



Department
for Education

FE Commissioner Intervention Assessment Summary Report: Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council

April 2024

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Background

Name of local authority	Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
UKPRN	10005413
Type of provision	Adult Skills and apprenticeships
Date of visit	23 April 2024
Type of visit	Formal intervention assessment
Further Education Commissioner (FEC) Team members	FE Commissioner – Shelagh Legrave Deputy FE Commissioner – Phil Cook FE Adviser – Ellie Churchward
Leader of the Council	Councillor Alec Brown
Managing Director	John Sampson
Location	Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Seafield House Kirkleatham Street Redcar TS10 1RT
Apprenticeship training provider	Yes
Special considerations	The council's Adult Learning Service is funded via the Tees Valley Combined Authority

Conclusion and executive summary

The Adult Learning Service (ALS) is well aligned to the objectives of the council. The service's vision is to "engage and inspire learners to develop skills to enable them to progress into further learning, training or employment." The service has an important role in its local community. A proactive approach is being adopted by leaders and managers, who are committed to improving the service.

Since the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspection, the council has established a task and finish group to drive improvements across the range of the service's activities. While much work has been undertaken, the council now needs to prioritise its activities as there remains a lot to do; all activities should be focused on the provision of high-quality education.

To ensure long term effective governance, an advisory board should be set up. The board should be given the appropriate information to be able to effectively monitor progress and to provide support and challenge. So that managers can keep up to date with new developments, partnerships should be explored for external support.

Provision needs to be aligned to new funding developments (tailored learning) and staff should receive high-quality continuous professional development (CPD). There is a need to ensure all staff are clear and accountable in respect of expectations and targets. To aid prioritisation and direct efforts and resources, both the self-assessment report (SAR) and the post inspection action plan (PIAP) need to be tightened to ensure clarity and focus. The comparatively small size of the service, and the commitment of the council members and senior management, mean that progress should be rapid.

The FEC team will complete a follow-up intervention stocktake visit in October 2024.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Governance

The council should establish a bespoke board or advisory group for the ALS. This should, in time, replace the task and finish group as a sustainable method of ensuring high-quality governance. **Target date: December 24**

Recommendation 2: Governance

Management information systems should be further developed by leaders and managers to provide higher levels of assurance for key aspects of the service, such as curriculum planning, learner destinations, teaching and learning. **Target date: September 24**

Recommendation 3: Leadership

Leaders and managers should ensure clear targets and expectations for both managers and staff are embedded, providing clear lines of accountability. **Target date: September 24**

Recommendation 4: Leadership

Managers should seek further collaboration with, and support from, other organisations. Reporting mechanisms should enable scrutiny of the extent and impact of external support. **Target date: December 24**

Recommendation 5: Leadership

The council should review performance management systems and processes, ensuring they are fit for purpose and aligned to the provision of high-quality teaching. **Target date: September 24**

Recommendation 6: Curriculum and quality improvement

Managers should ensure strategy and funding from August 2024 are appropriately aligned to new developments (tailored learning). **Target date: July 24**

Recommendation 7: Curriculum and quality improvement

Tutors should receive appropriate ongoing training that will enable a high-quality education and good progress for all learners. **Target date: to commence May 24**

Recommendation 8: Quality: self-assessment judgement and effectiveness in managing and improving quality

The SAR should be made SMARTer and pinpoint key achievements and areas for improvement that are aligned to the quality of education. **Target date: September 24**

Recommendation 9: Quality: self-assessment judgement and effectiveness in managing and improving quality

Leaders must maintain the momentum for developing and implementing a teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) framework, with evidence-based practice linked to a teacher development cycle. **Target date: June 24**

Recommendation 10: Quality: self-assessment judgement and effectiveness in managing and improving quality

To enable the pace of change required, the service should produce a single quality improvement plan, clearly identifying impact measures critical to all aspects of education. This should be closely monitored and supported by a regular detailed commentary on the impact of developments. **Target date: September 24**

Governance and leadership

Governance

The ALS is well aligned to the objectives of the council. The service's vision is to "engage and inspire learners to develop skills to enable them to progress into further learning, training or employment." The ALS sits in the directorate of growth, enterprise, and environment. The directorate is large, covering a very broad range of services.

The council has well-established systems of service scrutiny, including regular internal meetings held as part of the council's normal systems and practices. The ALS provides regular detailed reports. Management information reports primarily focus on retention, attendance, and achievement. The Ofsted outcome (inadequate, Dec 23) came as a surprise to all parties involved in the delivery and scrutiny of the service.

