

Sunderland City Council

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Sunderland City Council following publication of the inspection report on 19 February 2018, which found the provider to be inadequate overall. The effectiveness of leadership and management, and personal development, behaviour and welfare were also judged as inadequate. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners required improvement. Of the provision types inspected, apprenticeships were found to be inadequate and adult learning required improvement.

Since the inspection, the two previously separate branches of Sunderland City Council's funded provision, Tyne and Wear Care Alliance, and Family, Adult and Community Learning, have merged into one organisation under a single head of service. The new organisation is also about to take responsibility for the Connexions service.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 381 apprentices on health and social care apprenticeship programmes, 366 learners on community learning courses and 72 learners on adult skills funded programmes. The apprenticeship provision is delivered by three subcontractors and the council's own direct-delivery assessment centre. All of the adult learning is delivered by 16 subcontractors. Following the inspection, the council has not recruited any new apprentices onto programmes and is winding down its apprenticeship contract.

Themes

Have managers undertaken a service-specific 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and have they started to implement effectively the actions arising from this risk assessment? Are learners and apprentices more aware of how to keep themselves safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism?

Managers were swift to carry out a 'Prevent' duty risk assessment immediately after the inspection. They have developed an action plan that is relevant to the context of the service's delivery, most notably its use of subcontractors to deliver a high proportion of its provision. The action plan covers all the key areas in the national guidance for further education and skills providers, and only a few actions remain to be completed. For example, managers have not yet produced a freedom of expression policy or included specific requirements to implement the 'Prevent' duty in contracts to be awarded to subcontractors as part of this year's commissioning process. Managers have disseminated the findings of the risk assessment and the action plan effectively to direct-delivery staff and subcontractors through a series of well-attended forums and training events.

The profile of the 'Prevent' duty is much higher than it was at the time of the inspection. Visual displays and learner induction booklets in classrooms and workshops highlight the risks of radicalisation and extremism and promote fundamental British values. Tutors and assessors now reinforce these issues with their learners and apprentices more effectively through a series of one-to-one discussions, research tasks and 'bite-size' scenarios. Managers carry out interviews with apprentices to assure themselves that apprentices' levels of understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism, and their awareness of how to stay safe from these risks, are increasing. Initial results from these interviews show that the great majority of apprentices recognise risks and know how to report any concerns.

Priority for improvement

- Ensure that all remaining areas in the 'Prevent' duty action plan are implemented in line with agreed timescales.

Have managers established an effective system for reporting, analysing and acting upon safeguarding incidents across the directly delivered and subcontracted provision? Are tutors and assessors, and learners and apprentices, clear about how they report safeguarding incidents?

Managers now have an effective system in place to report and analyse safeguarding concerns and incidents across all areas of the provision. Since the inspection, there have been 13 reported incidents, all of which have been dealt with appropriately.

Safeguarding concerns and incidents are standard agenda items at all subcontractor review meetings, which was not the case at the time of the previous inspection. Reports on safeguarding concerns and incidents are a central feature of the service's newly developed performance management framework. The reports receive a high level of scrutiny at all levels of the organisation, including by elected members and senior leaders of the council. It is still too early for managers to use the information that they have collected to identify trends or to learn lessons about how they have dealt with safeguarding concerns, but this analysis is planned for later in the year.

Managers at subcontractors are fully aware of the new reporting requirements for safeguarding concerns and incidents, and respond to them effectively. The great majority of learners and apprentices are clear about how, and to whom, they should report any concerns about safeguarding.

Priority for improvement

- Carry out the planned analysis of safeguarding concerns and provide additional training for staff on how to identify and respond effectively to these issues.

Are elected members and senior leaders ensuring that the actions for improvement from the previous inspection are being implemented swiftly and effectively?

Elected members and senior leaders have a good level of understanding of the main actions contained in the post-inspection action plan and receive regular reports on progress against these actions. They recognise that, at this stage, many of the completed actions relate to the development of new processes and procedures. They are aware that they need to see the impact of these actions on the outcomes for learners and the quality of the provision. Due to impending local government elections, it is highly likely that the current, very experienced, portfolio holders for adult learning and apprenticeships will change.

