

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Merton Adult Education
Date of visit: 11 June 2009

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in February 2008 of Merton Adult Education's (MAE) provision for adult and community learning at which inspectors judged overall effectiveness, leadership and management, equality of opportunity and capacity to improve to be satisfactory. Achievement and standards and quality of provision were also satisfactory. Visual arts provision was good. Provision in Modern Foreign Languages and Preparation for Life and Work programmes was satisfactory.

MAE is a part of the London Borough of Merton Council and a direct provider of adult and community learning. London South Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds most of the provision, with around 20% of income generated from fees and fully-funded training. The head of community education manages the service and reports to the director of community and housing. The senior management team comprises the head of community education, the deputy principal, head of business development, head of department of Skills for Life and the support services manager.

MAE provides accredited and non-accredited learning programmes in 10 sector subject areas, managed by 12 curriculum managers. The service employs four senior tutors and 133 part-time tutors. Courses are available six days a week and on four evenings. Of the 4,904 learners currently on programmes, 62% are following personal and community development learning and first steps programmes. Further education courses make up 28% of learners and 9% of learners follow family learning programmes. The service provides most courses at four main venues, with the main centre in Wimbledon Chase.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has MAE made in improving achievement and standards?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, achievement and standards were satisfactory. Learners were developing good skills and making effective progress towards their learning goals. Attendance was good and overall retention rates were high at nearly 90%. Since then the general trend has been one of continued improvement in performance. MAE has taken effective action to monitor and improve retention and achievement by better use of management data and improving teaching and

learning. The overall success rate for accredited programmes improved from 63% in 2006/07 to 78% in 2007/08. Learners' achievement and success rates have continued to improve this year. For example, achievement in Skills for Life programmes rose from 70% in July 2008 to 78% in March 2009. For 2007/08, when MAE introduced arrangements for recording achievement on non-accredited programmes, achievement of primary learning goals was 88%. MAE has maintained high levels of learner retention across the provision. In Skills for Life programmes, retention has improved from 81% last year to 92% for 2008/09. Many learners progress to higher level courses. For example, in modern foreign languages, 70% of learners in 2007/08 progressed to a higher level course in 2008/09. MAE has improved its procedures for monitoring attendance. Levels of attendance are high at 90%.

Quality of provision

How much progress has the provider made in action planning to improve standards in teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, MAE has made reasonable progress in action planning to improve standards in teaching and learning. At the previous inspection, there was insufficient planning to improve teaching and learning. The grades for observed teaching and learning sessions across all departments have risen from 46% good or outstanding in 2007/08 to 63% in 2008/09. Managers have completed a review and update of the strategy for observation of teaching and learning with half the tutors observed every year and a new termly schedule. Tutors and observers have received training on the observation process. The new strategy gives clear guidance on the process and includes a review of session plans and individual learning plans. A tutor given an inadequate grade receives immediate, planned support and another observation within a short timescale. The actions from observations contribute to the new staff appraisal process and to continuous professional development. The observation records are now subject to internal and external moderation each term. However, the recording of evidence to show how well learning is taking place is inconsistent. Managers also use reports from the new management information system to monitor the impact of teaching and learning.

What progress has the service made in improving target-setting for learners and monitoring and recording learners' performance?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, MAE has made reasonable progress in improving the target-setting for learners and in monitoring and recording learners' performance. At the previous inspection, target-setting was often insufficient. All tutors have attended training on setting specific and measurable targets and these have improved on most individual learning plans. To further improve these targets, some departments have

produced a useful prompt sheet for tutors giving examples of appropriate wording. Most individual learning plans include recorded group targets linked to the course outcomes as well as personal targets linked to initial assessment or personal needs. However, the format of some of the individual learning plans is not helpful in clearly identifying these targets. Learners and tutors review their targets each term and renegotiate them for the next term. The moderation process has found that tutors do not record this review on all the individual learning plans. The data reports from the new management information system have had a significant impact on the monitoring of learners' performance. Departments now receive detailed reports on attendance and performance of individual learners. Monitoring of learners' performance has moved from compliance to monitoring the quality of target-setting and recording.

What progress has the provider made in implementing additional learning support?	Reasonable progress
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Arrangements for providing additional learning support were new at the time of the previous inspection and inspectors judged that support was too reliant on volunteer supporters. The new procedures are now well established. Using additional LSC funding for the first time during 2008/09 has enabled MAE to appoint two dedicated learning support tutors. Using the LSC additional learning support fund these tutors have worked with 14 learners, of which seven, following assessments for dyslexia, attended workshops run by a dyslexia specialist tutor. Dyslexia identification awareness training for staff has raised their awareness of available support services and the procedures for referring learners. Tutors referred about half of the 50 or so learners assessed for support needs by MAE's learner support officer. Funding is well targeted at learners with learning disabilities and 32 learners have been well supported on the 'Towards Independence' programme. Close working between the learning support officer and the programme manager is effective in providing appropriate support to individual learners. To reduce its dependence on volunteer support workers, MAE has established a team of nine subject tutors to provide additional learning support. However, these tutors have not received specific training for this purpose. MAE has adequate resources for adaptive technology to aid computer-based learning. MAE has improved its links with social services and external support agencies to provide good specialist support.

Leadership and management

How much progress has MAE made in introducing a new management information system?	Significant progress
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Inspectors identified insufficiency of the management information system (MIS) as a key area for improvement at the previous inspection. The analysis of detailed data for use in self-assessment and action planning was neither effective nor timely and

systems were unreliable and did not fully support curriculum needs. MAE has introduced a web-based information system accessible to curriculum managers and senior tutors. The new system provides prompt, accurate and complete data and supports curriculum needs well. Managers have received training from an external specialist consultant to improve their ability to analyse data using new computer software. Managers use the MIS more frequently and confidently to produce termly performance reviews with judgements that are supported by data. New systems provide detailed analytical performance data for different programmes and groups of learners. Managers make good use of this information, together with findings from learners' evaluation surveys, to target provision and develop the curriculum. The new MIS has helped to improve systems for monitoring and evaluating performance and planning for quality improvement. For example, programme managers make effective use of information produced from class registers to monitor attendance and take prompt action where necessary. This year attendance has risen to 90% across the provision.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has the provider made in improving arrangements for quality improvement through self-assessment and implementation of the post-inspection action plan?	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection, MAE has made significant progress in the arrangements for quality improvement through self-assessment and implementation of the post-inspection action plan. At the previous inspection, quality arrangements and the self-assessment process were satisfactory. Since then MAE has prioritised implementation of the post-inspection action plan and reviewed its quality assurance arrangements. The service now requires all staff to take responsibility for quality rather than for an individual manager to have this role. The development of an annual planning cycle clearly identifies all management actions, deadlines and review dates. Quality improvement is a key factor within all areas of the planning cycle. A new programme of regular management meetings contributes to quality improvement. The new self-assessment cycle and recording formats ensure that all staff are involved in self-assessment and that it is a continuous process throughout the year. Each term has a different focus with deadlines for each department to produce or update their report and quality improvement action plan. The new management information system supplies relevant data. Training supports staff in contributing effectively to the self-assessment process. The new process ensures that departments and individual staff take responsibility for self-assessment and quality improvement.