

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Staffordshire County Council
Date of visit: 13 June 2007

Context

This monitoring visit follows a previous inspection in March 2005, at which Staffordshire County Council (Staffordshire CC) was graded satisfactory for leadership and management and for its arrangements for quality improvement, and good for equality of opportunity. Training was good in family learning, visual and performing arts and media, foundation programmes and land-based provision. Programmes in information and communications technology (ICT) and in English, languages and communications were satisfactory, but training in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel was unsatisfactory. A reinspection in April 2006 found the quality of training in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel to be satisfactory.

Staffordshire CC holds a contract with Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the provision of adult and community learning throughout the eight district council areas in Staffordshire. The responsibility for this provision is with the adult and community learning service (ACLS) which is part of the lifelong learning division within the children and lifelong learning directorate of Staffordshire CC. ACLS contracts with seven colleges of further education, two schools and with the voluntary and community sector to offer adult learning provision. It also directly delivers approximately 25% of the provision, for example in family learning, ICT and literacy, numeracy and language, and offers residential adult learning opportunities at Pendrell Hall College. In total, Staffordshire CC provides learning programmes at over 300 venues throughout Staffordshire for over 20,000 learners.

Achievement and standards

What progress has Staffordshire CC made in improving achievement and standards?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Staffordshire CC has made reasonable progress in improving achievement and standards. Retention rates are high, with an improvement over the past three years in overall retention from 92% to 94%. Across this broad range of provision retention often remains very high at 95% and above, for example on direct provision at Pendrell Hall College and on some of the provision subcontracted to local colleges. Achievement rates are currently based on learners' completion of programmes and are not yet a sufficiently accurate measure of achievement.

The standard of learners' work remains good on many programmes. ACLS collects information on learners' planned progression, but progress on the monitoring of

learners' actual progression from direct delivery and subcontracted programmes is insufficient.

Quality of training

What progress has Staffordshire CC made in implementing skills for life across the provision?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Staffordshire CC is making reasonable progress in implementing skills for life across the provision. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Management roles and responsibilities are now clearer, with an identified senior manager responsible for skills for life developments, supported by an adult and family learning co-ordinator. The senior management team identify that the operational management of skills for life needs strengthening further, with proposals to establish a new post for skills for life development, which are not yet implemented. A satisfactory skills for life strategy is in place, which managers are in the process of updating. Staff usefully take part in skills for life developments within the region, with involvement in a good range of strategic and operational skills for life networks.

A skills for life quality improvement group provides improved co-ordination of skills for life developments. This group monitors a satisfactory skills for life action plan which has clear targets for new developments in directly delivered provision in English for speakers of other languages, but insufficient target-setting for developments in literacy and numeracy. A significant amount of training to raise awareness of skills for life takes place with directly employed tutors. More work is needed to ensure that all tutors have attended and to ensure further development of tutors' skills. Staffordshire CC has also worked directly with a minority of college tutors on the subcontracted provision on recognising learners' skills for life needs, with further work planned.

Staffordshire CC has now produced a useful skills for life guide for directly employed tutors and tutors employed across the subcontracted provision, but this is not yet in full use. Plans to establish skills for life within adult and community learning programmes have only been partially implemented. Initial assessment processes and target-setting with learners are not consistently implemented across the provision.

What progress has Staffordshire CC made in implementing systems for recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited provision?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Staffordshire CC is making reasonable progress in implementing systems for recognising and recording progress and achievement on non-accredited provision. A quality improvement group of managers, co-ordinators and outreach workers provides improved co-ordination of developments in this area across ACLS. A clear

action plan is now in place, which managers regularly review and update. Improvements in learners' and tutors' feedback documents were effectively linked to the process for recognising and recording progress and achievement. Staffordshire CC usefully piloted systems for recognising and recording progress and achievement within ICT programmes in libraries. Training for direct delivery tutors received very positive feedback from participants, with additional training events planned. However, over 50% of directly employed tutors have still to access training in recognising and recording progress and achievement. Tutors' awareness of recognising and recording progress and achievement remains variable across the provision. The identification of course and learners' individual goals on many programmes is insufficient. The monitoring and recording of progress and achievement remains insufficient for many learners.

Leadership and management

What improvements have been made in communication within Staffordshire CC?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Staffordshire CC has made reasonable progress in improvements in internal communication. An elected member of Staffordshire CC's cabinet has responsibility for the children and lifelong learning directorate, with another elected member providing support. Councillors' involvement also includes attending awards presentation events. Three council members, including the deputy chair, are on the governing body of Pendrell Hall College. The assistant director has termly meetings with the heads of service to review progress and the head of ACLS meets with the lead elected member for lifelong learning every six weeks. In February 2006 some 20 councillors attended a presentation on the work of ACLS. Interested members now receive a termly newsletter. The ACLS three-year adult learning plan for 2005 to 2008 is clearly included in Staffordshire CC's district annual delivery plans. However, importantly, Staffordshire CC's cabinet do not receive regular performance information on the adult and community learning provision.

Improved partnership working within Staffordshire CC includes developments with the library service, links with outdoor education, social care and health and with the human resources department, to facilitate the personal development of staff. Staff have regular individual supervision meetings with their line managers to review performance. ACLS has plans to further improve accessibility of its intranet for staff. Staff value the improvements in communication.

What improvements have been made in the observation of teaching and learning process?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Staffordshire CC has made reasonable improvements in the observation of teaching and learning process for the direct delivery provision. The approach is now well structured. A working protocol requires two weeks notice of a graded observation. The aim is to observe each tutor once a year and new tutors within their first four

weeks. Most tutors are observed each year. The forms are well laid out. Observation judgements are linked to well set out criteria to grade each element of teaching, learning and attainment. Observations include judgements on equality of opportunity and Every Child Matters issues. Learners also provide feedback on teaching and learning. Internal observations are moderated to help ensure consistency of judgements and grades. However, action-planning to improve performance is inconsistent. The process does not sufficiently cover the provision delivered by the voluntary sector

The college subcontractors usefully share observation of teaching and learning profiles with Staffordshire CC. They also provide samples of learners' feedback. Staffordshire CC's staff visit sessions provided by subcontractors' tutors to check on registers, schemes of work, lesson plans, resources and learners' views. Records of these visits are appropriately shared with the subcontractors at monitoring meetings. Arrangements are not fully in place for Staffordshire CC to quality assure standards of observation of teaching and learning practice across all the subcontracted provision.

How has the self-assessment process and development planning improved?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Staffordshire CC has made reasonable progress in developing the self-assessment process and development planning to improve the provision. A comprehensive and clear cyclical quality assurance system is in place. Staffordshire CC produces self-assessment reports that effectively reflect its own direct delivery provision, which managers appropriately moderate. All staff are effectively involved in the self-assessment process, which includes individual course reviews and course evaluation meetings between tutors and their line managers.

The subcontractors' monitoring document clearly sets out Staffordshire CC's expectations in relation to self-assessment, data transfer and termly monitoring visits. All subcontractors submit an annual self-assessment report of their adult and community learning provision, which is reviewed at the autumn term monitoring meeting. Staffordshire CC pays particular attention to the completion of a summary self-assessment report, which adequately reflects the key strengths and areas for improvement of its provision.

Staffordshire CC's quality improvement and development plan effectively sets out action points with clear, measurable targets and outcomes, accountabilities and time constraints. This action plan is regularly reviewed at senior management team meetings. Managers also review the subcontractors' quality improvement plans relating to the adult and community learning provision, at the termly monitoring meetings.