

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Cambridgeshire Adult and Community Learning Service
Date of visit: 10 December 2008

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection of Cambridgeshire Adult and Community Learning service (the Service) in November 2006 when the overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory. Leadership and management were also considered to be satisfactory, as were arrangements to improve quality. Equality of opportunity was, however, judged to be good. The three sector subject areas which were inspected, information and communication technology (ICT), Preparation for life and work and Family learning were all judged to be satisfactory.

The Service holds a contract with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide adult and community learning across all of Cambridgeshire other than Peterborough. Most of the provision is subcontracted to two colleges of further education and 17 village and community colleges across the county and a range of voluntary groups. The council directly delivers family learning programmes and those for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The range of the provision offered currently includes all sector subject areas. The largest are leisure, travel and tourism, arts, media and publishing and languages, literature and culture. Approximately 20% of the total provision leads to a qualification.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving levels of achievement especially in accredited programmes?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, achievement and standards were generally good, although achievement in the accredited programmes was satisfactory. Since then achievement in accredited programmes in family learning have improved. In wider family learning courses between 2006/07 and 2007/08 the figure improved from 80% to 88% and in family literacy, language and numeracy (FLNN) programmes it improved significantly from 63% to 84%. In the previous inspection retention on FLLN programmes was poor. This has improved from 89% in 2006/07 to 96% in 2007/08. Retention on non-accredited courses has remained good at 95%.

Attendance in 2007/08 was also good at 83% although this represents a slight decline from 87% in the previous year. The Service is aware of this decline and has put relevant actions in place, although it is too early to judge their effectiveness.

What progress has the service made in establishing effective use of RARPA across the provision?	Insufficient progress
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At the previous inspection inspectors judged that the recognition and recording of learners' progress and achievement (RARPA) were insufficiently established across the Service. There has been insufficient progress in improving this. The Service has introduced improved training and guidance for tutors, both directly employed and those of subcontractors. There is now clear guidance on how tutors should use RARPA. However, the Service recognises in its self-assessment report that not all tutors are using RARPA effectively. In some classes there is good recording of individual learning goals and progress towards these. However, in many programmes appropriate learning goals such as improved confidence are not recorded even when associated with the primary purpose of the programme. In some cases learners are asked what they would like to gain from the programme and are not given the opportunity to formally comment on whether they have achieved these goals. In many programmes individual learning plans have an over emphasis on activities to be undertaken by learners rather than their learning.

Quality of Provision

What progress has the Service made in working to meet the needs of learners and employers?	Reasonable progress
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The Service has made reasonable progress in working with employers, a weakness identified in two of the sector subject areas in the previous inspection. A number of learners on non-accredited programmes have progressed to employment or training with work experience. In addition the authority has recently gained two Train to Gain contracts. The first contract delivers information technology qualifications through the learndirect service in response to demand from local employers. The second is in relation to health and social care and offers relevant NVQs that help care home owners and managers to meet their regulatory requirements. The range of literacy and numeracy qualifications offered has increased to better meet the needs of learners with lower level skills. The authority has developed useful links with employers to successfully support a number of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities into employment. A number of short courses have been offered to meet the needs of businesses including Introduction to Polish, for health workers in local NHS trusts.

Leadership and management

What progress has the Service made in improving curriculum support for tutors in the subcontracted provision?	Reasonable progress
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Inspectors at the previous inspection identified that there was insufficient support for some tutors in the subcontracted provision. Since then the Service has improved curriculum support for all tutors including those in the subcontracted provision. It has put new curriculum leaders in place for the four largest curriculum areas with regular tutors' meetings to discuss developments and to share good practice. These meetings take place at least twice each year. The service has very recently launched a web-based facility to further support tutors and to enable easier sharing of good practice. Tutors are able to add pages and to edit the existing pages. This has been started in one curriculum area but there are well advanced plans to expand it to all curriculum areas. This facility is seen as particularly important for tutors in small curriculum areas to share ideas and good practice.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the Service made in improving the arrangements for observing teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The Service has made reasonable progress in improving the arrangements to observe the quality of teaching and learning, identified as being insufficiently evaluative in the previous inspection. Arrangements to moderate observation grades have been seen to be inadequate by the service. Moderation was often much delayed and hampered by incomplete records. Changes to grades during moderation were not reflected in the overall judgements about the quality of the provision in the self-assessment report. Greater emphasis is now placed on carrying out joint observations rather than paper-based moderation of records to maintain and improve the quality of observations. Procedures for observations of lessons have recently been reviewed and a larger number of observations are now carried out than at the time of the previous inspection. A good sample of lessons which are directly delivered by the authority is observed. However, some lessons appear to have been over graded and there is an over-emphasis on the activities of teachers rather than the learning that is taking place. A smaller number of lessons in the provision subcontracted colleges are observed; these are carried out by staff from the colleges. It is too early to make a reliable judgement on the effectiveness of the new arrangements in improving the quality of teaching and learning.

What progress has the Service made in improving the self-assessment process?	Reasonable progress
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The authority has made reasonable progress in improving the self-assessment process, identified as satisfactory in the previous inspection. Good use is made of feedback from learners and staff and the analysis of data to reach judgements. Feedback from partners, including employers, is not used effectively. The Service has a clearly defined process and timetables the production of sector subject area and other contributory reports, which are used to build a working draft self-assessment report. New arrangements have been introduced for more robust validation and moderation of the judgements it contains by internal and external review panels. The current report is, however, somewhat repetitive and the grade for leadership and management appears overgenerous in relation to the grades presented for achievement and standards and the quality of the provision overall. A new template for the 2009 report has been designed to reflect the key aspects of both the common inspection framework and the framework for excellence. The Service has provided much staff training and development about the importance of self-assessment and the new procedures. Relevant action plans are reviewed regularly by the new quality working groups and in monthly performance management meetings with line managers.