

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Bury Metropolitan Borough Council  
Date of visit: 18 June 2009

### Context

Bury Libraries and Adult Learning Service (the service) sits within Environment and Development Services of Bury Metropolitan Council. The Adult Learning Service is largely funded by Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It holds contracts for adult learning, a small programme for learners aged 16 to 18, Train to Gain and Adult Safeguarded Learning, including family learning, Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities and First Steps Learning. In addition, the service delivers literacy and numeracy qualifications and personal development programmes through employers, including Bury Council as part of a European Social Fund (ESF) co-financed project Pathways to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) 2.

At the previous inspection in 2006, the overall effectiveness of the provision, its leadership and management and equality of opportunity were good. One of the eight sector subject areas inspected was outstanding, three were good and four were satisfactory.

The Libraries and Adult Learning Service merged in 2006/07. It provides learning opportunities in adult education centres, libraries and a range of community outreach venues. Courses are offered in 11 sector subject areas. More than 1,000 learners are on accredited courses and around 2,500 on non-accredited programmes. Provision is targeted at areas of disadvantage or to specific groups.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to raise achievements on underperforming courses, including by particular groups?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the service was successful in raising retention and achievement rates while sustaining steady growth in its provision. In 2006/07, the LSC issued a notice to improve success rates on long preparation for life and work accredited courses. Around 50% of these courses did not meet required standards. The service has effective strategies to improve outcomes on underperforming courses. These include better data systems that support more detailed and accurate analysis of performance trends. The service reviewed its provision and now uses other appropriate methods to assess achievement for learners on pre-entry programmes. Overall success rates have increased from 67% in 2006/07, to 75% in 2007/08, and none of the long courses was below the LSC's threshold for minimum levels of performance. The service provides strong support for improving learners'

retention. Rates for current learners show that this improvement is likely to be sustained. Literacy and numeracy retention rates are around 88%, and in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) they are 91%. Success rates for learners from minority ethnic backgrounds are similar to the overall average. Consultancy support has been used well to implement strategies to raise success rates, and to make better use of data to monitor performance. The service is starting to monitor the internal progression of learners more thoroughly.

## Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve arrangements to plan for learners' individual needs, and to record and monitor their progress?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the service was slow to implement systems to measure learners' progress and achievement on non-accredited courses. Prompt action and termly monitoring ensure that tutors now complete records more thoroughly. Forms have been adapted to suit different contexts such as short courses. Training has improved tutors' understanding of specialist terms and language. Initial assessment is used effectively and individual learning plans are used well. Learners have a better understanding of how the process helps them monitor their own progress.

Imaginative approaches are more widely used to record learning. For example, Asian women learned how to use video cameras to show the garments they made and to illustrate some of their technical skills. The service identifies that not all course and personal learning outcomes are easily measurable. Practice is inconsistent between subject areas. Subject specialists are starting to monitor the quality of identified learning outcomes and how they can be measured. Tutors plan better for learners' individual needs. The service plans to more thoroughly evaluate its practice in recording and monitoring learner progress.

What progress has been made to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to resolve the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection?	Significant progress
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The need to improve teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice between areas of learning was identified at the previous inspection. Some tutors made insufficient use of information learning technology and other visual aids, and did not plan individual learning effectively. Many good aspects exist in the arrangements to assure the quality of teaching and learning. All tutors are observed each year and 25% of observations are moderated. The 15 trained observers regularly review their practice. Observers focus appropriately on learning and the learner experience. Tutors whose sessions are judged as satisfactory or inadequate receive additional support and mentoring. Observers share the emerging picture of areas for improvement but no annual summary evaluation is produced to plan staff development priorities. Observers receive a useful document which includes good

prompts for grading sessions. Sharing of good practice between subjects has increased but this is not sufficiently developed in some areas. The service plans to more thoroughly scrutinise the quality of the recording and monitoring of learners' progress, and of how well equality matters are promoted through the curriculum. Teaching and learning continue to improve. Better use is made of learning technologies. Around 70% of teaching is judged to be good or better.

