MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Surrey County Council
Date of visit: 27 November 2008

Context

This monitoring visit follows the ALI reinspection in January 2007 of Surrey County Council's (SCC) adult and community learning service at which leadership and management and quality improvement were found to be satisfactory and awarded a grade 3, and equality of opportunity was found inadequate and awarded a grade 4. All curriculum areas were satisfactory. Overall effectiveness was awarded a grade 3 and the inspection team were broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process. The provider demonstrated that it had sufficient capacity to make improvements.

Since the reinspection, SCC now offers direct Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded provision in the north and south west of Surrey through a reduced number of learning centres, however, the total number of learners is increasing. SCC offers mostly personal and community development learning (PCDL) and continues to hold the contract for all the family learning provision in Surrey, concentrating on family literacy, language and numeracy. Adult and community learning sit within the cultural services directorate of the council and works across a wide-ranging network of schools and children centres. A new adult learning manager came into post in March 2008. He has raised the profile of SCC's adult and community learning provision in the community and actively promotes the part it plays in the council's strategic planning. SCC staff appreciate his consultative, responsive style of leadership and the new sense of direction he has given to the service.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve success rates and retention rates for substantive courses?	Reasonable progress

No success rate judgements were made at reinspection. At the previous inspection inspectors judged that managers had insufficient information to evaluate provision. Data collection for 2007/08 is much improved. Recording progress and achievement (RARPA) is now well established and shows satisfactory performance for the current year. Current data held by the provider indicates that success rates for the very small proportion of accredited courses are at least satisfactory. Retention rates are high.

Quality of Provision

What progress has been made in planning and monitoring individual learning?	Reasonable progress

SCC has made good progress in implementing the process for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA). At the previous inspection RARPA was insufficiently established, learners on many courses were unsure about its relevance or purpose. Learning aims were not clearly identified and recorded and the individual learning record did not sufficiently distinguish between different learners' performance. The changes and improvements made to RARPA in adult and community learning by SCC are now well established. Good guidance exists to promote an understanding of RARPA to tutors. Initial assessment is appropriate for different types of provision and learners feel they are on the right level of learning and course. Different versions of RARPA are used by different types of provision, however, the process is generally well understood and used by learners and tutors. Tutors promote the importance of RARPA well to learners. SCC has made good progress in training tutors and staff in how to set clearly defined learning objectives. Generally, learning objectives recorded by learners and assisted by tutors are improved. Curriculum managers and tutors clearly understand the progress they expect learners to make. However, some completed RARPA forms do not always indicate learners' full achievement sufficiently, or the expected minimum threshold for the achievement of learning outcomes. Some completed forms indicate the distance travelled in learning but not whether this merits full achievement.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving specialist resources?	Significant progress

SCC has made significant progress in improving specialist resources. At the previous inspection inspectors judged that language tutors had too few specialist resources to promote learning. Since then many new resources exist to support language tutors at every centre. In addition, tutors from many curriculum areas have welcomed the increase in specialist resources. Provision is far less reliant on tutors bringing their own resources into learning sessions. Additional support for learners in classes is far more speedily provided. A range of specialist support resources are now available for learners with specific learning difficulties or disabilities. SCC has invested in new information and communication technology and has provided more funding to improve learning resources and accommodation. Managers have implemented much improved marketing and publicity to promote courses. Tutors have good opportunities to request new resources and value the action that managers take as a result. Specialist learning resources for learners with disabilities are relocated according to where they are needed.

What progress has been made to make better use of targets to manage performance and raise standards?	Significant progress

Managers made too little use of targets to manage performance and raise standards at the time of the previous inspection. Personal and team targets were not sufficiently challenging and overall targets for the service were not clearly broken down into curriculum areas or by individual staff. Now, clear and measurable targets are set at strategic level and are promoted widely and reflected in service and curriculum plans. Managers share targets for their area of the provision. SCC has made significant progress in how information is shared and used to plan and evaluate the performance and relevance of its adult provision in Surrey. Clear action plans are devised based on better and more relevant information. Managers are set clear targets and action plans are regularly reviewed. Curriculum managers devise relevant improvement targets to match their provision. Curriculum managers have completed useful evaluations of the types of learners that access courses and where they can recruit new learners in new locations. Curriculum managers have a clear supportive team ethos. Information is effectively shared and they feel well supported by senior managers. Managers have a greater awareness of the community they serve and are seeking to make the service more inclusive. SCC has been successful at reducing the proportion of course cancellations noted as high at the reinspection. SCC has productive peer group partnerships with other providers in south east England to share good practice and evaluate the quality of information in documents such as the annual self-assessment reports.

What progress has been made to show how explicitly equality and diversity are promoted through policies, widening participation projects, information materials and the curriculum?	Significant progress

At the reinspection, equality of opportunities was judged inadequate. Inspectors noted that SCC had satisfactory arrangements to support learners with disabilities. Marketing and publicity materials were satisfactory but considered not to represent the diverse nature of potential learner groups. The service was in the early stages of developing its work with disadvantaged groups and family learning had decreased over the previous year. Equality was not explicitly promoted through the curriculum and the service had been slow to implement its policies. Data on people from minority ethnic groups was not collected and analysed.

Now the service has good arrangements to support learners with additional needs on both mainstream and discrete programmes. Marketing materials are more accessible to a broader audience of new and lapsed learners. The service has developed good learner involvement strategies. Tutors have improved equality and diversity awareness in course and lesson planning. Family programmes have increased the participation of learners from under-represented and minority ethnic groups. The council is undertaking a comprehensive review of equality and diversity in the service

and is committed to achieving level 3 of the national equality standard by autumn 2009. Social inclusion is much improved. Safeguarding of vulnerable adults is particularly well addressed by clear guidelines and staff training promoting ways of preventing abuse occurring. The impact of equality initiatives is monitored through a range of quality improvement activities. SCC has extended its range of work with disadvantaged and hard to reach groups.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made to measure the impact the self-assessment process and improvement action planning has had on the provision since the previous inspection?	Significant progress

At the reinspection, arrangements for quality improvement were satisfactory. Good progress had been made in developing the observation of teaching and learning and the amount of inadequate teaching had been reduced. The formal recording of learners' progress and achievement was insufficiently established. Self-assessment did not give a clear indication of key judgements.

In the last 18 months, significant improvements have been made in many areas of the provision. Family learning has moved from out-sourcing much of its provision to providing mainly in-house programmes and integrating its skills for life courses. Community learning is working with disadvantaged groups of learners including travellers and people with mental health difficulties. SCC is offering a larger range of different programmes to learners in isolated geographical areas. Improvement activity is carried out through detailed and very useful observations of teaching and learning. The feedback is instrumental in improving the performance of many part-time staff. The self-assessment is more critical than last year and the judgements match the organisations proposed grades. Frequent informal visits and contacts take place to support tutors, improve their practice and share information. These are recorded to help monitor staff performance. The self-assessment process is well established and fully inclusive. It makes good use of feedback from its learner and tutor course evaluations, learner focus groups, partners and local schools. Changes happen as a result of this feedback. The self-assessment report is rich in judgements and data and provides a largely accurate assessment of the provision. The post-inspection action plan includes clear and measurable targets to raise the quality of programmes. Staff help compile the reports on their areas of learning and recognise their own contribution to the process.