The post-inspection action plan contains a detailed set of actions for each of the main improvement areas identified at the previous inspection. However, the success measures for some key actions do not have clear enough targets to enable senior leaders and elected members to know whether they have been achieved. For example, there are no measurable quantitative targets, or the dates by which these should be achieved, for apprentices' overall achievement rates or for a reduction in the number of apprentices on breaks in learning.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that the new portfolio holders for adult learning and apprenticeships are briefed swiftly and thoroughly so they can be effective in holding managers to account for the implementation of the post-inspection action plan.
- Revise the success measures in the post-inspection action plan so that, where relevant, they contain clear quantitative targets and timescales for completion.

Have managers improved their use of management information to enable them to evaluate better the quality of teaching, learning and assessment? Are managers using this information more effectively to monitor the implementation of quality improvement actions?

Managers are not yet in a position to use timely and accurate management information to enable them to be fully effective in evaluating the quality of the provision. A new management information system had been commissioned at the time of the previous inspection but had only just been installed before the monitoring visit. As a result, staff are still undergoing training on how to use the new system to generate the range of reports that they need to assure and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Senior leaders and elected members have provided additional support and expertise from the council's performance unit to ensure that the new system will be able to produce reports that capture the provider's key performance measures. However, at

present the service does not have the capacity to enter all its enrolments onto the new system, so cannot currently produce accurate reports on learner numbers.

Priority for improvement

- Accelerate the implementation of the new management information system so that it can produce timely, accurate and accessible data that managers can use effectively to analyse the quality of the provision.

Have managers improved the arrangements for monitoring the quality of the adult learning and apprenticeship provision delivered by subcontractors?

At the time of the previous inspection, the overall management of subcontractors was found to be weak, and particularly so for those subcontractors delivering apprenticeships. Since the inspection, the contract management of apprenticeship subcontractors has strengthened considerably. Managers hold contract review meetings with subcontractors much more frequently than previously. They scrutinise the progress of individual apprentices intensively, drawing up action plans for those apprentices who are making slower than expected progress. Managers remove apprentices from underperforming subcontractors and transfer them to their own directly delivered programme to hasten their progress. As a result of these concerted actions, current overall achievement rates are higher than they were at the same time last year, and the number of apprentices on breaks in learning has halved.

The pace of improvement in the management of adult learning subcontractors has been slower. Too many subcontractors have not received a formal review meeting since the inspection; a number of scheduled reviews have been pushed back due to a lack of capacity in the adult learning team. Managers have developed a well-considered contract management procedure that aims to increase the scrutiny of the performance of adult learning subcontractors, but this is not scheduled to be fully deployed until the new academic year. Improvements to the quality of performance information used at contract reviews is dependent on the speed at which the new management information system becomes fully operational.

Priority for improvement

- Ensure that the adult learning team has the capacity and expertise to execute the changes in the way it reviews the performance of its subcontractors, and quicken the pace at which these changes are implemented.

Are apprentices receiving their entitlement to high-quality off-the-job training, and have managers established the systems to ensure that this is taking place?

Managers have developed a range of effective measures to identify whether apprentices are receiving their entitlement to off-the-job training. For those

apprentices taking their qualifications through the direct-delivery assessment centre, who make up about a third of all current apprentices, managers have devised a learning log that captures the type and duration of apprentices' off-the-job training. Two of the largest subcontractors have implemented systems to monitor off-the-job training, but this has only been applied to the learning that has taken place since the inspection.

Apprentices' access to off-the-job training remains insufficient. Only half of apprentices are given time by their employers to study for their qualifications while they are at work. This reflects the lack of employer engagement in most aspects of their apprentices' learning. Responses to the regular questionnaires completed by apprentices since the inspection demonstrate that only a third of employers were involved in the selection of the qualification units that their employees study, and about the same proportion participate in reviews. Despite this lack of employer engagement, the vast majority of apprentices report that they learn new skills through their qualifications that help them to achieve their career aspirations.

Priority for improvement

- Ensure that assessors and contract monitoring officers reinforce with employers the requirement to provide their apprentices with time at work to complete their studies.

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