A proactive approach is being adopted by leaders and managers, who are enthused and committed to improving the service. Post Ofsted, a task and finish group has been established to monitor, scrutinise and challenge, with a particular focus on the post inspection action plan. The group includes the executive member for growth and skills, the executive director of growth, enterprise and the environment, relevant council officers, staff and employer representatives.

As the ALS is a comparatively small service, and part of a large directorate, the council should establish a bespoke board or advisory group to ensure future scrutiny, support and challenge. This should, in time, replace the task and finish group as a sustainable method of ensuring high-quality governance.

To support the above, management information systems should be further developed by leaders and managers to provide higher levels of assurance for key aspects of the service, such as curriculum planning, teaching and learning. Retention, attendance, and achievement remain very important key performance indicators (KPIs). Destinations data should be enhanced, providing explicit alignment to the purpose and objectives of the service. There should be a greater focus on providing assurance for teaching and learning, staffing matters such as staff morale, and the impact of both CPD and external support. Governance reporting structures should ensure a focus on performance indicators linked to each curriculum area. The council should consider the development of a data dashboard.

The FEC will provide support to develop the board or advisory group and advice regarding the development of management information outputs.

Leadership

The council has a system of leadership and accountability for the ALS. Management of the service is reasonably resourced (bearing in mind the service's size), with an adult learning and skills manager and a curriculum manager. The service also has several senior tutor roles.

Since the Ofsted inspection, the council has acted quickly to increase scrutiny, support, and challenge. Student outcomes show signs of significant improvement. However, the council should ensure clear targets and expectations for both managers and staff are embedded, enhancing current lines of accountability.

As the ALS is a comparatively small service, managers face capacity challenges regarding maintaining a line of sight on new developments, for example developments in pedagogy. Managers are in regular contact with other local authority adult learning providers and a large independent training provider (ITP) has recently provided a critical friend role. However, managers should further seek collaboration with and support from other organisations. Reporting mechanisms should enable scrutiny of the extent and impact of external support. Locally, potential partners are unlikely to see the service as competition (the ALS being a provision targeting those hardest to reach). Much of the service delivery is based at the local college, with which the service and the council have an excellent relationship; collaboration on CPD should be explored. Nationally, the service should continue its engagement with HOLEX (representative body for adult community education). Reporting mechanisms should enable scrutiny of the extent and impact of external support.

In recent times, the service has had challenges managing underperformance; it reports this did have an impact on the Ofsted inspection. The council should review performance management systems and processes to ensure they are fit for purpose and aligned to the delivery of high-quality teaching and learning.

Curriculum and quality improvement

Curriculum and provision overview, planning and development

The ALS delivers a range of non-accredited courses known as Learning for Inclusion (Lfi), regulated functional skills, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), a range of bespoke employer provision, and, until recently, apprenticeships. Approximately 1,100 learners attend ALS programmes each year. As a result of Ofsted judging the service inadequate, the Department for Education (DfE) issued a notice of intention to take contractual action, inviting the council to make representations. After consideration of the representations, DfE issued a notice of termination for both the council's very small, nationally funded adult education budget (AEB) provision and its apprenticeship agreement, with a termination date of 19 July 2024. Accordingly, apprenticeship provision was not reviewed as part of this intervention visit.

Much of the service offer is designed to provide a platform for engagement for those least likely to participate in learning, with low or no qualifications, and those looking for work. The aim is a supportive learning pathway to improve the lives of residents both in the community and in the workplace. Lfi is delivered in conjunction with community groups and schools, with the main base in the local college. It is used as a lever to inspire achievement and further progression.

In March 2023, progression from the Lfl to AEB is reported as 7.7% and in March 2024 as 1.7%. Progression within the regulated AEB provision to another regulated course is higher. Progression from mathematics increased from 23.5% in March 2023 to 46.2% in March 2024, while progression from English increased from 29.4% to 46.2% over the same period. Longer-term destination tracking has been developed to enhance evidence of impact.

The curriculum planning process begins each year in January, reviewing local priorities, labour market information (LMI), and stakeholder feedback. This is documented in a one-page pictorial curriculum strategy. Planning approval processes for the curriculum planning cycle are underdeveloped. However, curriculum managers reported that there is a renewed focus on working more closely with stakeholders, such as employers and community groups, as part of the planning process. This will be reported via the task and finish group.

The planning process is integral to the alignment of strategic direction. The service's current planning for 2024 to 2025 is considering government funding changes to non-qualification provision (Lfl), now aligned to the nationally renamed Tailored Learning. Managers should ensure strategy and funding from August 2024 are appropriately aligned to new developments; this will be crucial to the engagement of targeted hard to reach groups and to planning effective progression pathways.

