

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Hull County Council
Date of visit: 2 July 2009

Context

Hull City Council (HCC) is a large adult education and work-based learning provider. It provides learning programmes for young people, families and adults of all ages. HCC has delivered adult learning provision to residents of Hull since the establishment of Hull City Council as a unitary authority in 1996. Adult and community learning is provided from four main learning centres, with 100 community and outreach venues. Around 42% of provision is accredited. The provision ranges from entry level to level 3 and access to higher education. Work-based learning has been delivered by HCC since 1983, and is managed from four locations in the city. In September 2006, work-based learning and adult education were brought together within HCC's Children and Young People's Services directorate. This coincided with a restructuring of the directorate which was completed in October 2008. Only adult and community learning provision was included in this enhanced monitoring visit.

At the inspection in 2005, HCC's overall effectiveness, leadership and management and equality of opportunity were satisfactory. Quality improvement was inadequate. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision was good. Health, public services and care; arts, media and publishing; languages, literature and culture; education and training; preparation for life and work; and family learning were all satisfactory. Leisure, travel and tourism was inadequate and was reinspected in 2006 when it was good.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve success rates on the long course provision in those areas performing below expectation?	Reasonable progress
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Using the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) guided learning hours measure, 54% of long courses achieved satisfactory success rates in 2007/08, improving considerably from 40% in 2006/07. Success rates on long courses in health, public services and care; ICT; education and training; and business, administration and law all improved from below to above the LSC's minimum levels of performance in 2007/08. However, success rates on long programmes in languages, literature and culture decreased to a low rate of 29% in 2007/08 from 47% in 2006/07. Success rates were low at 7% for the seven learners on the newly introduced leisure, travel and tourism programme.

Strategies to improve retention are starting to have an effect. Induction, initial assessment, and information, advice and guidance have all been improved and are directing learners effectively to courses that meet their needs. Action taken by lead tutors to contact learners who have not attended for three sessions is successfully encouraging learners to return.

How much progress has been made in improving the achievement rates on non-accredited courses and the success rates on accredited courses?	Reasonable progress
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Self-assessment accurately identified good retention and achievement rates as a strength in learning for leisure and pleasure courses. Achievement rates in 2007/08 were good or better on most courses, and most programmes show a consistent three year improvement trend. Data for terms 1 and 2 this year shows that the amalgamated achievement rate is a high 92%.

Success rates on accredited courses in 2007/08 improved in health, public services and care; ICT; arts, media and publishing; education and training; and family learning, and were satisfactory or better. In English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and business administration, success rates improved but were still low. ESOL, literacy and numeracy pass rates were high. Difficulties in capturing data for ESOL, literacy and numeracy courses, which are roll-on, roll-off, are currently being dealt with but it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the actions taken.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in implementing processes for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA), including initial assessment, and setting and monitoring individual targets?	Significant progress
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The 2005 inspection found that target-setting for many learners was not precise enough. Some tutors did not have a complete understanding of RARPA processes. Individual learning plans were not specific enough. Initial assessment outcomes were not always used in target-setting.

RARPA is particularly effective in Skills for Life, family learning and learning for leisure and pleasure courses, as identified in the self-assessment report. RARPA is now well established and well understood by tutors and learners. Detailed initial assessment carried out by learners and tutors is used well to plan individual learning. Learners have realistic and individual targets which are monitored regularly. Learners understand what they are achieving and how to progress.

RARPA is now part of new tutors' induction. The observation of teaching and learning process identifies the implementation and effectiveness of RARPA processes. Good practice exists in some areas, for example in art, where work that learners produce

throughout the year is photographed, transferred to a DVD, and accompanied by evaluative written tutor feedback and learner self-assessment. The sharing of good practice takes place at cross-service meetings and with other providers.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made to develop the use of data and management information to plan and improve the quality of the provision?	Insufficient progress
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The previous inspection found data was not used routinely in the planning and improvement of the quality of the provision. Management reports were available on the provider's intranet, but the information was not easy to access and use, and was not used effectively by curriculum team leaders. Since the previous inspection, progress has been made to improve the understanding and ownership of data, but in some areas, insufficient use of management information remains an area for improvement. This is identified in the self-assessment report.

Better use is now made of data to plan the development of the provision. For example, geographical analysis was used well to identify areas where HCC offers few early years, play work and family learning courses. Close working with other agencies, such as children's and women's centres, enabled HCC to successfully introduce provision in settings familiar to local residents in those areas.

