

Gloucestershire County Council Adult Education

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Local Authority
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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Adult Education in Gloucestershire (AdEd) is part of the Lifelong Learning section of the Community and Adult Care Directorate of Gloucestershire County Council. AdEd contracts with Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to deliver mostly personal development or community learning. The great majority of learning is non-accredited and the small accredited provision is employer responsive. AdEd subcontracts with 25 organisations to deliver courses.

Learning providers included six further education colleges, voluntary and community sector organisations, local schools and private training providers. Approximately 10% of the provision is directly delivered. During 2008/09 AdEd offered opportunities to about 10,000 learners in provision covering community learning, family learning, preparation for life and work and courses for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Just over 400 learners were enrolled on Train to Gain funded courses. At the previous inspection effectiveness of provision and capacity to improve were judged to be satisfactory as were achievement and standards, quality of provision, leadership and management and equality of opportunity. The three areas of learning graded during the inspection were also all satisfactory.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in making the self-assessment process sufficiently self-critical, leading to quality improvement?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection self-assessment was thorough, self-critical and accurate in identifying key areas for improvement and was well established. Some actions for improvement, however, were not yet fully effective, for example the assessing and recording of learners' progress and the sharing of best practice. AdEd supports contractors more effectively to develop accurate self-assessment reports which now also comment on their contract management. AdEd uses these and the self-assessment of its own provision well to develop a whole-service report. The process leads to more effective quality improvement plans for curriculum areas, although that for leadership and management is less well developed. The presentation and use of management information have improved. AdEd has strengthened the system for observation of teaching and learning through training, better moderation and peer review. All tutors are now given appropriate support to meet their identified development needs. Teaching and learning grades have improved as has assessing and recording learners' progress. AdEd makes good use of learners' views to develop and improve provision and learners are better informed on the actions taken as a result. A few needed improvements that AdEd has identified are planned but have still to be implemented.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving the success rates and achievement of learners in both accredited and non-accredited provision? Significant progress

At the previous inspection achievement and standards were satisfactory. Retention rates were high on both accredited and non-accredited courses. However, recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) was insufficiently developed to measure achievement. RARPA is now sufficiently established to better validate achievement on non-accredited courses. The overall success rate on accredited courses in 2008/09 remains high at 95% and the timely success rate has improved from 78% in 2007/08 to 87% in 2008/09. Overall achievement on non-accredited provision has risen from 84% in 2007/08 to 87% in 2008/09. Retention in the same period has improved from 89% to 91%. In skills for life programmes achievement has improved significantly from 51% to 75% and retention from 71% to 92%. The performance of learners from different backgrounds and learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities shows no significant variation from the average. Achievement for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved from 87% to 90%. Learners report high satisfaction levels with their courses and AdEd has a good network of specialist support agencies to meet learners' particular needs. AdEd has started to collect information on learners' progression. However, it is too recent to make a judgement on progression rates.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the recognition and recording of progress and achievement? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection the recognition and recording of progress and achievement were inadequate. Since then AdEd has completed a well-managed and resourced project aimed at improving the range of strategies, including the use of technology where appropriate, to enhance the RARPA process. The resulting Technology Toolkit was introduced to staff through training events at the start of 2008/09. This has significant potential but as yet is only being actively taken up by a small proportion of AdEd's tutors. However, the more standard approaches to RARPA, still employed by most tutors, have improved. Observations of teaching and learning for the current year show improvements, when compared to the previous year, in such things as learners' involvement in, and use of, appropriate formats. Emphasis on RARPA during annual tutor training, and in supporting materials, is having a positive impact. AdEd reasonably leaves some of the detailed implementation of RARPA to its providers. However, although it does support providers where necessary and examines RARPA at intervals, there is no routine system of monitoring the application of RARPA to ensure its reliability and rigour. This was noted in the previous inspection report, and is still an area for improvement.

What progress has been made in improving the advice and guidance given to learners for progression and planning and monitoring of progression?

Significant progress

Information and guidance for learners on progression opportunities were insufficient at the previous inspection. AdEd has made significant progress in this area. Resources, available through its enhanced next step programme, are effectively deployed to assist learners. Virtually all classes have a visit from an adviser, who gives general and specific advice on progression opportunities. Learners welcome this and use it to aid their planning. Recent tutor training, including better support documentation, now properly emphasises the tutor's role in aiding progression. Since the previous inspection a specific project reviewing how to improve progression advice and opportunities has helped managers focus on areas for improvement. Much of that work has been completed, including revising a strategy, reviewing the work of provider organisations, gathering learners' views and analysing progression data. AdEd understands that it still has work to do to ensure these actions are refined and lead to further improvements. In specific projects run by AdEd for learners with personal or learning problems there is a good and sensitive approach to progression. This has been enhanced by the general work on progression. AdEd continues to revise its programme offer to better meet the progression needs of learners.

What progress has been made in improving initial assessment and subsequent planning to meet individual learning needs?

Reasonable progress

AdEd has made reasonable progress in improving initial assessment. At the previous inspection initial assessment was often weak. In Skills for Life provision initial assessment and planning is often good, but AdEd recognises that there is still work to be done on more general courses. The improving application of RARPA includes better initial assessment. AdEd does properly identify and then support some tutors who require more help in their work, including initial assessment and how it is used. In some cases where learners have specific needs AdEd has ensured that initial assessment is delivered in a sensitive and more comprehensive way. For instance, for learners with visual impairments there is an additional day on the course so that their possible use of adaptive technology can be reviewed and built into individual planning. Where initial assessment is well done it is then used effectively in planning to meet individual needs. Feedback to learners, on their level of performance and planned programmes, appears to be good. Use of alternative approaches to initial assessment is improving, for instance with the use of technology to test or record learners' skills.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of the Skills for Life strategy?

Reasonable progress

The Skills for Life strategy, and its implementation, was an area of concern at the previous inspection. AdEd has made reasonable progress in improving this aspect. The strategy has been extensively revised, with peer group and specialist advice. It

is now a clearly written document with a useful associated action plan, which is leading to improvements. However, the strategy contains too much emphasis on staff development and management changes, rather than actions directly linked with learners. The reinvigorated approach has resulted in improvements on specific literacy and numeracy courses, such as more one-to-one initial interviews and a common assessment system. Outcomes on accredited skills for life courses are now at a good level. Assessing and meeting the needs of learners on more general courses has not improved in a similar way, although AdEd has initiatives in place, such as developing a more discrete initial screening system. Staff training is good, but the review of individual tutors' skills for life support is not yet a specific feature of the observations of teaching and learning. The strategy demands an evaluation of skills for life successes, but it is not clear how the effectiveness, rather than the quantity of help, will be reviewed.

What progress has been made in improving the management of curriculum areas? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection curriculum area management had generally improved since the 2004 inspection and was satisfactory. Curriculum managers have addressed most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and have made satisfactory or better progress in these areas. Curriculum managers work more effectively as a team to improve the quality of provision. They plan the curriculum offer appropriately against local, regional and national priorities but take particular account of local need. Capacity building of contracted providers has improved as has the vetting of course proposals. These now ensure that course objectives and outcomes are well defined to meet the needs of target groups. Risk assessment of providers' capacity and capability has improved. AdEd provides improved staff development opportunities for its own and contractors' tutors, for example on recognising and recording progress and achievement. Contractors and their staff particularly value the recent safeguarding training. AdEd takes particular care in supporting and nurturing providers who offer unique services and locations to attract hard-to-reach learners and those from underrepresented groups. A few aspects of curriculum management, although planned, have still to be implemented, such as improving the sharing of good practice through formal tutor groups.

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