Governance needs to effectively hold to account leadership and management (judged to be inadequate by Ofsted) for the quality of education provided. To that end tutors require appropriate ongoing training that will enable a high-quality education and good progress for all learners.

Quality: self-assessment and effectiveness in managing and improving quality

The quality of the service's education has declined since the previous Ofsted inspection (May 2018). Leaders and managers had recognised this but reported that the extent of the decline, detailed by Ofsted (Dec 2023), was unexpected. The SAR, as defined by Ofsted for 2023 to 2024, was overly detailed and repetitive. The opportunity was missed to prioritise focus on the steps needed to improve the quality of education, specifically pedagogy and tutor expertise. The SAR would benefit from an approach, such as the use of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) objectives, which pinpoints key achievements and areas for improvement that are firmly aligned to the quality of education.

Managers reported that attendance and punctuality across the service needed to improve. They have implemented actions to address underperformance and reported actions have already seen an overall increase of 22.2% in learner attendance this year. Targets are now in place for all senior tutors; these are monitored by leaders and

managers at appropriate intervals and documented in improvement plans. Learner outcomes are reported as good across much of the provision in comparison with sector averages for similar types of learning. Lfl non-qualification achievement and retention were both 100% (2022 to 2023) and overall AEB achievement was reported as 85%, with retention at 90%; however, there remain some areas of underperformance.

The service is small. Managers reported that the service has had staffing issues as well as recruitment difficulties. Leaders and managers recognise the significant impact of this, and the requirement to measure the impact of appropriate and timely CPD that will continue to enhance the learner experience. A systematic approach to CPD every 2 weeks and to measuring the impact of this is now in place; there are some early signs of improvement that should now be used to continue the improvement journey. Leaders must maintain the momentum for developing and implementing the TLA framework, with evidence-based practice linked to the teacher development cycle.

The quality improvement plan (QIP) is now superseded by a post inspection action plan (PIAP). There is recognition of required improvements needed within the QIP, produced at the start of this academic year, and this has been expanded upon within the PIAP. Senior managers in the service are conducting regular reviews in sync with quality cycle activity, which is maintaining a focus on a continued upward, improving picture. To enable the pace of change required, the service should produce a single quality improvement plan. This should clearly identify impact measures critical to all aspects of the quality of education, for example, effectively assessing learner starting points and reviews of classroom practice. This should be closely monitored and supported by a regular detailed commentary on the impact of developments.

The FEC will provide support in terms of teaching and learning, self-assessment and quality improvement planning.

Student and staff views

Learners are enthusiastic about the provision they attend. They discussed their experiences with the FEC team and were able to explain how it made a difference to their lives. For example, it gives some a focus and allows them to reduce their feeling of isolation. They explained that they are well supported by tutors and enjoy their learning experience.

The staff team that the FEC team met are motivated and eager to make improvements for the learners they teach. They are committed to engaging in, and embedding, CPD activity, particularly to improve their own pedagogy, and then sharing practices that will benefit all learners. They are all involved in key aspects of the improvement journey.

Appendix A – Interviewees

Cabinet member: Growth, Enterprise and Environment

Executive Director for Growth, Enterprise and Environment

Assistant Director for Growth, Enterprise and Environment

Learning and Skills Manager (Head of Service)

Learning and Skills Curriculum Manager

Redcar and Cleveland Council Finance representatives

Learning and Skills staff

Learning and Skills students

Tees Valley Mayoral Authority representatives

Appendix B – Documents reviewed

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP
Relevant council meeting minutes re decisions on adult skills and apprenticeship provision
Relevant committee meetings minutes re decisions on adult skills and apprenticeship provision
Service Summary (Vision/Intent – potentially Accountability Statement)
Organisational chart for directorate showing lines of reporting to wider council
Risk Register re adult skills and apprenticeship provision
Organisation chart re adult skills and apprenticeship provision
Task and Finish Group meeting minutes
Details of adult skills and apprenticeship offer
Safeguarding policy and procedures and recent training undertaken
Most recent staff survey
CURRICULUM AND QUALITY
Post inspection action plan (PIAP) and progress against actions, including Safeguarding and Prevent
Teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) policy and procedures and observation of TLA records (headline)
Details of performance management processes (appraisal)
Details of procedures for tracking learning progress
Details of delivery venues
3 years' trends in numbers, levels and achievement rate data by level and qualification aim
Most recent student survey
FINANCE
Latest management accounts and/or budget position relating to provision, including performance to date and forecast against budget