What progress has been made to improve the responsiveness of learning programmes, including strategies to recruit new and harder to reach learners?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in improving the responsiveness of learning programmes, including strategies to recruit harder to reach learners. The service has responded well to changing funding priorities by seeking out additional funding or through further developing partnerships. It continues to be successful in recruiting learners from disadvantaged areas or those who were not previously involved in learning. LSC targets for programmes aimed at worklessness or skills for jobs have been met. Since March 2008, provision has been extended to include ESF and Train to Gain funding to meet identified needs in the local labour market and LSC priority areas. NVQs are offered in customer service, hospitality and catering, adult and childcare. Employees appreciate particularly the support they get before starting an NVQ, especially those not recently engaged in other learning activity. More recent programme developments include work with the probation service to deliver Skills for Life provision to ex-offenders. Full-cost customised training is increasingly offered to meet specific business needs. Students planning to go to university from a local sixth form college develop their skills in producing healthy and nutritionally balanced meals on a basic cookery course.

## Leadership and management

What progress has been made to improve the promotion of equality and diversity and assessing its effect?	Reasonable progress
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Areas for improvement at the previous inspection included the development of suitable policies to meet the needs of the service, the staffing profile and learners' awareness of complaints and bullying procedures. Good progress has been made in a number of areas. Access to sessions for learners with restricted mobility is now good. Through better training and information, tutors have a better understanding of equality legislation. An equality group regularly monitors learner participation and performance. Awards celebrate the achievements of more vulnerable learners. Tutors produce learning materials for individual learners. A well-trained team of learning support assistants and volunteers enhance support for more vulnerable learners and the service is starting to monitor its effect on learners' success. Procedures to collect learners' views are more thorough and questionnaires are adapted for particular groups. The service has identified the need to strengthen its monitoring and

implementation of strategies. Examples of good practice exist in promoting equality through the programmes but these are not recorded systematically. Teaching observations do not focus sufficiently on equality. The effect of some initiatives is not measured or reported on sufficiently. Some progress has been made in improving the representative nature of the staff profile, particularly in the recruitment of male tutors.

What progress has been made to improve the effectiveness of the strategy for Skills for Life and family learning?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the strategy for family learning was incomplete. Progression routes were insufficiently established and the strategy to engage men in learning was not developed well. The provision of long and short courses was imbalanced and parents, learners and schools were not sufficiently aware of learning opportunities. Staff numbers were insufficient to co-ordinate and teach. Actions to implement strategies for both family learning and for Skills for Life were slower than anticipated because of the restructuring of the service. All weak areas in family learning identified at the inspection have now been resolved. The appointment of additional staff has increased capacity. Partnerships are strong and progression routes are well defined with evidence of families progressing to further provision. Male participation has increased although this remains an identified area for further development. Skills for Life has a much higher profile throughout the provision. Training is provided to enhance the awareness of Skills for Life in non-accredited provision and for managers across the council. Although the service has a strong commitment to increasing Skills for Life provision in the community, it acknowledges this as an area for further improvement.

What progress has been made to improve the use and analysis of management information to support planning and monitoring of the service?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the use and capacity of the management information system was satisfactory. However, the system could not accommodate learners with non-standard starting and end dates. This issue has been satisfactorily resolved. Reasonable progress has been made in further improving the use and analysis of management information to support the planning and monitoring of the service. A network has been established to connect geographically dispersed sites so that information can be shared much more rapidly. Management information is used more fully in programme planning. For example, analysis of the timing of withdrawals led to improvements in the scheduling of ESOL provision. However, the service has identified the need to further develop its use of data. A consultant was appointed to support the purchase and installation of a new computer software package which allows for a more sophisticated monitoring of the provision. Although this has strengthened the use of data for self-assessment, further training for managers is required to ensure it is used more effectively.

What progress has been made to improve the effectiveness of self-assessment and arrangements for feedback from learners?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the self-assessment process was broadly reliable. However, the report was overly descriptive and not fully accurate in estimating the importance of strengths in some sector subject areas. The service has revised the style and structure of its self-assessment report resulting in a sharper focus on judgements. Internal and external validation of the report is an integral part of the process. Staff involvement in the process is good. Although feedback from learners systematically contributes to findings, the service acknowledges feedback should be more sharply focused on the *Common Inspection Framework*. The system for identifying key strengths and areas for improvement is thorough. Recently purchased computer software enables more effective use of national benchmarking data to support judgements in the most recent self-assessment report. Although the service used the most recently published benchmarks to evidence judgements on achievement and standards, no adjustment was made to reflect anticipated improvements in national success rates. Action plans cover strengths and areas for improvement, but improvement targets are not always sufficiently quantifiable or measurable. Thorough measures are in place to monitor progress towards achievement of actions within the action plans.