for the academic year 2011/12 so any decision not to renew will not take effect until the following year. So far there has been little response from sub-contractors to become further involved and it is too early to judge any improvement in the submission of their SARs to support the provider's own SAR, which is not due for publication until March 2012. Enable is now conducting quality monitoring visits to ensure compliance with its quality standards and contract managers have regular meetings with each of the sub-contractors at which they further reinforce the requirements.

How far have management information systems and the accuracy and accessibility of data to managers improved?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection managers were not always using learner outcome data effectively to support management actions or improve the performance of all learners. Enable was introducing a more appropriate management information system to track learners' progress. The new system is now fully operational. It is designed to be compatible with the funding body's systems and now produces accurate data and relevant management reports more quickly than the old system. Enable managers now make good use of the resultant data to monitor overall performance for the consortium and for each of its sub-contractors and to compare the performance of different groups of learners. Although the provider has transferred data from previous years into the new system it has little confidence in the accuracy of this old data. Although Enable has an accurate picture of current performance, it will take some time to build up sufficient reliable data to enable

managers to fully identify trends. Managers are using performance data well and share individual sub-contractors' data with them.

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