

# Adult College for Rural East Sussex

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		5–8 February 2013
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement-3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

### Summary of key findings for learners

#### This provider requires improvement because:

- Outcomes for learners require improvement. Most learners are on non-accredited courses and their achievement is not always based on sufficiently robust personal or course aims.
- Men, learners on short duration accredited courses and learners with disabilities or learning difficulties achieve less well than all learners.
- Teaching, learning and assessment vary in their quality and too many learning sessions require improvement. In the less effective sessions, teaching is dull, lacks pace and variety, and does not promote cultural diversity.
- Tutors do not use learners' starting points well to plan learning, set targets and review their progress.
- Leadership and management require improvement as initiatives introduced by managers have not yet had sufficient time to raise the quality of teaching and learning or success rates.
- The current provision is not responsive enough to community or employers' needs and has insufficient new learners, falling enrolments and a high proportion of cancelled courses.

#### This provider has the following strengths:

- Learners develop good practical skills and confidence which help them progress well.
- English, mathematics and functional skills learners experience good quality, highly effective teaching and learning, resulting in high achievement rates.
- Learners are supported very well and have thorough initial advice and guidance.
- Managers have high expectations of tutors and invest significantly in their development.
- Managers carry out very accurate self-assessment which they use well to focus improvement.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen learners' personal and course learning aims to provide managers with more robust achievement and success rate data for non-accredited provision.
- Share best practice more effectively and enhance the mentoring and peer observation schemes further to broaden the range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies that tutors use, including through information and learning technologies (ILT) and more imaginative recording of learners' progress.
- Train tutors to promote diversity more effectively within learning sessions.
- Make better use of the results of learners' initial assessment to plan learning, improve the quality of individual learning plans and targets, and assess learners' progress more meaningfully through regular reviews.
- Work with partners, the local authority and community representatives to identify the needs of the Wealden community and its employers to develop a more diverse course offer, increase enrolment figures and reduce course cancellations.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Success rates by learners on non-accredited courses, which account for the majority, are consistently high, particularly in information and communication technology (ICT) and general interest courses. However, these rates are not sufficiently reliable because many learners have insufficiently challenging or suitable course learning aims to judge their achievement.</li> <li>▪ Learners' success rates on accredited courses, which account for the small minority of learners, are relatively static and require improvement overall. Learners taking long duration courses achieve well and above national rates, particularly in English and mathematics. Learners' success rates on short duration accredited courses are low and declined in 2011/12 because of the poor achievement on book-keeping courses.</li> <li>▪ The small number of Asian learners consistently achieve very well. For the last two years, men achieved less well than women. Success rates by the small number of learners taking accredited courses who have declared a disability or learning difficulty are low and relatively static.</li> <li>▪ Learners' attendance improved significantly in autumn 2012 and is now generally good. This reverses the downward trend in the previous year.</li> <li>▪ Learners develop particularly good practical, creative and technical skills, especially those taking dance and machine embroidery courses. They apply the skills they acquire well, demonstrating good standards in movement, speaking and listening, and creating good original products.</li> <li>▪ Learners increase their confidence which helps them become more independent and autonomous learners. A good proportion of learners gain an enthusiasm for learning and extend their interests further through taking complementary or additional courses, particularly with languages and cookery.</li> <li>▪ Learners progress well from beginner to improver level in subjects such as digital photography, dressmaking and yoga or from courses that develop their English and mathematics skills onto GCSE and functional skills courses. A few learners who have completed courses with the Adult College for Rural East Sussex (ACRES) now volunteer as learning support assistants. Very few learners progress onto advanced-level programmes or to provision with other learning providers.</li> </ul>	
<b>The quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	Requires improvement

- The quality of learning sessions varies too much according to the tutor and subject, with too many learners attending sessions that require improvement. This is mirrored in the standard of learners' work and outcomes, which are lower in some subjects, by course duration and accreditation type.
- In the better learning sessions, learners take part in varied learning activities including talks, demonstrations, group and pair work that enhance learning and enable them to develop their skills and projects. They benefit through active learning, participate well and develop good collaboration skills. In a mixed ability dance session, learners worked in groups and pairs, supporting each other to achieve accurate and fluid choreography.
- Tutors have strong subject and industry expertise which most use to good effect to integrate and balance theory well with practical activities. This extends learners' understanding in subjects such as fitness where learners find out how muscles work alongside practising movements.
- Learners enjoy their courses and value their tutors' patience, support and enthusiasm. Tutors provide an exceptional level of help and email contact between learning sessions, with some holding valuable tutorial sessions to enable those who are struggling to catch up. They plan and work very effectively with learning support assistants to enhance learning for individual learners.
- Tutors promote safety well and, in the better sessions, use current events such as the internet safety day to reinforce and extend learners' knowledge. Learners understand and use safe practices, which they demonstrate through warming up thoroughly in fitness classes and using hand tools safely in craft learning sessions. A minority of learners do not take sufficient breaks when using computers.
- In the weaker learning sessions, tutors do not inject enough pace and challenge to ensure all learners achieve. Typically, they provide too much whole-class teaching that inhibits the more able learners' progress and fails to meet the needs of learners who require more support. A small minority of learners becomes bored and demotivated.
- Tutors do not use high quality teaching and learning resources consistently and many rely too heavily on worksheets to support learning. In the better learning sessions, tutors introduce well-presented reference materials for learners to use and life models to develop arts learners' drawing skills. Few tutors use ILT and other media effectively to add variety, enhance learning, record progress and meet learners' different learning styles.
- Learners attend learning sessions in buildings that generally have good quality and easily accessible accommodation. In a minority of sessions, their experience and learning are adversely affected by cold rooms or poor internet access.
- Tutors do not use the results of learners' initial assessment effectively to plan learning or set appropriate course or personal learning targets that are broken down into small, measurable and meaningful steps. A significant majority of tutors lack the confidence to agree, set and monitor targets with learners. As a result of this, too many learners fail to understand and value the process.
- Learners receive feedback from their tutors following each project or activity, but this is not always recorded or used to reflect on the progress they have made towards achieving their learning targets. Too many tutors do not recognise the relevance of using critical feedback or promote this to learners as a positive aspect of learning.
- The quality of English, mathematics and functional skills teaching is good with highly effective learning, as tutors put difficult concepts into realistic and everyday scenarios. Tutors motivate learners, particularly in English, to read at home through initiatives such as the 'six book challenge'. Tutors plan spoken and written English tasks well so that they are integral within the subject area learning, particularly in ICT, arts and crafts.
- Learners benefit from an extensive and useful range of pre-course telephone, email and web-based information, advice and guidance which meets their needs well. Once on their course, they receive more variable advice and guidance about progression opportunities and routes, which some learners are unclear about.

