

Norfolk County Council Adult Education Services

Follow up re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the second follow-up re-inspection monitoring visit to Norfolk County Council Adult Education Service 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

Managers have moved quickly to bring about improvement and the actions being taken are focused well on strengthening outcomes for learners. An interim head of service has been put in place by the local authority to help build the capacity of the leadership team pending the recruitment of a new service head.

Significant weaknesses in relation to data are being addressed, including by the establishment of a new assistant head post with responsibility for management information, funding and performance. The roles set out in the job description reflect well the current needs of the service. Managers are rightly placing an emphasis on the collection and analysis of data as a means of supporting teaching and learning. In some areas, for example, regular records of individual learners' performance are being presented to the responsible managers in order that any issues impeding learners' progress can be highlighted and dealt with. Such practice is yet to be extended across all programme areas.

Processes for managers to collate and present emerging in-year achievement data are more secure. However a systematic cross-service approach that frequently monitors and takes appropriate restorative actions from accurate and timely performance data still remains paramount. Realistic plans and timescales are in place to achieve this goal.

The adult education steering group is strengthening its role in scrutinising and challenging the performance of the service. Its membership has been expanded to include external expertise as well as the economic development and library services of the local authority. This broader representation provides the potential for the service to contribute to shared County Council priorities in relation to skills and employment for example. Cross-party political support is being secured on the group and the lead elected member takes an active interest through his chairmanship. The group however is not yet benefitting from sufficiently accurate performance data and clear enough service priorities to allow it to fulfil its function comprehensively.

An outline set of key performance indicators has been consulted upon and the draft document covers a broad range of curricular and business related reporting areas well. Managers recognise that it needs further refinement to align performance indicators with County strategic objectives and to link with the service self-assessment. A few important indicators, such as the cost of course cancellations, do not yet feature. Managers are working well to inform teachers about their role in contributing to strategic objectives.

The latest self-assessment is evolving but continues to be too descriptive and fails to present the key areas for improvement succinctly. It does not yet focus enough on the characteristics of effective teaching, learning and assessment nor put in place a comprehensive set of actions to improve these rapidly.

New processes to improve the recording and reporting of attendance continue according to plan, including the piloting of on-line registers. The service does however face challenges due to the hugely dispersed and isolated nature of classes. Managers have taken collective responsibility for establishing baselines, monitoring more closely attendance and setting expectations through the performance management process. Evidence of the impact of this drive is not yet available.

Targeted support for individual teachers is now in place and their progress is monitored regularly. Managers readily acknowledge 'pockets of resistance' by a minority of staff to attend training events and accept the new performance management arrangements, and teachers' increased accountability. They report however that, overall, teachers recognise the need for change and are engaging optimistically.

Following the removal of funding from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) for the study programme contract, service managers have instigated urgent work to review the service's strategic intentions in relation to 16-18 learners. Managers are acting proactively and in conjunction with a broader set of partners with a view to meeting a clear need for the most hard-to-reach young people in the County. The service's emerging strategy therefore differs considerably from previous years and is a clear expression of its desire to provide a more responsive programme for these learners.

Reasonable improvement for learners

Improvement in the quality of the study programme

The service has moved quickly to address the considerable shortcomings within the study programme albeit at the latter part of 2014/15. The new service manager has significantly improved the outcomes and retention for 16-18 learners. With the cooperation of local employers, a work experience option has been secured to enable learners to gain vocational skills and experience. Up until this point work experience had not been factored into the programme. A much needed level of discipline has been introduced to the study programme, such as a risk register approach whereby young learners' progress, attendance and performance are tightly monitored with a view to supporting them to continue on the programme should issues arise. All programme documentation has been reviewed and updated to help sustain such improvements.

Reasonable improvement for learners

Improvement in teaching, learning and assessment

Managers have introduced a planned and concerted set of actions to support improvement. Included within these is a new teaching learning and assessment policy developed by managers and teachers, which is in the process of being implemented. Programme teams are however at different stages in relation to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment but progress is evident.

In the small sample of lessons seen, teaching, learning and assessment were good. Learners were making gains in knowledge and skills, teachers were providing feedback on learners' written work and the standards of work were good in the majority of lessons. Key areas for development already recognised by the service are being tackled but do however remain. These include: the planning and implementation of learning activities that meet the needs of all learners; improving the use of questioning to ensure teachers are fully aware of their learners' understanding and progress; eliminating the over-use of teacher-led activity; recapping at the end of lessons and ensuring that teachers use information on learners' starting points and abilities in a timely manner, such that all learners are enrolled on the right level and course, and are set appropriate targets.

Continuing professional development (CPD) events are taking place currently. These are responsive to teachers' needs and linked to the practical skills of teaching and learning. The events are being well-received and are encouraging often geographically isolated teachers to work collaboratively. A learning support assistant specific training programme is scheduled. Managers are monitoring levels of engagement in CPD events and their impact.

Managers themselves have conducted visits to other providers, organised external training for subject leaders and attended an Ofsted regional improvement event in order to view good practice and garner support for rapid improvement.

The observation of teaching, learning and assessment features highly in bringing about change. A small team of specialist staff is being appointed to ensure more consistency and accuracy in observations of practice and to report on and nurture improvement. The appointments process has been rigorous and included classroom observations and practical tasks. Managers are undertaking 'learning walks' focusing on known concerns, such as embedding equality and diversity. Subject teams are beginning to carry out their own 'learning walks'.

Reviewed teacher performance management processes are being embedded. An associated monthly performance management report and accompanying process of analysis and subsequent follow up by the curriculum quality officer and programme manager for the quality of teaching and learning is also taking place. A more relevant 'recognising and recording progress and achievement' (RARPA) process to sharpen the impact of community learning is shortly to be agreed.

Overall there is a renewed sense by teachers and managers of what constitutes effective teaching, learning and assessment. There is however some distance to travel to test the impact of the new measures.

Reasonable improvement for learners

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