

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Milton Keynes Council Adult
Continuing Education service
Date of visit: 22 May 2007

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection of Milton Keynes Council's Adult Continuing Education (ACE) service in March 2005 and partial reinspection in March 2006. In March 2005 leadership and management were satisfactory and equality of opportunity was good. Arrangements for quality assurance were unsatisfactory. Provision was good in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel and satisfactory in information and communications technology (ICT), visual and performing arts, English, languages and communications, and family learning. Provision in foundation programmes was very weak. At the reinspection foundation programmes were judged to be satisfactory.

Milton Keynes Council contracts with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the provision of accredited and non-accredited adult and community learning. Provision is delivered directly by ACE, working with a range of local community organisations. ACE offers courses in 15 subject sector areas at around 50 locations. In 2005-06 there were 18,006 enrolments by 7,084 learners on approximately 1,600 courses.

Further education funding for the service fell by 27% between 2004-05 and 2005-06, accompanied by significant changes in the services' programmes, particularly for those aged 19 and above. The service completed a restructure in September 2006.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving achievement and standards since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Progress in improving achievement and standards is reasonable. On long programmes leading to accreditation, success rates rose from 52% to 58% between 2004-05 and 2005-06. On the small non-accredited long programme provision, achievement rates rose very significantly from 65% to 89%. On non-accredited short programmes, achievement rates remained satisfactory at 69%. On substantial short programmes leading to accreditation, success rates fell slightly between 2004-05 and 2005-06 from 67% to 64% but remain

satisfactory. On very short programmes leading to accreditation, success rates fell sharply in the same period from 94% to 76%. However, the pattern of this provision changed considerably between 2004-05 and 2005-06, with a very large fall in the number of learners and programmes.

Quality of provision

What steps have been taken to improve lesson planning, particularly in the re-inspected provision and what have been the outcomes to date?	Reasonable progress
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Progress in improving lesson planning is reasonable. Since the previous inspection, the service has provided a significant level of staff training on planning lessons as part of its broader strategy to improve teaching and learning. External consultants have worked effectively with the ACE skills for life team to improve planning across the provision. A well attended internal staff development event on planning has been held. Tutors now prepare lessons well and use a wider range of learning resources. Since the previous inspection most main sites have been equipped with interactive whiteboards and staff in most curriculum areas use these frequently and effectively. The service has identified that, despite progress made, lesson planning is still not of a consistently good quality. Further staff development and monitoring is planned in this area.

Has the standard of teaching and learning improved since the reinspection? How does the service know and what measures have been put in place to improve teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The standard of teaching and learning has shown a reasonable improvement since the previous inspection. ACE's records show the proportion of lessons judged to be good or better in its programme of observation of teaching and learning so far in 2006-07 has increased to around 70%. In 2005-06 the proportion was 48%. The service is taking appropriate action to increase its number of trained and accredited observers to expand the observation programme. Written feedback received by tutors following observations is appropriately supportive and objective, and where necessary identifies suitable actions for improvement. The service is making good progress in piloting models of peer observation to help improvement.

<p>What progress has been made in improving target-setting and the review of individual learner's progress? What progress has been made in establishing recognising and recording progress and achievement?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Target-setting and the review of learners' progress was identified as a weakness in parts of the provision at the last full inspection, and at the subsequent reinspection. ACE has made reasonable progress in tackling these weaknesses. All learners now receive a suitable initial assessment. In 2005-06 the service piloted a new and well conceived record of achievement. Learners use this to review and record a self-assessment of their skills at the start, middle and end of courses. This has been extended across all personal and community development learning provision for 2006-07. The service is reintroducing more structured tutor assessment to supplement the review process in the forthcoming academic year. Around 40% of the records of achievement are not returned by the learners at the end of their courses. However, tutors will now retain copies of all records of achievement for analysis by the service as part of its improvement strategy. ACE is progressing well in developing new methods of recording progress and achievement. For example, foreign language learners use web-based self-assessment tools.

Leadership and management

<p>What progress has been made to improve the use of data?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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ACE has taken effective action to improve key curriculum weaknesses since the previous inspection. These include a significant improvement in grades at reinspection for literacy numeracy and ESOL provision. It has effectively focused its quality improvement initiatives on teaching and learning, successfully tackling cross-curricula areas of weakness in lesson planning and teaching standards. Its system for observing teaching and learning has improved considerably, and includes monitoring of lesson and individual learning plans. Staff development is better planned. Appropriate elements of quality assurance include clearly specified annual cycles of activity for self-assessment and curriculum planning. However, these are not yet sufficiently synchronised. Some quality assurance measures are still not sufficiently systematic.

<p>What progress has been made in the self-assessment process and development planning?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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ACE published its most recent self-assessment report in December 2006, with an accompanying development plan. Useful recent improvements to the process make it more inclusive. These include self-assessment workshops where tutors contribute systematically to

the report, and open events where learners add their views. These support well-established measures such as feedback from learner questionnaires. A clear cycle for the self-assessment process is now in place. The report is extensive, covering all the subject sector areas represented in ACE provision. Parts of the report and development plan, such as those covering preparation for life and work, are detailed and thorough. Others, particularly those dealing with smaller areas of provision, are incomplete. The use of data has improved. Data on learner performance, and from observations of teaching and learning, now contribute routinely to the evidence base of curriculum sections, but are not used sufficiently systematically to identify areas for development. However, they form a significant and appropriate part of the leadership and management section.