

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Liverpool City Council
Date of visit: 24 April 2008

Context

This monitoring visit follows the reinspection in December 2006, at which Liverpool City Council (LCC) was graded as satisfactory for leadership and management, and for its arrangements for equality of opportunity. Quality improvement was good. Provision was good in both family learning and information and communications technology (ICT). Retail and commercial enterprise; arts, media and publishing; languages, literature and culture; and preparation for life and work were all satisfactory. Provision includes further education, first step, personal and community development learning and neighbourhood learning in deprived communities. LCC holds contracts with Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council.

Achievement and standards

How have achievements and standards improved since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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LCC has made reasonable progress in raising standards and achievement. At the reinspection, achievement rates on accredited courses were good on long courses at 61%. LCC has maintained this level. LCC monitors retention, achievement and success rates closely and its managers have a clear understanding of the value of each measure. They interpret each indicator logically to make meaningful year-by-year and mid-year comparisons. Most measures show distinctly and continuing upward trends. For example, in 2005/06 achievement in short courses was at 67%. This rose to 75% in 2006/07. Retention rates on personal and community development learning rose from 87% in 2005/06 to 92% in 2006/07. Where retention is identified as an issue timely actions are taken. For example in some courses in health, public services and care, retention went down to 74% in 2005/06. LCC identified this as an issue and implemented a range of effective strategies to improve. These included better information, advice and guidance, use of taster sessions, improved induction and a better range of courses. In 2006/07 retention improved to 81%. Final confirmed data for 2007/08 is not yet available but the service has internal data which indicates continued improvement when measured against the same stage last year.

How has the skills for life strategy progressed since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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LCC has made reasonable progress in developing the skills for life strategy. At the reinspection the strategy document was new to the service and insufficiently implemented with no named person leading its development. A skills for life manager is now in place. She has been working effectively with a consultant to improve provision. The manager has written a detailed plan for service-wide delivery with effective methodologies to prioritise targets across the provision. A clear strategic direction for development is in place. Managers and team leaders have been given effective training. Some good work has been done to share this information with tutors. The observation of teaching and learning process has been revised to include a checklist of good practice in skills for life when delivering sessions. This is used by both tutors and observers. However, this process has not yet come through a full cycle so the impact is not yet known. Unlike in the reinspection, the skills for life teaching team is now appropriately qualified and undertaking further training. Two members of the team are training in specialist dyslexia qualifications. New materials are now in place. While access to ICT is not always sufficient, the manager is aware of the issue and has conducted an audit to more effectively use resources and to purchase more. Tutors have had some training in the use of interactive materials though plans are in place for more.

How is self-assessment and development planning changing and improving provision?	Significant progress
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Self-assessment and development planning were identified as satisfactory at the previous inspection, and the inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process. Since the reinspection, LCC has made significant progress with the use of self-assessment and development planning to improve provision. The service has undertaken some very successful collaborative work with a neighbouring authority, initially to conduct a self-assessment peer review, providing some external moderation. This work has now developed significantly, extending across much of Merseyside. As part of the development planning, LCC has played a major part in establishing a North West protocol for the observation of teaching and learning. The results of this process are used well in evaluating progress in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment process is now more thorough, particularly in relation to identifying areas for improvement. Curriculum and subcontractor's self-assessment reports continue to be used well to contribute to the overall report. Course reviews provide a much greater source of evidence for self-assessment and tutors are much clearer about the relationship between course reviews and self-assessment. Since the reinspection, the grade profile of teaching and learning has improved, as have achievement rates.

How well is management information being used to improve?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made by the service in the analysis and use of data to improve provision, develop courses and attract new learners. A consultation exercise with staff helped to identify their requirements in understanding and using data. Effective use has been made of external consultants to develop the scope and use of management information systems. Over the last year, much more use has been made of data to identify and understand neighbourhood trends, including patterns of learner recruitment, retention and achievement. The service recognises that this aspect of data use requires further development. Management information continues to be accurately recorded. Participation by gender, ethnicity and disability is evaluated and monitored through the use of equality and diversity impact measures. Data managers have developed a detailed training guide, effectively used across the service. Individual and group training is provided for curriculum and administration managers, covering the types of reports that are available and how these can help with curriculum planning. The most recent self-assessment report identifies that the understanding of some tutors on the use of data requires further development. The recording of data for non-accredited learning has been improved and is now used across the service.

What actions have been taken since the reinspection to improve quality improvement processes?	Significant progress
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The previous inspection report identified that quality improvement processes were incomplete in some areas. Attention was particularly drawn to training on recognising and recording of progression and achievement, the quality of initial advice and guidance to learners, evaluation of the effects of initial assessment and sharing of good practice. The service recognised these issues and had plans to resolve them. The service has made significant progress towards resolving these issues. A simple but effective learner record book is now used well to identify group and individual learning objectives. Learners are fully involved in completing this, identifying and recording their achievements from each session and reviewing their overall progress. Tutors also evaluate whether individual learning aims have been achieved. Curriculum managers moderate these evaluations through wide ranging sampling activities. The service has made significant improvements to its pre-course information, providing a clear and detailed explanation about course content, entry requirements and methods of assessment. This is available directly from centres or through the website. On some courses, it is provided on a practical basis through the use of well planned taster sessions. Good use is made of open days, with independent advice and guidance on courses and progression opportunities provided by service staff. Schemes of work and lesson plans now take account of the results of initial assessment, through a greater focus on individualised learning and extension activities. Examples of good practice are shared at curriculum and cross-

curriculum meetings. Records of observations of teaching and learning now prompt observers to identify, record and share areas of good practice.

What measures have been taken to improve equality and diversity practice across the organisation?	Reasonable progress
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LCC has made reasonable progress in improving equality and diversity practice across provision. At the reinspection they applied diversity practice insufficiently to challenge staff or learners. Frontline staff have now had relevant training to ensure they fully understand some of the barriers facing learners. Around half of all teaching staff have had a package of training given in how to apply equality and diversity in the classroom. The remainder are to have this training in the next year. Many staff have had training on an individual basis as a result of individual requests. Much work has been done with partner agencies to increase individual staff understanding of particular communities, though this has not yet been rolled out on a more systematic basis. Some good work has been done through peer review work to include equality and diversity in the observation processes. Many staff are shadowing colleagues from other providers to pick up good practice. LCC are making effective use of neighbourhood learning in deprived communities funding to reach a range of communities and to provide resources in deprived communities. Some good work has been done to make learning more individualised and to use appropriate methodologies particularly for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. Appropriate measures are in place for the protection of young people and vulnerable adults. LCC has a named person who has overview of the issue. They have council-led policies and procedures. Family learning staff have undertaken relevant training. The rest of the staff have not had this training. Criminal Records Bureau checks are made using central council procedures.