

Lancashire County Council

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Lancashire County Council receives funding from the Skills Funding Agency to provide learning for social and personal development, learning for qualifications, and employer provision which is mainly Train to Gain. Lancashire Adult Learning (LAL) is the service within the council with responsibility for the programmes. During 2008/09, 26,961 learners enrolled on adult and community learning courses. In addition, LAL has 1,826 learners on Train to Gain programmes leading to national vocational qualifications.

LAL provides learning at three main centres and over 600 community-based venues throughout the county. It provides courses in 15 subject areas as well as family learning and community development. LAL also has an apprenticeship programme with 64 apprentices and a learndirect programme.

LAL was inspected in February 2009. Effectiveness of provision, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision, leadership and management, and equality of opportunity were all good. Four subject areas: health, public services and care; information and communication technology; education and training; and preparation for life and work, were also good.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How effectively is self-assessment and improvement planning used to bring about improvements?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the previous inspection self-assessment was good; it remains good. LAL places a good strategic focus on continuous improvement. The very thorough, well-established and well-documented self-assessment process is constantly reviewed and updated. Following the completion of the most recent self-assessment, LAL introduced effective arrangements to get feedback from staff on how the process could be improved. Staff suggestions have informed improvements to the process.

Arrangements for internal and external validation are well established and highly effective. Staff contribute to self-assessment through the completion of course reviews and programme reviews. Following the previous inspection, a detailed post-inspection action plan was devised and progress against the identified actions was thoroughly monitored. Actions have now been integrated into the quality improvement plan. The self-assessment report informs the quality improvement plan. Progress against the actions identified in the plan is rigorously monitored at all levels of the organisation. Good progress is being made against the areas for improvement identified through self-assessment. Judgements in the evaluative self-assessment report are well supported by evidence.

Outcomes for learners

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

At the time of the previous inspection, achievement and standards were good; they remain good. Most courses offered by LAL are for personal and social development. During 2008/09 retention rates have remained high at 93%; achievement rates improved to the same figure. The arrangements for recognising and recording progress and achievement are now well-established. However, monitoring the achievement of learning objectives relies too much on learners' self-evaluation and places insufficient emphasis on the progress tutors judge learners to have made towards achieving their objectives.

On Train to Gain provision, the overall trend in success rates was slightly down during the period 2006/07 to 2008/09 by about 2%. In 2008/09 success rates were 6% below the national rate. However, data for 2009/10 show a significant increase in success rates to 87%; 2% above the national rate. Success rates within the planned time improved by 13% between 2006/07 to 2008/09. In 2008/09 they were 3% below the national rate. However, in 2009/10 to date they are 6% above the national rate. At the time of the previous inspection, overall success rates on courses leading to qualifications were satisfactory. They remain satisfactory.

Outcomes for curriculum areas vary and some areas perform less well than others. For example, LAL identified through its self-assessment that, in Skills for Life provision, successful outcomes are low. Managers are taking appropriate action to improve performance.

Quality of Provision

What progress has LAL made in improving individualisation of learning? Reasonable progress

The previous inspection identified that although initial assessment and initial goal setting were good, they did not always translate into individualised learning. To resolve the problem in provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, LAL developed a productive partnership with Beaumont College, a specialist college for learners with profound and complex needs. LAL and college staff carried out joint observations and they discussed and shared documentation. Activities and goals are now linked well to learners' individual needs in this area. An active research task, introduced on initial teacher training courses, successfully challenges trainee teachers' thinking and skills. Some courses now include 'stretch and development' activities that learners access on LAL's virtual learning environment (VLE). Inspectors observed good use of individualisation in sessions. For example, in a language class, tutors set homework and conversation tasks appropriately to encourage and challenge learners. Individualisation of learning is monitored well through observations of teaching and learning, learning visits, course file reviews and

course reviews. Managers recognise that they do not know how far through the organisation this good practice has spread and recognise that, in some instances, tutors do not record how they implement individualised learning.

What progress has LAL made in promoting equality and diversity in teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

The inspection identified that the promotion of equality and diversity in teaching and learning was insufficient. As a result, LAL established an innovative and highly effective project, enabling 11 tutors to share good practice and develop high-quality learning resources. For example, an information and communication tutor designed an interesting task to develop learners' use of the internet through researching the food of different cultures. Tutors involved with the project are very positive about the benefits to their learners and are pleased by learners' enthusiasm for the topic. Very good use is made of the VLE to enable the project tutors to share and receive feedback on resources and to discuss ideas. This online system works particularly successfully as most tutors are part time and work over a wide geographical area. The project has stimulated much debate and sharing of good practice around wider teaching and learning and the use of the VLE, to the benefit of learners. LAL is now considering how to involve all of its tutors in the project. Following training, the quality and recording of observers' judgements on equality and diversity have improved and in most cases are good.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made to ensure that managers use data effectively to measure the impact of actions and to improve the provision? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, the use of data to measure impact in some areas was insufficient. Good progress has been made in developing a single service approach to the production and dissemination of management information. The service has clear targets and key performance indicators, and progress against these is monitored rigorously and regularly by the strategic management group.

Curriculum groups now receive a set of useful and relevant reports four times a year, enabling managers and tutors to see clearly how their courses are performing and to identify areas for action. A very good monitoring report, piloted for employer provision, provides detailed information about learners' progress relative to their planned end dates. This enables managers to identify concerns easily and take appropriate action. LAL plans to introduce similar reports for all provision. Work has started on a good impact assessment framework, which will be introduced during 2010/11. Data are now analysed to compare the performance of learners receiving additional learning support with other learners, broken down by course level, which is enabling the service to analyse the impact of learning support. There is now a managing attendance policy. Attendance data are collected and monitored locally but are still not available for the whole service.

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