

ENHANCED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: London Borough of
Hammersmith and Fulham Adult
Learning and Skills Service

Date of visit: 8 July 2009

Context

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham's Adult Learning and Skills Service (ALSS) has been part of the council's community services department since June 2007. It was previously located within the children's services department. The head of service now reports to the assistant director with responsibility for regeneration and housing strategy. In 2007/08 the provision was restructured and the four adult education centres were reduced to three. The service works in partnership with the voluntary sector and provides courses in a variety of community venues. In addition to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded programmes, ALSS run a number of partnership projects in the community, funded through New Deal in the Community, Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities, the European Social Fund and the London Development Agency. In 2008/09, 5868 learners attended courses, with some enrolling for more than one course. On accredited courses, 1568 learners were enrolled; 3714 were on non-accredited learning and 933 on additionally funded courses.

In June 2008 ALSS refocused its mission to 'provide enjoyable and successful learning and opportunities for adults, with an additional focus on employment opportunities for the local community, reflecting changing priorities at both a local and national level'.

This enhanced monitoring visit follows the monitoring visit in June 2007 where in six of the seven themes identified, the service was judged to have made reasonable progress in improving the provision. In the theme relating to improving the initial assessment and support for Skills for Life learners, the service had made insufficient progress.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving achievement and standards for all learners?	Reasonable progress
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The service has made reasonable progress in improving achievement and standards. At the previous monitoring visit, achievement and standards had improved since the 2006 inspection but inspectors found significant variations in pass rates across the provision. Data for 2006/07 showed a significant decline in success rates although retention rates remained good on most accredited programmes.

Improved data collection has enabled effective monitoring of attendance, retention and achievement rates on both accredited and non-accredited courses in 2008/09. Attendance rates have improved steadily over the past three years from 73% in 2006/07 to 84% in 2008/09.

Success rates on level 1 long courses are broadly satisfactory. In 2007/08 success rates were 67% for adult learners but only 57% for 16–18-year-olds. However, learner numbers for this group were very low. Level 2 success rates are satisfactory at 68% for adult learners and 69% for 16–18-year-olds. Level 3 success rates are much higher at 82% for adult learners. The number of learners aged 16–18, at this level, are far too small for success rates to be judged.

In 2007/08, short course success rates were broadly satisfactory at 69% for adult learners on courses running for between five and 24 weeks. However, very short course success rates were low at 60%.

What progress does ALSS data for 2007/08 show in improving success rates for learners on long courses?	Reasonable progress
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The previous monitoring visit in 2007 found that overall success rates were high. LSC data indicated an increase from 45% in 2004/05 to 90% in 2005/06. In 2006/07, overall success rates on accredited courses across 12 sector subject areas declined to a particularly low 22%. While these figures were largely attributed to poor reporting of achievements and poor planning of courses, they also highlighted significant weaknesses in the service.

The service has introduced a wide range of initiatives to remedy the problems. At the previous monitoring visit there was insufficient clarity about how some performance data were presented. Data collection has improved. The purchase of propriety software, introduced in September 2008, enables the service to capture retention and achievement rates more accurately and to calculate success rates for all accredited courses. Success rates have improved significantly. In 2007/08, overall success rates on long courses improved by 47 percentage points from 22% in 2006/07.

The promotion of study skills sessions has been good. Sessions very effectively support learners who struggle to keep up with their studies. The service has

successfully increased the uptake by learners from 25 in 2006/07 to 125 in 2008/09. The introduction of a learners' agreement has focused attention on attendance, punctuality and commitment to learning, with the expectation that learners will complete their courses and sit examinations. This has contributed to the maintenance of retention rates at 88% over the last two years.

The quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve initial assessment and support for literacy and numeracy?	Insufficient progress
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The service had made insufficient progress to improve initial assessment and provide support for literacy and numeracy at the 2007 monitoring visit. This remains to be the case. The initial assessment process has improved and is now provided for all learners. The introduction of a Skills for Life initial assessment strategy clarifies procedures. Despite this, initial assessment does not always inform individual learning plans or lesson planning.

