

Isles of Scilly Council

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Adult and community learning (ACL) was established on the Isles of Scilly in 1999. The provision is managed through the lifelong learning section of the council of the Isles of Scilly. Most courses are short and very few lead to an accredited qualification. Most courses are delivered at Carn Thomas on St Mary's, with some provision in the community centres on the other inhabited islands. The provision has significant importance to the community of fewer than 2,000 adults, as there are no colleges or other providers of post-16 education on the islands.

The Isles of Scilly Council (the council) was inspected in November 2008. The overall effectiveness and main aspects of the provision were judged to be satisfactory, as was the provision in the subject sector area of community learning. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit, which include the two mandatory themes of outcomes for learners, and self-assessment and improvement planning.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of the self-assessment process to bring about improvements? Reasonable progress

The council has developed the self-assessment process well. At the previous inspection, the process was judged to be inadequate, although substantial work was underway to address this. The process has been revised further so that it is more inclusive of stakeholder views and is clearly focused on the new common inspection framework. Good use is made of interviews, focus groups and other forms of feedback to inform the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is now less descriptive and contains more evidence-based judgements. The council has derived a clear quality improvement plan from the self-assessment report which is monitored monthly using an effective review process. The use of data to evaluate performance is better but could still be improved, for example by more detailed analysis of recruitment patterns and outcomes. The self-assessment process has brought about improvements in the quality of the course documentation, the evaluation of performance and the range of provision.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving the outcomes for learners? Reasonable progress

Most of the provision consists of very short courses, of which very few are accredited. Achievement and standards were judged to be satisfactory at the previous inspection. The council has focused the provision more clearly on activities

which promote learning and has redirected club activities out of the service. Success rates on the accredited courses are high. The council has improved the recording of both group and individual learner objectives. These are reviewed after each session and at the completion of the course. Most learners fully achieve their learning objectives. Learners receive good information and advice about opportunities for progression to other courses, such as those leading to vocational qualifications. Many use these opportunities well to enhance their employability. The council identified the under-representation of the over-sixties in the most recent self-assessment report as a concern and has improved the information technology provision to meet the needs of this group.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the planning and monitoring of individual learning? Reasonable progress

The planning and monitoring of individual learning were judged to be insufficient at the previous inspection. The council has revised the documentation for all courses to include a pre-course questionnaire and a well-designed individual learning plan for each course over nine hours in duration. Information sheets for each course have been developed and more information is collected about each learner prior to the start of the programme. This ensures that learners are well informed about the courses and has also led to the development of new courses. The individual learning plans are used to good effect to monitor progress and achievement.

The council has provided a stronger focus on meeting the particular needs of individual learners. Tutors have received appropriate training and are supported in meeting the needs of mixed ability groups through observations and classroom visits. The council has introduced better learner feedback which confirms that learners recognise that their needs are being met.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the identification of sources of external support to develop the provision? Reasonable progress

The council was judged at the previous inspection to have made insufficient progress towards identifying sources of external support to develop the provision. It has now made good use of external consultancy for this purpose. The council is now a member of a local adult learning provider network and has established a close partnership with Cornwall Adult Education Service. It has developed effective communication through the creative use of electronic media, and this is now being used to promote the use of e-learning in a variety of courses. The council has introduced a virtual learning environment. This is well supported by Cornwall Adult Education Service, which is very experienced in its use.

The council has commissioned an external body to review the longer-term strategic development of the provision and is awaiting the final report. The council has also developed further the very good working relationships with local residents and employers resulting in a variety of initiatives, such as the training of beach lifeguards.

What progress has been made in the engagement of tutors to develop the service? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, tutors were judged to be insufficiently engaged in developing the service. The council identified a variety of barriers to engagement, most significantly the use of sessional tutors who are geographically remote. The council has developed more opportunities for tutors to contribute to the development of the service. Increased use of electronic communication and the introduction of the virtual learning environment have improved contact between tutors. The council supports tutors more effectively through the use of a well-designed tutor handbook supplemented by classroom visits. Tutor representatives attend the lifelong learning advisory group after consultation with colleagues. Tutors were included in the external strategic review through focus groups. Tutors have greater involvement in the self-assessment process, particularly through more critical end-of-course reviews.

What progress has been made in the improvement of the arrangements to assure the quality of the provision? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, quality monitoring arrangements were insufficiently established. The council has made good use of external consultants to advise on the development of appropriate measures to improve the quality of the provision. These include improved course documentation, better course evaluation by tutors and learners, and systematic planned classroom visits and observations of teaching and learning. The learner and tutor handbooks have been revised and are now well established. The council continues to improve its use of data, although some aspects of data analysis still need to be developed. The quality assurance system is now appropriate and perceived by the council as effective in improving the quality of the provision. A quality improvement group is scheduled to meet each month to review progress against the quality improvement plan. A strengthened lifelong learning advisory group discusses various aspects of quality improvement and contributes to the broader priorities of the council.

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