

NCC Adult Education Services

First 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 Norfolk County Council Adult Education Services following publication of the inspection report on 9 March 2015, which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

Leadership and management were judged inadequate. Outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment were judged to require improvement, as were the subject areas of foundation English and independent living and leisure skills. Sport was judged to be good.

Norfolk County Council Adult Education Service is part of the council's community and environmental services. The service provides learning at over 300 locations across the county and through seven subcontracted providers.

Themes

Improvement in leadership and management

Current work and activities are centred on a very detailed action plan which highlights all the improvement points identified in the inspection. It is not yet linked to clear, overarching themes or key performance indicators. From discussions with leaders and managers, it is clear that the priorities are rightly to ensure that as many learners who are retained this year achieve their goals and qualifications and that staff receive initial training to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Managers, with support from a council project manager, meet weekly to review progress against agreed actions. They involve a wider group of staff as specialist leads to take strands of work forward, such as developing a more effective individual learning plan. Work, and resultant progress, is at an early stage. An interim head of service will be in place by early June to drive rapid improvement across the service and to strengthen aspects of quality assurance and learning.

Attendance monitoring is now in place, so that leaders and managers have a better understanding of learners at risk of under-achieving or leaving, with plans to introduce on-line recording and reporting of attendance across the service fully from September. Managers make more systematic checks within each programme area to ensure that all claims for achievement are processed in a timely way. However, leaders and managers recognise that further actions are needed to ensure data are reported and captured accurately and consistently, to inform monitoring and reviews of performance.

Leaders and managers are creating a new team to undertake graded observations, through a rigorous appointment process, to be in place by the end of April. Observation arrangements have been strengthened to include no-notice observations and a sharper focus on aspects of learning and progress. Tutors' performance management is better linked to risk factors and to outcomes of observations.

Governance has also been strengthened through a cross-party steering group, with complementary oversight by a council deputy director. Steering group members lack a clear understanding of the key priorities for the current year and do not yet have sufficient high level performance data to enable them to analyse performance and progress against targets. Steering group members have commissioned a review of the service's strategy to better align provision across the region to the council's broader aims, including for learners aged 16 to 18.

Priorities for improvement

- At the next steering group meeting, agree the key priorities and performance indicators for 2014/15, together with the proposed strategy for 16 to 18 provision.
- Agree on the key reporting and progress measures that leaders, managers and steering group members will use so that performance and progress can be monitored effectively and actions for further improvement can be agreed with better confidence.
- Ensure that steering group actions are precise, so they provide sufficient challenge to leaders and managers to improve the service rapidly.
- Ensure a systematic cross-service approach to timely and accurate monitoring of attendance, retention and achievement by leaders, managers and steering group members.
- Review the current action plan so that priorities are clear, targets are sufficiently challenging and meaningful and progress can be more clearly reviewed by all within the service.

Improvement in the quality of the study programme

Arrangements for ensuring that potential learners' skills are assessed prior to commencing their programme of study are in place, alongside the introduction of a 'taster week' where learners will experience different vocational areas so they are better informed of the requirements of each programme. Plans for learning support assistants (LSAs) to observe each learner during the 'taster week' to assess their levels of engagement and the skills they need to develop are in place; this information will be shared with tutors to inform individual learning plans.

More effective tracking of attendance and retention, fortnightly, now exists across the three delivery centres in Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Thetford, so that appropriate support can be put in place for learners at risk of under-achieving. The

programme manager is working with the employer engagement team at the council to develop external work experience opportunities, although the current cohort of learners is not likely to benefit.

Leaders, managers and steering group members plan to undertake a review of the study programme provision, in consultation with local providers and the Education Funding Agency, to review how the offer can best meet the needs of young people, in line with the council's strategic aims.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that information on learners' abilities and skills needs are shared with tutors and LSAs so they can plan learning and support to best effect.
- Match work-related learning and work experience closely to learners' goals and skill development needs.
- Review how the current cohort of learners could benefit from external work experience to aid progression and better prepare them for employment.

Improvement in teaching, learning and assessment

Since the inspection, all teams have met with their programme managers to ensure they are clear what needs to improve across the service. During the summer term all teachers are expected to attend a one-day staff development event, covering the key themes identified at inspection of stretching and challenging learners, widening their cultural experiences, developing their English and mathematics skills and using information learning technology to increase access to and enliven learning. Managers plan to undertake learning walks in order to gauge its impact and to identify where additional targeted support for teachers is required. Managers plan to introduce a rolling programme of themed workshops during the next academic year based on the outcomes of lesson observations.

Managers and tutors, with input from learners, are revising individual learning plans so that they are more user-friendly, targets can be recorded and followed up effectively and the progress learners make can be easily monitored. This work is at an early stage.

Priorities for improvement

- Conduct themed learning walks regularly to gain feedback on the impact of the staff development programme on learning and progress, including gaining feedback from learners.
- Ensure targeted support for individual tutors is put in place rapidly and progress monitored regularly.
- Engage with local providers, other community learning and skills providers and stakeholder organisations to view good practice and garner support for rapid improvement.

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