A recent pilot project embedding Skills for Life in business has involved testing new materials. Individual learning plans, informed by initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and language skills and the recording of progress and achievement, are provided in one document. They give an accurate account of the learners' progress from their starting point to the completion of their course. While this is clear and useful, target-setting is still insufficiently specific and measurable. Only 18 learners have been part of this pilot whereas 911 learners are on Skills for Life courses this year, with approximately 250 taking literacy courses.

Progress in developing initial assessment and support for literacy and numeracy remains slow. Individual learning plans continue to state global Skills for Life targets. Use of the vocational context in targets is insufficient. The records of tutor progress assessments are vague and it is difficult to gauge the progress a learner has made.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the system for observations of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The service has made reasonable progress in improving the system for observations of teaching and learning. A simplified management structure facilitates a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. Good management guidelines outline clear expectations for both the observer and the person being observed. Curriculum managers plan observations well. Additional early observations may be triggered by low attendance or learners' complaints. Peer observations enable tutors to share good practice.

The standard of the observation reports has improved, reflecting an evaluative rather than a descriptive approach. Learners' feedback about the quality of teaching is effectively integrated with the reports. However, some judgements are insufficiently supported by relevant evidence. The accuracy of teaching and learning observation grades are well moderated by a management group, supported by an external consultant. However, the minutes of the moderation meeting lack clarity, and do not identify how improvements to the process might be made.

Effective improvement plans are in place for all observed staff, and are reviewed regularly. Continuing professional development events are planned to resolve areas for improvement identified at both curriculum and service levels. Effective tutors are encouraged to share their good practice by delivering professional development training for their peers. Poor tutors are given good individual support to improve, and are re-observed within a three week period to minimise the negative impact on learners. In 2008/09, the internal grade profile reflects the more critical approach.

What progress has been made in improving the use of management information to raise standards?	Reasonable progress
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The service has made reasonable progress in improving the use of management information to raise standards. Managers were aware that the management information system was inadequate to reflect the complexities of the data required for planning purposes. Tutors had limited access to relevant data, and made insufficient use of it. The service introduced a new management information system in September 2008. Managers helped to design the reports produced to meet service needs. Monthly review meetings between curriculum and system staff enable checks on the accuracy of data. Managers routinely monitor attendance and retention for individual classes and make more effective use of data to plan the curriculum. For example, they can review enrolments by gender, ethnicity, disability or geographical area to identify gaps. Accurate data are now available to inform the judgements made in the self-assessment report.

Tutors have a greater understanding of the data relevant to their courses, which are available for their course reviews. However, some staff make insufficient use of it. Continuing professional development is in place to improve the use of data for planning and quality improvement. At present, the service makes insufficient use of national benchmarking data to compare its performance.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

<p>What progress has been made in developing the self-assessment process? How well is the report and post inspection action/quality improvement plan capturing the quality of provision?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The service has made reasonable progress in the formulation of self-assessment and quality improvements plans. The self-assessment process is thorough and part of the service's quality improvement cycle. The views of both staff and learners are incorporated effectively into the self-assessment report. Curriculum managers formulate detailed curriculum reports, which are moderated. Peer review has effectively supported the clear management focus on making self-assessment a more evaluative process. The service uses an extensive range of evidence to formulate judgements. However, in the 2007/08 self-assessment report, insufficient use was made of reliable performance data to support judgements. Tutor reviews pay insufficient attention to problems such as low attendance.

Managers have effectively integrated the post inspection and improvement plans and review them regularly. Realistic targets for improvement are set. Timely management intervention ensures that staff take remedial action to tackle incomplete actions. However, some designated success criteria insufficiently affect learners. For example, the planned success criteria for increasing staff understanding of the importance of performance measures to monitor learners' success rates was the provision of a training event. Managers did not identify measures to evaluate whether this had any effect on learners' achievements.