

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Buckinghamshire Adult Learning
Date of visit: 10 May 2007

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in January 2005 and the subsequent reinspection in March 2006. At the initial inspection Buckinghamshire Adult Learning was graded satisfactory in leadership and management, the arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The provision was judged good in information communications technology (ICT), health and social care and public services. The provision in visual and performing arts and media, English languages and communications, foundation programmes and family learning were all graded satisfactory. The provision in hospitality, sport leisure and travel was judged unsatisfactory, but at the subsequent reinspection it was graded satisfactory.

Buckinghamshire Adult Learning is the primary provider of part-time learning for adults in the county on behalf of the local authority (LA). Adult learning is now part of an integrated culture and learning service within the safer and stronger communities portfolio of the authority.

The service now offers an advertised programme of taught courses, workshops and residential courses from entry to level 4, together with a range of non-advertised programmes, which are developed to meet community, partner and employer needs. The service has, over the last 18 months, developed new provision in delivering national vocational qualifications (NVQ) within the authority. It now also has a Train to Gain contract. As part of an offender learning and skill service contract, skills for life courses are delivered in the community. It has provision in all sector areas, although most of the work is in health and social care, ICT, sport and leisure, visual and performing arts and media, English languages and communications and foundation programmes.

Learning programmes take place in 115 locations across the county in dedicated adult learning centres, schools, community venues, village halls and employers' premises. During 2006-07 three new learning centres have opened with different partnership arrangements. In Buckingham, a learning centre shares a town centre location with the library and a joint county and district customer service centre. In High Wycombe, a new centre shares premises with the youth service and Sure Start, and in Beaconsfield the new premises are on a school site.

Achievement and standards

How have achievements and retention changed in the past year?	Significant Progress
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Success rates on most programmes in 2005-06 were good and generally showed improvement over the previous year. Student retention has considerably improved when compared with 2005-06 with all Adult and Community Learning (ACL) non-accredited programmes exceeding 91% and all accredited programmes exceeding 82% retention, except for science and mathematics which, at 56%, remains the lowest programme. This programme primarily consists of GCSE mathematics delivered to adults. Considerable work has been done to improve the management of attendance during the past year. Tutors must submit registers weekly and follow up any non-attendance. Most appropriately all new students have received improved information and guidance about the courses they apply for, and all students on longer accredited programmes are interviewed before starting their course. Many have changed to a more appropriate course following this advice.

What has been done to improve the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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Buckinghamshire Adult Learning has continued to focus sharply on raising the standards of teaching and learning and meeting the individual needs of students. All tutors are systematically observed each year, many on at least two occasions. Tutors and tutor managers have been fully trained in the new methodology for monitoring teaching and learning. Staff at all levels have been very active in developing the paperwork and assessment criteria for lesson observations. Paperwork for recording observations is now clear and unambiguous. Tutors know what is expected of them and understand the criteria. Reports identify good practice, how well information learning technology is used in sessions and detail student learning, as well as tutor performance against previous reports. Reports also detail core expectations of any session and subject specific criteria; for example in practical sport sessions criteria are set against the coaching standards. In all areas managers provide comprehensive descriptors and evidence against criteria. Feedback is used well to support tutors with identified development needs; for example in languages other tutors are frequently used as peer mentors working with colleagues to develop their skills. Visits to monitor teaching and learning are all scheduled for each tutor and manager. Many staff have completed accredited teaching courses. All staff are risk-banded based on previous reports and experience but many can expect a minimum of two observations each year. Moderation of reports is good. Tutors recognise the benefits of the much improved process.

What improvements have been made to reinforce equality and diversity for learners and staff?	Significant progress
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Buckinghamshire Adult Learning has made significant progress in improving and strengthening the framework for equality and diversity. The authority has a new corporate policy, from which Adult Learning has developed its own framework to better inform and support learners and staff. New and effective diversity and awareness training has been delivered to all staff. Specifically, an inter-agency session was run to help staff understand how to respond to concerns of abuse amongst adults. The diverse needs of the population have been effectively recognised in new marketing materials and in classroom resources. The student charter, student handbook and various marketing leaflets are now available in varied formats and languages. All classroom observation reports include good comment on the appropriateness and awareness of equality and diversity in the classroom. Three new training centres have been recently established to provide training opportunities for non-traditional learners. These centres have been effective in providing training to the elderly, travellers and learners from areas of deprivation.

What steps have been taken to ensure all staff are provided with appropriate support and development to carry out their roles?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in supporting and developing new and existing staff. Since the previous inspection the structures within Buckinghamshire Adult Learning have changed significantly. Tutor co-ordinators have a management role over a group of subject specific tutors. All have now attended a management development programme to help them in their new roles. Training needs of staff have been analysed and a new programme to share good practice and provide coaching in classroom skills to tutors has been successfully introduced. Tutor co-ordinators now run well structured and informative training sessions at the beginning of each term for new and existing tutors. Sessions are well attended and provide good information to tutors. Tutors are actively encouraged to attend; if they are unable to attend they receive individual support from tutor co-ordinators. New tutors or those identified with a training need following an observation are supported by tutor co-ordinators and often by other tutors in the role of mentor. In languages this has been particularly effective in sharing skills and teaching methodologies across language classes. Staff have been effectively involved in the development of a new programme for the observation of teaching and learning. Tutors are now all aware of the expectations upon them for observations. Feedback to tutors is effectively delivered and is used well to promote improvement.

How effective has the self-assessment report (SAR) process and the resulting development plan been in identifying and managing issues?	Significant progress
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The self-assessment process was considered good at the previous inspection. It has been improved to better reflect the training and learning programmes. Tutors and tutor co-ordinators are fully involved in the development of the self-assessment report. Detailed analysis is now undertaken at course level which informs an area assessment and team operating plans, which are now used effectively to manage improvement and development. The development plan produced following the self-assessment is integrated and linked with the self-assessment report. Buckinghamshire Adult Learning have used the outcomes of the previous inspection report very well to promote and develop structured effective improvement.