

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Hertfordshire County Council Adult and Family Learning Service

Date of visit: 31 May 2007

Context

This monitoring visit follows the reinspection in February 2006, at which Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service (HAFLS) was graded as satisfactory for leadership and management and for equality of opportunity but as unsatisfactory for its arrangements for quality improvement. Provision was judged to be good in information and communications technology (ICT), in visual and performing arts and media and in family learning.

Since the previous inspection Hertfordshire County Council has been restructured and HAFLS now operates within the directorate for children, schools and families as part of the division of libraries, heritage and arts.

In the current year HAFLS has around 13,000 learners. Most of these are enrolled on ICT, arts, English and modern languages and family learning programmes.

Achievement and standards

How have the methods of recording achievements improved?	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection HAFLS has made good progress. Procedures for the collection of data are now effective and data is evaluated well. HAFLS acts promptly to address concerns raised by data information and fully understands the reasons why figures are either exceptionally high or low. Managers have introduced effective methods of recognising and recording progress and achievement. HAFLS offers good training to providers to help them gain a better understanding of the process of monitoring learners' progress and achievement and to overcome difficulties in introducing this method of recording achievement. HAFLS is likely to meet the challenging success rate target of 83% set by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for this year. It has set progressively increasing targets for the next three years. No reliable comparison can be made with data from previous years, when achievement rates were based on learners' completion rates.

Literacy, numeracy and language support

What initiatives has HAFLS introduced to develop literacy, numeracy and language support?	Significant progress
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HAFLS has developed a range of good initiatives to contextualise and establish literacy, numeracy and language support for learners across the curriculum. Screening and initial assessment tools have been developed to enable providers to determine more effectively the need and level of support required by learners. Many community providers are developing courses which cross-reference course content to the skills for life core curriculum. Learners develop knowledge of a subject at the same time as literacy and numeracy skills. Where appropriate, community providers refer learners to other providers better able to meet their needs.

The service has developed a skills for life strategy which includes workforce development. For example, Train to Gain providers supply courses to local authority staff and this involves initial assessment of literacy and numeracy and additional skills for life support. The number of learners participating in skills for life courses as part of HAFLS' family language, literacy and numeracy provision has increased, as have opportunities for learners to progress from initial taster courses to accredited learning.

Widening participation

What strategies have been developed to widen participation of under-represented groups?	Significant progress
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HAFLS has continued to develop very effective strategies to widen participation of groups in the community not traditionally involved in learning, such as Travellers and carers. The equality and diversity manager, participation manager and senior family learning development officer work together with voluntary and community organisations to identify the learning needs of under-represented groups and how best these needs can be met by providing training and development.

A range of innovative projects has been developed that captures the imagination of community learners. This often acts as an engagement tool and leads to further learning. Data on learners' participation rates by gender, ethnicity and disability is collected, collated and analysed to identify trends. A very effective data monitoring system captures learners' progress and achievements. An increase in community provision has changed the profile of learners engaging in learning to include a greater proportion of learners from under-represented groups.

The service has introduced equality and diversity impact measures which focus on areas for improvement. These measures are effective in informing community providers of their community profile and in highlighting gaps in services and local need. Numbers of learners from black and minority ethnic groups and learners with

learning difficulties and/or disabilities have increased significantly. The quality monitoring of subcontracted community providers includes a clear focus on equality and diversity. HAFLS has developed a range of useful tools to enable providers to improve their teaching and learning and to focus on equality and diversity in their teaching practice.

Curriculum planning

How have the curriculum changes been planned and managed?	Significant progress
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Recent curriculum planning and development has been managed very well. A new approach to commissioning community providers and an increased budget provided through the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities fund has enabled HAFLS to focus on the spread of provision and target learners most in need. The use of needs analysis to guide planning and the strategic reduction in subcontracted provision has narrowed the curriculum offer, but better aligned it with the strategic priorities of HAFLS, the LSC and the government. A major review of the personal and community development learning funded activities and the production of a curriculum statement clearly set out HAFLS' offer. Data is now more effectively used to guide management decisions and provides a more accurate picture of successful courses and sector subject areas. Quality monitoring processes and support for community groups have been central to this development and have proved very successful.

Development of a coherent service

How well has HAFLS built networks and ensured good links between different aspects of provision?	Significant progress
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HAFLS has put several effective measures in place to create a more coherent service. Family learning programmes, now delivered directly by HAFLS, pull together a wide range of provision, including extended schools, community learning workers and children's trust partnerships. Better progression routes are being created, although ways of monitoring and recording this are still in development. Voluntary, community and educational groups in Hertfordshire benefit from the way HAFLS has developed extensive networks, including operational networks, to ensure coherent provision. HAFLS has a good understanding of skills gaps in Hertfordshire, for example at level 2 and in construction skills, and of its role in helping to fill these gaps. It skilfully signposts learners to other providers and services when it does not have the capacity or expertise to offer provision. Currently, HAFLS is developing web-based materials to bring more consistency of practice and build providers' capacity to monitor their own quality, especially through learning observation training and equalities training. The provider is well aware of the need to market provision more effectively and has plans to do this from next year.

Quality improvement

<p>What improvements have been made to quality improvement processes, including self-assessment and implementation of the post-inspection action plan?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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Quality improvement measures, which were judged unsatisfactory in the inspection in 2004, had improved but were still judged as a weakness during the reinspection. They have since been further developed and improved and arrangements are now effective. The self-assessment process and quality improvement plan are thorough and actions have been carefully monitored and completed by agreed dates. HAFLS regularly monitors provision and observes teaching and learning. Areas for attention are promptly followed up. Staff, whether directly employed or employed by subcontracted or commissioned providers, are very well supported to help them understand, as well as implement, new documents and quality monitoring activities. For example, providers are helped to produce good self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans. Staff are helped to understand how to recognise and record learners' achievement in ways which meet the needs of learners and are appropriate for the type of provision. HAFLS produces very detailed reports to providers analysing data in helpful ways and setting realistic targets, benchmarked against national and local data.