MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Devon County Council
Date of visit: 8 July 2009

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in May 2008, when inspectors judged Devon County Council's overall effectiveness as satisfactory. Capacity to improve, leadership and management and equality of opportunity were judged good. Health, public services and care and information and communication technology were graded good, and preparation for life and work was graded satisfactory.

Adult and community learning is provided by Devon Adult and Community Learning Service (DACL) which is part of the adult and community services directorate of the County Council. DACL provides non-accredited and accredited adult and community learning in a range of venues and community centres across Devon. It employs a head of service to manage a team of eight senior managers comprising three area managers, three skills managers a systems manager and a quality manager. The management structure has undergone several changes over the last few years, the most recent being the appointment of the new head of service in February 2008. Provision and services are focused around eight main centres, situated in the main market towns from which local outreach programmes also operate.

During 2008/09 to date, 11,160 learners attended 1,336 courses in personal and community development learning in nine sector subject areas. Employer related and Train to Gain courses were attended by 651 learners on 135 courses in four sector subject areas and learner responsive provision was attended by 5,654 learners on 696 courses in 11 sector subject areas. In that period, 345 tutors provided courses in 280 venues.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has DACL made in improving achievement and standards overall and, in particular, literacy provision?	Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection achievement and standards were satisfactory overall. Trends in success rates in accredited provision show substantial improvement between 2006/07 and 2007/08 for level 1 and 2 long courses and short courses. In

2007/08, the success rate for level 2 long was at or above the national rate, for level 1 long it remained below the national rate and for short courses it was at about the national rate. In-year success rates for the period up to the end of April 2009 generally show a continued improvement. At course level, success rates on a few courses are still low. DACL has identified this and is taking appropriate action to improve outcomes. Since the inspection, DACL has introduced more stringent measurement of success rates in non-accredited provision. Success rates in this provision have continued to improve. Poor success rates in literacy were an area for improvement in the previous inspection, particularly at entry level. DACL has introduced a number of measures to improve success rates in all skills for life provision. It piloted new entry level qualifications in 2008/09. Success rates are improving.

Quality of provision

| How much progress has DACL made in identifying and meeting learners' support needs? | Reasonable progress |

At the previous inspection, the identification of learners' support needs was a key area for improvement. DACL has improved initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills of all learners referred to Skills for Life provision. In addition, all learners enrolled on national vocational qualifications (NVQs) have an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills at induction. Initial information, advice and guidance for all learners includes discussion of potential additional learning support needs. Learners with identified literacy or numeracy needs are encouraged to enrol onto Skills for Life qualifications. DACL provides appropriate additional support to enable learners with identified support needs to complete their course, whether they enrol onto Skills for Life qualifications or not. Improved information across the service about the support available and how to access it enables tutors and other staff to make appropriate referrals for additional support. Learning support co-ordinators act promptly to ensure timely and appropriate support for all learners referred. The service has developed good access to specialist staff and resources to ensure appropriate provision for identified support needs, for example, signers, readers and scribes as well as specialised equipment.

| How much progress has DACL made in developing the use of resources, in particular information and communication technology (ICT) to improve teaching and learning? | Reasonable progress |

DACL has implemented a stepped programme to address this area for improvement identified in the previous inspection. A clear policy to upgrade equipment and resources has resulted in significant improvements in facilities available to learners. The programme of upgrading is still underway. DACL has made progress in reducing the number of external venues without appropriate facilities. DACL has focused on

purchasing portable resources, such as laptops, so that all learners can access appropriate resources. A comprehensive programme of staff training in the use of ICT is being implemented. It is too early to identify substantial impact in all curriculum areas. Observations of teaching and learning now include feedback on improving the effective use of ILT. DACL is in the process of extending the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) across all provision. Some curriculum areas have a good range of resources available to staff and learners on the VLE, but in other areas it is still underdeveloped.

Leadership and management

How much progress has DACL made in the management of distance learning programmes in ICT?	Reasonable progress

The previous inspection report identified the management of distance learning programme in ICT as an area for improvement. Of the two partner providers, one was considered broadly satisfactory at inspection and the other inadequate. DACL has monitored both partners through interim and annual audits which identified potential areas for improvement. DACL provides support to develop and improve provision. DACL provided additional support to help the latter partner improve its learner monitoring and monitoring processes through formal improvement planning discussions and regular monthly support meetings. Through careful discussion and negotiation, this partner decided to complete its current contract in April 2009 and thereafter discontinue its ICT delivery partnership with DACL. The monitoring and follow up of learners on distance learning programmes has improved. The partners have made some use of DACL's VLE, and DACL has provided support in observations of their teaching and learning sessions. Success rates on distance learning programmes in ICT have improved from 49% overall at the previous inspection. In-year data to the end of April 2009 showed success rates had improved to 77% at level 1 and 74% at level 2.

How much progress has DACL made in consolidating its quality improvement procedures?	Significant progress

A key area for improvement at the previous inspection was quality improvement procedures. A reorganised quality improvement panel representing most levels of staff has clear responsibility for sharing information across the service. The panel reports to senior management team meetings and senior managers monitor progress. In January 2009, DACL implemented a quality audit framework. Key aspects of provision have clearly identified quality improvement procedures with set criteria, an agreed timeframe and a named person responsible. DACL has effectively supported the transition to the central 'My Devon' system for providing pre-course information and has introduced new arrangements for a consistent format for pre-course information. DACL has established an electronic monthly reporting system for

retention and achievement data. Team leaders take prompt action to follow up areas of concern. Termly reports to area managers and team leaders keep both groups informed of withdrawals, retention, achievement and success data. DACL uses this information effectively to highlight concerns and take action. DACL effectively records staff development activity. A new database records action plans from observations of teaching and learning and tracks their implementation. DACL has effective links between action plans from teaching and learning observations, and workforce development and e-learning plans.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How effective are self-assessment and improvement planning, including the implementation of post-inspection action plans?	Reasonable progress

The previous inspection identified the self-assessment process as good. DACL has a clear and inclusive process. Overall judgements effectively use feedback from staff at all levels. DACL is reviewing the self-assessment process to further improve involvement of learners, employers and other stakeholders. It is also working collaboratively with other local authorities in the South West to strengthen the thoroughness of its self-assessment judgements. Effective use is made of a wide range of material such as course reviews, internal monitoring and auditing activity, external peer reviews and the results of consultancy. Self-assessment effectively informs the annual quality improvement plan which is monitored throughout the year. DACL is systematically addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The latest quality improvement plan ensures that these continue to be followed through.