

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Cumbria Adult Education
Date of visit: 25 March 2009

Context

Cumbria Adult Education (CAE) contracts with Cumbria Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to offer provision to approximately 13,235 learners each year. Learners are recruited from the three large urban centres of Carlisle, Barrow and Kendal, and the surrounding small towns and villages in a dispersed rural county.

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in November 2007, when CAE's overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management were satisfactory. The provision in sport, leisure and recreation and in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages was good. Provision in arts, media and publishing, languages, literature and culture, independent living and leisure skills and family learning was satisfactory.

Since the inspection, the service's profile of provision has not changed significantly. In 2007/08, within further education provision, information and communication technology (ICT) remains the largest area of provision with 32% of all learners. In personal and community development and learning, arts, media and publishing remains the largest area of provision, with 35% of all learners. CAE continues to deliver most of its provision through subcontractors, but has reduced the number of its subcontractors from 44 to 33.

Since the previous inspection, as part of an overall reorganisation of the Children's Services Directorate in Cumbria County Council, CAE was combined with the 14-19 partnership team to form the Continuous Learning Unit within the Schools and Learning section of the directorate. A new management team is now responsible for the provision.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving achievement and standards?	Reasonable progress
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The service has made reasonable progress in improving achievement and standards. Success rates on accredited long courses are improving overall. Success rates on long courses have improved from 57% at the previous inspection to 67% in 2007/08. In 2007/08, success rates for level 1 courses improved to 74%, although this is still below the national average. During the same period, success rates on level 2 and level 3 courses have also improved to 78%. Success rates in most sector subject

areas have improved, with success rates on ICT courses in 2007/08 above the national average at 79%. However, success rates in some sector subject areas, especially languages which accounts for a substantial proportion of the provision, have not met the LSC's targets for minimum levels of performance. The retention rate for learners on non-accredited provision in 2007/08 is satisfactory at 88%. CAE now monitors attendance throughout the year, and has already identified trends with the potential to affect retention rates negatively. Actions to improve the retention rates have been identified and are progressing, though it is too early to assess the full affect of these.

What progress has been made to improve the procedures to recognise and record learners' progress and achievements?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the procedure for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) was an area for improvement. CAE has taken reasonable action to improve the use of the RARPA process in its provision. Tutors have benefited from focused training on RARPA, and most have improved their practice. Tutors and managers have worked hard to develop and share practices to improve the consistency and reliability of the use of RARPA process within the provision. The use of the RARPA process is monitored through detailed regular audits, and centre managers and curriculum leaders intervene when issues are identified. However, a few tutors still do not use all aspects of the RARPA process effectively. For example, the setting of appropriate and time-bound learning targets is not consistently good in assessing learners' progress and achievement. CAE has identified that the RARPA process and its implementation, particularly with some of its subcontractors, requires further improvement, and has developed more focused support for tutors to implement the RARPA process successfully.

What progress has been made to improve learners' assessment and to use this information effectively?	Reasonable progress
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CAE has made reasonable progress in improving the assessment of learners and in using this information effectively. Since the previous inspection, CAE has developed procedures to take the assessment practices used in its accredited provision as a model for assessment in many areas of non-accredited programmes. Many tutors find this approach very useful in making better judgements about learners' progress. Formative assessment procedures are now well established and monitored through mentoring and better use of in-year data. Procedures for initial assessment have also improved. All learners receive improved pre-course information to help them to decide which course is best suited to their needs and goals. This is followed by an appropriate assessment to ensure that they are on the right course. Tutors have received good levels of training in recognising learners' literacy and numeracy support needs, and this has had a positive affect on referrals to appropriate provision and to the provision of in-class support. Information from the initial assessment is transferred to learners' individual plans adequately. However, the use of this

information is not consistently effective. For example, learners are assessed about how they learn best, but this information is not used to plan teaching sessions.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the implementation of quality arrangements?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the implementation of quality assurance procedures was an area for improvement. CAE has worked hard to improve the monitoring of its large and dispersed subcontracted provision and has made reasonable progress. Following the review of its quality arrangements, the monitoring and implementation of quality systems is now led by a senior manager and a management team. CAE has devised clear procedures to improve the implementation of its quality systems. A clear schedule of activities has been created which focuses on improving the quality of provision and is shared with all subcontractors. Activities include monitoring the performance of learners against performance targets in all 33 subcontractors and identifying any performance issues. A sample of learners' paperwork is reviewed biannually to monitor the implementation of the procedures used in the RARPA process, and action plans are identified and agreed. Regular meetings and feedback from staff ensure they are fully involved in the development and implementation of the quality arrangements. Audits of learning processes are effective in identifying areas for improvements. Subcontractors are required to offer explanations for any underperformance and suggest actions for improvement. However, subcontractors do not have individual improvement targets. No overall system is in place to collect and monitor the pace of the implementation of the action plans agreed with the subcontractors. The pace of improvement within some aspects of the subcontracted provision is slow.

What progress has been made to improve the quality, and effective use, of the observation of teaching and learning?	Insufficient progress
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At the previous inspection, self-assessed grades for the observation of teaching and learning were too generous. Since then, CAE has made insufficient progress to improve the consistency and use of the observation process. It has satisfactorily trained 20 of its staff who observe teaching sessions, which include a number of joint observation sessions. The observers use new observation recording forms which include a checklist of important aspects of teaching and learning sessions. Recommendations from observations are communicated through action plans to tutors. However, the planning of observations is insufficiently focused on improving the quality of the provision. Tutors are only observed every other year without any systematic arrangements to monitor the effectiveness of the actions following each observation. Observation records are clear and informative; however, they do not pay sufficient attention to learning and focus too much on teaching. Arrangements to improve the consistency of observation grades are not developed well. For example,

no moderation process or clear criteria are in place which apply to all the observation records to ensure the consistency of observation grades. Detailed criteria for improving the consistency of observations have been developed more recently, but not implemented.

What progress has been made to make the self-assessment process more critical and use the development plan more effectively?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the self-assessment process was judged to be satisfactory although it was insufficiently critical and some over-grading was noted. CAE has made reasonable progress in improving aspects of its self-assessment. It has improved its use of data significantly to assess performance. The use of the subcontractor monitoring process contributes to the self-assessment report effectively. However, some of the strengths identified do not focus sufficiently on the affect on learners. The self-assessment process is inclusive and uses feedback and the performance of its subcontractors to identify areas for improvements.

The use of the post-inspection action plan and development plan based on the self-assessment report is satisfactory. The development plan is detailed, with clear arrangements for monitoring actions. CAE is making satisfactory progress in improving the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.