

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Adult College for Rural East  
Sussex  
Date of visit: 10 December 2008

### Context

The Adult College for Rural East Sussex (ACRES) was first inspected in May 2006 and reinspected in May 2007. This monitoring visit follows the reinspection of ACRES at which overall effectiveness of provision and leadership and management, including arrangements for quality improvement and equality of opportunity were satisfactory. The inspection team were broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process and ACRES demonstrated it was in as good position to make improvements. Provision in leisure, travel and tourism; languages, literature and culture; and preparation for life and work were all satisfactory.

ACRES was established in August 2005 from a consortium of seven community colleges and East Sussex County Council. It delivers a co-ordinated programme of adult and community learning in Wealdon, a predominantly rural area of East Sussex, of area 300 square miles and a population of around 120,000. Over 98% of the population are white.

ACRES' management board is comprised of the principals of the consortium's partner colleges and a representative of the County Council. The adult learning manager at ACRES, reports to the Board, and has responsibility for an operational team consisting of a business manager, curriculum co-ordinators and administrative staff. Since its establishment two colleges have withdrawn from the consortium resulting in a drop in learner enrolment of 24%. Enrolments have, however, stabilised and ACRES has total of 1292 learners on personal and community development programmes (PCDL) and further education programmes. All programmes are funded through Sussex Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving learners' levels of attainment since the previous inspection achievement when standards were generally satisfactory?	Reasonable progress
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ACRES has made reasonable progress in improving standards and achievements. Average attendance has improved from 84.7% in 2007/08 to 94.3%. Average

retention and levels of achievement of primary learning goals for learners on non-accredited PCDL programmes have risen to over 90%. ACRES has revised its procedures for recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement, especially for PCDL learners. Tutors have introduced more individualised learning into teaching plans and learners are set more personal and challenging targets to raise standards of work and levels of achievement. In 2007/08, enrolments onto accredited further education programmes fell steeply, with learner numbers in literacy, ESOL and numeracy, for example, falling by 60%. Enrolment has stabilised and 16% of current learners are following accredited programmes. Achievement and standards have been maintained in most accredited programme areas, with continued good levels of attendance and retention. Where falls in success rates have occurred reduced retention levels have been largely responsible and achievement has been sustained. Success rates of 70% and 73% respectively, were achieved on level 3 photography and GCSE Spanish courses, introduced in 2007/08. English speakers of other languages are now able to work towards qualifications and a success rate of 75% was achieved in 2007/08.

#### Quality of provision

How effective has action taken to ensure the individual needs of learners, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are well met?	Reasonable progress
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At the reinspection, curriculum management of programmes for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities was inadequate. ACRES' approach to the identification of learners' support needs was not systematic and many staff relied on learners declaring their own support needs. ACRES has made reasonable progress in meeting learning support needs and promoting access to learning for people with learning difficulties and disabilities is a key objective in the 2008/09 strategic plan. A student support officer has been appointed to take responsibility for disability support and to work with staff and learners. Arrangements are providing better identification and recording of each learner's learning support needs, although systems still rely heavily on personal disclosure of need by individual learners. The proportion of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities has gradually increased from only 2% in 2006/07 to 6.2% this year. The student support officer works well in liaison with the subject curriculum co-ordinators to assess individual need. Student support reviews, evaluating the adequacy of support arrangements, are completed two weeks after enrolment and findings are circulated to appropriate tutors. For learners on PCDL programmes, there is no dedicated fund to provide additional support for learning difficulties and disabilities. However, ACRES has made available adaptive computer technology and has targeted improved use of information and learning technology to support learning.

