

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Borough of Poole Adult Learning
Date of visit: 29 April 2009

Context

The Poole Adult Learning (PAL) service is part of the Borough of Poole unitary authority in south Dorset. The service provides adult and community learning at a main site and a number of other community venues. The provision ranges from short courses of less than five weeks to programmes of up to two years in length. Over 1000 learners are on adult and community programmes that are funded by the Dorset and Somerset Learning and Skills Council (LSC). PAL also provides full cost courses, mostly in recreation and arts, along with Train to Gain provision to local employers. The service offers a range of extended services as a subcontractor. The Train to Gain provision currently has around 80 learners, mainly in health and social care and business administration. Plans are well advanced to merge Poole Adult Learning with Bournemouth Adult Learning.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in improving success rates, retention and achievement, especially on Train to Gain programmes?	Significant progress
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The post-inspection action plan notes that the overall success rate for the further education (FE) provision in 2007/08 was 81%. This is a significant increase from 47% in 2005/06, and 66% in 2006/07. LSC funded programmes amount to around two thirds of the total provision and success rates on all of these programmes improved by around 10% in 2007/08. Level 1 long and short courses improved by over 10% but remain below the national average. At level 2, long course success rates improved by 9% to significantly above the national average.

Adult and community learning short course success rates improved in 2007/08 to 96%, well above the national average. Leisure courses have increased over the last three years and in 2007/08 the success rate was 95%. Success rates on Train to Gain programmes are also improving. In 2007/08, the success rate was 50% but the current rate for 2008/09 is 86%, representing a significant improvement.

Retention rates are high across the provision. Current in-year retention rates for FE and adult and community learning provision are 95%, and achievement is in line with the previous year.

Teaching and learning

How much progress has been made in improving the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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PAL has reviewed and improved its system for the observation of teaching and learning. The service has provided training for observers, revised the observation processes and is now moderating judgements more thoroughly. Follow up to individual observations is comprehensive and results in action planning, regardless of the grade awarded. However, observations judged either satisfactory or unsatisfactory are followed by appropriate monitoring reobservations.

PAL has reviewed the observation of learning on Train to Gain and has developed an alternative format for observation. The service recognises that it has further work to do but it is making good progress towards full implementation across all Train to Gain programmes. Managers are developing and trialling a work-based learning observation handbook. So far the handbook is proving useful for observations of the services own work-based learning teaching sessions. PAL collaborates with other adult and community learning providers, through a South West Adult Learning network. Five cross-service observations have been successfully carried out with Bournemouth Adult Learning colleagues.

How much progress has been made in ensuring that teaching and learning on Train to Gain programmes has improved? Has progress been made in improving initial assessment and the planning and recording of learning?	Reasonable progress
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PAL has improved the quality of its training by developing useful additional training materials. Tutors discuss the arrangements for training with employers and employer-based training and the training provided by the service are clearly linked. PAL recognises that it has further work to do in developing the arrangements for quality assurance and in monitoring the quality of training. In health, public services and care, and business administration, tutors have successfully introduced a standardised written assessment to assess the capability of learners' for the national vocational qualification at level 2 and 3. Tutors are using this successfully to improve early identification of learners' support needs and to plan learning.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in improving achievement and standards, teaching and learning and the management of Train to Gain?	Reasonable progress
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The service has successfully integrated Train to Gain programmes into the mainstream provision and quality assurance is now more effective. Managers and tutors are clearer about their roles and responsibilities. The recruitment of a work-based learning co-ordinator and new assessors has resulted in improvements in the management, co-ordination and effectiveness of communication within programmes. The interest and commitment of senior managers to improving Train to Gain has facilitated these improvements. Assessors are now clear about the systems for communication and the services' expectations of them.

How much progress has been made in the use of the management information system to monitor retention and success rates?	Significant progress
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Data held by the service is largely accurate and up to date. Tutors record attendance regularly and follow up poor attendance effectively. The service has developed monthly data reports that it sends to relevant personnel. Retention rates have improved year-on-year and the overall rate is currently above 95%. The spreadsheets are coded and clearly show any under-performance. These reports are made more meaningful by the consistent follow up of absences. Course tutors now share data more effectively and managers monitor the success of this through curriculum and managers' meetings. The service now identifies under-performing courses earlier and takes effective action to improve success rates.

How much progress has been made in improving the promotion of equal opportunities?	Reasonable progress
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Within the Train to Gain provision nine staff have recently received equality and diversity training, three other staff who previously completed training have a refresher course booked, and three newly recruited staff have training planned. Employers are now required to provide information on their commitment to equality and diversity as part of their agreement with the service. Tutors now discuss equality and diversity with learners during reviews and feedback is collected through questionnaires completed by learners after induction, mid-way and at the end of their programmes. Assessors have a good understanding of equality and diversity and use this effectively to enhance learners' understanding and improve their professional practice. All staff appraisals now have a focus on equality and diversity and recent professional up-dating has included training on disability awareness. The strength of good support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been maintained.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has been made in carrying out the actions planned in the post-inspection action plan?	Reasonable progress
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The self-assessment report is an evaluative document and the post-inspection plan clearly sets out the actions to be taken to bring about the necessary improvements following the inspection. A good number of the actions have been followed through completely. Some actions are still in progress and the service recognises that work can still be done. Some sections in the post-inspection plan do not have clear, measurable targets, but most targets have recently been reviewed and up-dated.