- Tutors' promotion of equality and diversity within learning sessions and activities requires improvement. Tutors often plan equality and diversity, particularly in responding to individual learners' needs, within lesson plans but do not provide learners with sufficient opportunities to explore wider cultural influences within their work or projects.

### The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Managers set high expectations and demanding targets for improvement which they routinely monitor through regular meetings. This is starting to have an impact, in raising attendance, men's achievement on accredited courses and the quality of some tutors' teaching, but has not resulted in sustained improvement trends across the whole provision.
- Board members use their expertise from education and the local authority to challenge aspects such as the restructuring, budgets and investment in resources very effectively. They know the provision and rate of improvement well through regular and informative reports. Board members review enrolment and course cancellation trends routinely but do not receive sufficient timely retention, achievement and success rate data to challenge in-year trends.
- ACRES very effectively restructured its key management roles in 2012 to align better with its aims. Tutors' performance is effectively managed through ACRES' lesson observation scheme, which is very accurate and thorough. Managers observe tutors very early in the academic year through ungraded and unannounced class visits to prioritise their training, development and the follow-up graded lesson observation.
- Managers, mentors and peers provide tutors with excellent opportunities for staff development. Tutors are well qualified and all hold teaching qualifications, or are working towards achieving these.
- Managers analyse data, key findings from lesson observations and staff and learners' views very thoroughly and use the findings well in preparing the informative and incisive self-assessment report. They use self-assessment productively to focus improvement initiatives and the quality improvement plan.
- Managers gather learners' views through a wide range of mechanisms, such as class visits and lesson observations, informal meetings with learners at the start of their programme and through electronic and paper-based questionnaires. They use feedback well to improve course information sheets, resources, accommodation, times of sessions and internet access. Managers tell learners about how their views are used through an informative 'you said we did' section in the student newsletter.
- Managers recognise the current provision is not attracting sufficient new learners, different funding streams or fee income. Course cancellations are too high and have risen over the last four years. ACRES does not have a current strategic plan, but managers and partners are working productively to gather data and intelligence about the needs of the Wealden community to plan a more responsive course offer for 2013/14.
- Managers introduced new courses that successfully attracted more men onto ACRES' courses over the last two years. They monitor thoroughly the retention rates by this group, which is showing early signs of improvement in the current year. However, their actions to improve retention and achievement by learners on short accredited courses and those declaring a disability or learning difficulty are less successful in raising success rates.
- The equality and diversity group devised extensive resources for tutors to help them promote the topic, such as 'how to' guides, a checklist to self-assess their promotion in teaching and learning sessions and more detailed induction materials. They routinely monitor tutors' approach to equality and diversity during lesson observations which has helped identify some tutors' good practice and challenge others' stereotypical views. Tutors have not received formal training in equality and diversity for several years and their promotion of these aspects in learning sessions is insufficient.

- The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Managers and tutors risk assess venues and course activities thoroughly and take sound control measures and action where appropriate. Managers check the validity of risk assessments during class visits but do not have a formal system to follow up those that are missing or require strengthening.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### Adult College for Rural East Sussex

<b>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</b>  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	Community learning
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>	3
Outcomes for learners	<b>3</b>	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>3</b>	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>3</b>	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Community learning	<b>3</b>

## Provider details

### Adult College for Rural East Sussex

<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Age range of learners</b>	19+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	Full-time: n/a
	Part-time: 1,315
<b>Adult Learning Manager</b>	Christine Jervis
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	January 2010
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.acreslearning.org.uk">www.acreslearning.org.uk</a>

<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>								
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Total number of learners</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Full-time</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Part-time</b>	-	60	-	101	-	6	-	-
<b>Number of community learners</b>								
	837							
<b>Funding received from</b>								
	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with no subcontractors</b>								

## Additional socio-economic information

ACRES is a consortium of four East Sussex community colleges that manages the adult learning programmes in the Wealden District Council area and includes the towns of Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Uckfield and Wadhurst. Its main administrative centre is in Uckfield. ACRES offers community learning in several subject areas including ICT, fitness, leisure and recreation, visual arts, languages, English and mathematics. Courses are held in community colleges and a wide range of local venues. ACRES has around 90 tutors, many being part-time or sessional staff. Wealden is a predominantly rural area, has low levels of unemployment and mixed levels of deprivation. Few Black, Asian, Chinese and other minority ethnic residents live in Wealden when compared with the south east and England.

## Information about this inspection

<b>Lead inspector</b>	Janet Rodgers HMI
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One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the learning and development manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded community learning

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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