## Leadership and management

What progress has been made in further developing and implementing arrangements for observing teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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Improvement of teaching and learning was a weakness at the 2006 inspection. At the time of reinspection, ACRES had implemented very effective arrangements with the findings of observations of teaching and learning (OTL) being used well to share good practice and to identify staff development needs. Reasonable progress in arrangements for OTL has been made and the OTL programme has been reviewed. Additional informal visits are made to classes early in the term as a supplement annual observation of each tutor as part of the planned OTL programme. Areas for improvement identified by OTL are discussed with the tutor and an action plan is agreed. The action plan is monitored and progress is discussed with the tutor at an individual annual planning and review meeting. In cases where tutors need on-going support additional observations are scheduled. Observers now place greater focus on evaluating the process and outcomes of teaching and learning rather than assessing the quality of programme documentation. Judgements on a tutor's effectiveness in determining the level of learning and progress made by learners in sessions is now included in OTL reports. Paired observations, particularly with new observers have been introduced as part of the cross-organisation moderation process and ACRES is a member of a quality consortium with partner providers preparing for joint observations across the consortium.

How effective have been initiatives to attract learners from under-represented groups and communities?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of inspection 2006, ACRES was not effectively publicising and marketing its provision to reach under-represented groups. At the time of reinspection, some good initiatives were in place to attract learners from these groups and communities. ACRES has made reasonable progress in widening participation by under-represented groups of learners. In consultation with Sussex LSC, ACRES has identified priority under-represented groups and successfully bid for funding to support this area of work. Projects to reach older learners in isolated parts of the community are underway. ACRES has established close links with agencies and organisations, such as Age Concern, in supporting elderly learners. External links have led to better marketing of courses through the distribution of information leaflets by key workers in partner organisations. Strategies are more clearly focused on targeting deprived areas. ESF funds were secured by ESCC and as part of their project, they provided funding for ACRES to appoint a community project co-ordinator during 2007/08. For 2008/09, the contact points in two districts are funded from the LSC PCDL bid ACRES won. Marketing events to provide information have been held for community organisations. Learners' surveys are being used to identify appropriate curriculum

developments, especially to counter the gender in-balance created by low numbers of male learners. Efforts to recruit more male tutors have been largely unsuccessful and male under-representation in programme areas, such as sport and recreation, persists.

What progress has been made in introducing procedures for collecting and using data to improve services?	Significant progress
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ACRES had set up more effective management information systems by the time of the reinspection, but the organisation was judged to be making insufficient use of data to support quality improvement. ACRES has made significant progress in improving its systems for the collection and use of data. Since the reinspection an independent management information system, designed to ACRES' requirements, has replaced the use of a shared local authority system. Data is being routinely collected and better used for strategic planning and the setting of key objectives, especially in the targeting of funds to priority learners. Analytical data, for example, is used in ACRES' strategic plan to give an indication of performance trends and to provide detailed participation profiles of learners by gender, age groups, disability, ethnicity and concessionary fee claims. The system, managed centrally by dedicated administration staff, produces timely, complete and reliable data and performance reports to inform curriculum development. The system is used effectively for many aspects of service management including, recording enrolment information, participation and attendance monitoring, planning staff training and developing marketing strategy. Staff training in the use of the MIS has been completed and managers and curriculum coordinators have direct access to information to guide operational management and quality improvement.

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

How effective is the self-assessment process and how well has the post-inspection action plan been used to improve the quality of provision?	Reasonable progress
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At reinspection the self-assessment process was satisfactory. Tutors and board members, however, were not sufficiently involved in the process, although feedback from learners and external partners was incorporated into the self-assessment report. The report was critical and evaluative and accurate in its judgements, but it contained insufficient historical data to monitor trends in performance. Reasonable progress has been made and the process of self-assessment is more inclusive. Each curriculum coordinator now prepares a draft report addressing the key questions contained in the Common Inspection Framework. Although these drafts still draw heavily on the views of learners, better account is taken of performance data for retention, attendance and achievement. The findings of the OTL programme are used and revised arrangements for the recognising and recording of learners'

progress and achievement are providing more reliable information on performance in non-accredited programmes. A draft self-assessment report is presented to the Board of Management and to curriculum coordinators for comment and amendment before a final report is produced. Each curriculum coordinator produces an action plan, agreed with the adult learning manager, and action plans are monitored at monthly management meetings. Some action points within the plans are included as targets in individual staff development plans.