Ownership of the data has improved. Managers share and discuss retention and success by course level with tutors. However, some managers can not easily access reports which give them an overview of retention and success in sector subject areas or the service overall. Some reports are inaccurate. For example, some learners are shown as withdrawals when they are awaiting test results. HCC has recently bought a new management information system which better meets the service's requirements and can record and analyse learners' flexible start and end dates. The system is currently in transition and managers are using a combination of systems to monitor individual learners' progress.

Insufficiently challenging targets for retention, achievement and success are set at senior manager, manager and sector subject area level. Sector subject area self-assessment reports place too much emphasis on minimum contract requirements to assess success rates.

What progress has been made in the implementation of quality improvement arrangements, including observations of teaching and learning, course reviews, use of learners' feedback and sharing of good practice?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection found that quality improvement arrangements were inadequate. The implementation of quality improvement arrangements has improved as a result of restructuring that has clarified roles and responsibilities. Lead tutors are responsible for quality improvement in specific sector subject areas and this is enhanced by development officer roles that focus on particular aspects of provision. Awareness of, and commitment to, quality assurance procedures by staff is much greater. For example, standard internal verification procedures are now in place across the service. Quality improvement processes have successfully improved initial advice and guidance, induction for learners and success rates on some courses.

The process of lesson observations has been strengthened by better moderation of grades awarded and a greater focus on the learning taking place. The outcomes of lesson observations are used well to share good practice within sector subject areas and to identify areas for improvement. Some sharing of good practice has taken place between areas but this is at an early stage of development. Tutors carry out course reviews that take into account learners' views. Lead tutors use course reviews, lesson observations and data to evaluate courses regularly. Outcomes are summarised in annual self-assessment reports but are not recorded sufficiently throughout the year.

A satisfactory range of strategies is used to gain feedback from learners. The service is attempting to put in place a learner involvement panel of course representatives, but this is at an early stage of development. Learners are very positive about the responsiveness of the service, the support they receive and the progress they are making.

What progress has been made in promoting equality of opportunity to include the monitoring of relevant training and use of data?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, data was not used effectively for planning or target-setting at a local level, or for monitoring the poor performance of particular groups of learners. Staff involvement in equal opportunities training was not monitored and its effect was not evaluated.

The recruitment of different learner groups in specific sector subject areas is now monitored well and the service sets targets to increase participation where relevant. An equality and diversity plan is in place and the equality and diversity group meets regularly. All staff have attended training, following an audit of how well equality and

diversity are promoted within the provision and plans are in place to monitor this using lesson observations.

Arrangements are in place to meet the needs of specific groups of learners. Systems to deliver additional learning support are satisfactory and the uptake of this is monitored well. Materials are produced in appropriate formats for those with learning difficulties. Key information is translated into other languages for ESOL learners. Plans are in place to enable volunteers to attend sessions with vulnerable learners, such as those with mental health issues.

What progress has been made in developing strategic links and partnerships?	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection, HCC has developed links with a wide range of partners to identify needs and plan provision. Partners speak highly of the responsive nature of the service and its commitment to widening participation. The service enhances the provision it offers to learners through representation on relevant external organisations such as the Learning Disability Partnership Board. Restructuring within the local authority has developed close connections between the adult and community learning service and the work-based learning and employer engagement team. This has helped the service to develop its provision, for example by delivering Skills for Life provision within Train to Gain programmes. Closer working with the probation service and Jobcentre Plus has led to improved retention rates on some programmes. A joint initiative between the primary care trust, BBC Open Centre and HCC has resulted in the creation of a job shop.

What progress has been made in developing and using accurate self-assessment and post-inspection improvement planning as a development tool?	Reasonable progress
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Strengths and weaknesses identified at the previous inspection did not closely match those in the self-assessment report, although the grades were similar.

Sector subject area teams produce detailed and useful self-assessments which identify areas for improvement, as well as strengths. HCC's self-assessment report includes other aspects of its work, and the main strengths and areas for improvement for adult and community learning are not sufficiently clear. The annual development plan includes actions to be taken in all of the sector subject areas and some actions for the service as a whole. Some targets in the development plan are not sufficiently precise to assist monitoring. Progress against action plans is discussed regularly within teams, but this is not formally recorded sufficiently throughout the year.