

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Shropshire Council Adult and  
Community Learning  
Date of visit: 18 June 2008

### Context

Shropshire Adult and Community Learning is part of the Learning, Employment and Training Service, within the Learning, Culture and Community Safety Division of the council's Community Services directorate.

The service has undergone a restructuring programme over the last two years. Shropshire Adult and Community Learning operate from the Gateway Education and Art Centre in Shrewsbury and through a number of community venues located across the county. Most of the provision is non-accredited. The provider receives funding from Shropshire Learning and Skills Council, predominantly for personal and community development, first steps provision and for family learning. It also receives funding to support neighbourhood learning in deprived communities. An adult and community learning manager runs the provision, supported by two quality improvement managers, a family learning manager and two teacher/advisors. Most teaching is delivered by part-time tutors. In 2006/07, there were 5,766 enrolments. The largest areas of provision were arts, media and publishing and language, literature and culture.

At the previous inspection in November 2006, leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality improvement, were judged as satisfactory. Provision in information and communication technology, sport, leisure and recreation and family learning was satisfactory. Arts, media and publishing and language, literature and culture were judged as good.

### Achievement and standards

How much improvement has occurred in achievements and standards?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Since the previous inspection, Shropshire County Council has made reasonable progress in improving learner achievements and standards. Processes for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) have been established and learners and their tutors are now aware which individual and course objectives have

been achieved. However, the service does not have common definitions across the service for retention or achievement. Learner evaluation questionnaires indicate that learners gain improved confidence and social skills as well as achieving their personal and course objectives. The standard of learners' work continues to be appropriate to the level and stage of their course. Shropshire County Council has reorganised its provision so that there is a shared management structure for adult and community learning, work-based learning, learndirect and learning provision funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. This arrangement provides clear progression routes for learners from non-accredited adult and community learning provision into accredited provision elsewhere in the service. There are indications from end of course reviews that the proportion of adult and community learners progressing onto further courses has increased, however, the provider does not have data to quantify this.

How much has the skills for life provision improved?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Shropshire County Council has made reasonable progress in improving the quality of its skills for life provision. Since the previous inspection, the council has appointed a family learning manager. The adult and community learning manager meets regularly with the family learning manager and team, who have primary responsibility for implementing the skills for life strategy. The number of learners achieving qualifications in literacy and numeracy has increased since the previous inspection. The family learning team now has a better working relationship with the council's extended schools team, and has developed an action plan for its work with them. There is also a more targeted and appropriate range of courses than previously. The service has provided staff development in skills for life. In 2006/07, most tutors attended training on initial assessment and differentiation (the accommodation in their planning and teaching of diverse starting points, abilities and learning goals of learners). In the past year, family learning tutors have attended a number of courses to update their skills. The council has usefully extended its range of community-based courses, which engage an increasing number of learners into family learning provision. It also subcontracts to a charity to provide courses to engage learners with specific learning difficulties or disabilities. The service acknowledges the role of skills for life in a number of its quality improvement documents. However, the adult and community learning service does not yet have a single plan for implementing the Learning, Employment and Training Service's skills for life strategy, which captures all the key actions which need to be addressed and monitored.

Have the reviewing and recording of learners' progress and achievement improved?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Reasonable progress has been made in improving the processes for reviewing and recording learners' progress and achievement. This was a key challenge for the service at the previous inspection and was a particular weakness in language, literature and culture. Initial assessment is now used effectively to establish learners' starting levels against which to judge progress and achievement. Tutors have received appropriate training in RARPA and have been issued with appropriate guidance. On long courses, learners' progress and achievement of objectives are recorded during mid course and end of course reviews using an improved individual learning plan. Learners on courses running for six weeks or less use a simpler learning record for the same purpose. The recording of course objectives and progress towards, or achievement of them, has improved. Learners record their reasons for enrolling on the learning programme but although there is space provided to translate these into specific personal learning objectives, this is rarely done. The provider now uses the Asset language ladder, a nationally recognised hierarchy of language competence, to assess performance levels in modern foreign languages. It is introducing OCN accreditation, where appropriate, in its adult and community learning provision to add further objective measures of achievement.

To what extent has target-setting improved?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Shropshire County Council has made reasonable progress in improving its target-setting. Clear targets continue to be set at the service level agreement for recruitment, by learner type, age and for retention. The service has broken down these overarching targets by curriculum area. The adult and community learning manager uses a traffic light system to regularly monitor targets and highlight those most in danger of a shortfall. Appropriate action is taken to identify the causes and address them. Curriculum teams have a much clearer understanding of their contribution in meeting the service's overall targets. The service is in the early stages of capturing and integrating detailed learner feedback to inform the curriculum development and action plans.

How well are quality improvement processes now implemented?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

The provider has made significant progress in implementing its quality improvement processes. At the previous inspection the service was given a key challenge to fully implement quality improvement arrangements. Arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning are now more thorough. Each tutor is observed at least once every year and more frequently if their sessions are judged to be satisfactory or inadequate. The report format for recording observations has been improved and

includes clear time-bound action points used for staff appraisal and personal and team development planning. Observation grades are regularly moderated and joint observation is undertaken to train observers as a quality improvement tool. Peer observation is used to demonstrate good practice. All new tutors are observed within their first 12 weeks. At the previous inspection, these initial observations were not graded. All observations are now graded. The service has set target of 75% of observations to be grade 1 or 2 by the end of the 2008/09. Currently in adult and community learning and family learning, 68% and 50% of observations respectively are graded 1 or 2 and there has been no unsatisfactory teaching observed this year. In addition to formal observations, there are also informal visits where practices and documentation are audited as well as a two tier central auditing arrangement for all course documentation. The service has recently recruited two quality improvement officers and has two teacher/advisors all of whom are actively involved, with senior management, in the monitoring of quality improvement arrangements.

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

What improvements have been made in self-assessment and improvement planning?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

At the previous inspection, the self-assessment process was judged as thorough, although some of the judgements and grades in the report were judged to be inaccurate. The service has continued with its inclusive process. All key stakeholders are appropriately involved. The self-assessment report has a strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning. Curriculum area grades are fully supported by the lesson observation grade profile. The report is judgemental and clearly identifies strengths and weaknesses. Supporting evidence is clearly cited to support the judgements, however, the report does not place the same importance on learner achievement and retention data as it does to the quality of teaching and learning.