

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Rutland Adult Learning Service
Date of visit: 26 June 2007

Context

The monitoring visit follows the inspection of Rutland Adult Learning Service (RALS) in February 2005 and the reinspection in March 2006. At the 2005 inspection, arrangements for equality of opportunity were satisfactory, as was provision in business administration, management and professional, information and communications technology, visual and performing arts and media and English, languages and communications. Leadership and management and quality assurance were judged to be unsatisfactory, as was provision in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel and foundation programmes. The 2006 reinspection found that all aspects of leadership and management were satisfactory and provision in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel and in foundation programmes was satisfactory also.

Since the reinspection RALS has been substantially restructured. The service is now managed by the youth and adult learning team leader, who reports to the head of Rutland County Council's inclusion, youth and adult learning service. The team leader is supported by an adult learning curriculum and participation manager and four curriculum co-ordinators. There is also a learning mentor, three neighbourhood learning champions and a co-ordinator for information and learning technology and for national vocational qualifications (NVQs).

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards were judged to be satisfactory overall during the reinspection. To what extent has this been improved?	Insufficient progress
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Insufficient progress has been made in raising achievement and standards in the accredited provision. Data provided by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) shows that the overall success rate for adult learners was 73% in 2005-06. The corresponding figure for the previous year was 71%. For long courses at level 1 to 3, RALS does not perform as well as other providers in terms of adults' success rates. Success rates on short (five to 24 weeks) courses for adults fell from 60% in 2004-05 to 50% in 2005-06, placing RALS in the bottom 10% of providers nationally. In contrast, adults on very short courses had a 92% success rate, putting RALS just above the national average. In several sector subject areas, particularly at level 2, success rates have fallen below the minimum level of performance set by the LSC and a notice to improve has been issued.

It is too early to judge achievement and standards in 2006-07. Withdrawals are now recorded more accurately. On the basis of known outcomes, at this late stage of the academic year, current data suggests that success rates will rise by 2 percentage points in 2006-07. The overall attendance rate in 2006-07 is 80%, just above the target which RALS set and significantly above the figure of 71% for the previous year.

Better use is being made of targets for retention, achievement and success at course level. Some targets are rather low, reflecting the low rates in earlier years. Insufficient use is made of national averages for success rates on long accredited courses to make targets more challenging.

Quality of provision

<p>The reinspection found that initial assessment had improved since the inspection and was now satisfactory. However, it was not being used consistently and effectively across all areas of learning. What further improvements have been made?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Overall, initial assessment arrangements remain satisfactory. RALS introduced a new procedure for initial assessment in September 2006. All learners complete the assessment when they begin their programme of study. They are asked to disclose any literacy, numeracy, language or other learning need. However, the initial assessment does not include a diagnostic exercise to identify the level of learners' literacy or numeracy. Support for those identified as needing it is provided by a learning support worker in class or individually. The effect of additional learning support on retention or success rates is not formally recorded. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this new initial assessment procedure.

<p>What progress has RALS made in recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement in non-accredited learning?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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In September 2006, RALS introduced a procedure for recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement. Consequently, it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of this initiative. The new procedure requires learners to complete a booklet when they begin their studies, which includes the initial assessment, questions on preferred learning styles, course aims and their personal objectives. Learners also identify their level of confidence in and understanding of the subject. During the course, learners indicate how much progress they have made and what they have achieved against each objective. This helps to chart the learners' journey during the programme and gives appropriate recognition of their progress and achievements. Tutors in modern foreign languages have devised a useful additional

initial assessment tool to help learners record the specific language skills they gain as the course progresses.

Target-setting on some foundation programmes was judged to remain weak at the reinspection. What measures have been implemented to resolve this weakness?	Insufficient progress
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Insufficient progress has been made in improving target-setting for learners on foundation programmes. At the reinspection, some targets in individual learning plans were not specific enough and some targets were not set in a context which was relevant to learners' experience or interests. Some progress has been made in encouraging learning by ensuring that the context is relevant to learners. For example, numeracy exercises devised for a farmer are based on calculations of the proportions of cereals needed when mixing animal feed. However, progress in ensuring that targets are specific and measurable has been too slow. In the nine months following the reinspection, there was no curriculum co-ordinator to manage this area of work. During this time the number of learners in this provision declined. RALS appointed an appropriately qualified and experienced curriculum co-ordinator in January 2007. Actions are now being taken to ensure that the service expands its provision in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages. Some tutors are now setting appropriate and measurable targets, but this practice will not be adopted by all tutors until the next academic year. RALS has a clear view of what needs to happen, and has the expertise to implement the changes. Professional development is planned and coaching has already started.

Leadership and management

Strategic planning was identified as a weakness at the first inspection but found to be a strength during the reinspection. Has this strength been maintained?	Reasonable progress
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The provider's strength in strategic planning has been maintained. Following a period of considerable disruption RALS is now relatively stable, although further changes are planned. The new structure is designed to align the service more closely with the other directorates of Rutland County Council and with the priorities set by the LSC. RALS now works more closely with Rutland County Council's extended schools team. Provision in family learning has increased significantly since the reinspection. Provision which does not contribute to corporate priorities is being phased out gradually. Curriculum planning is aligned to local need and increasingly tied in with Rutland County Council's policy on promoting inclusivity and diversity. Staff roles are much clearer. The newly appointed curriculum area co-ordinators provide valuable support and guidance for part-time tutors. Tutors feel well-supported. Curriculum area co-ordinators meet regularly and they understand the strategic direction of the service well.

<p>Quality assurance arrangements were unsatisfactory at the first inspection but satisfactory by the time of the reinspection. However, inspectors found that quality monitoring on some programmes remained insufficient. Has this weakness been resolved?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the arrangements for monitoring the quality of programmes. At the reinspection, the monitoring of systems and paperwork was judged to be insufficiently rigorous with too great a focus on auditing rather than quality improvement by some managers. The service has been restructured and all the sector subject areas, as well as NVQ provision, are now co-ordinated by designated staff. The co-ordinators meet monthly with the adult learning manager and twice each term on an individual basis. The responsibilities of curriculum managers for quality improvement and self-assessment are now much more clearly understood. RALS recognises that there is further work needed to reach a more rigorous set of arrangements for quality improvement. Work is well advanced to establish a clear statement of tasks and timescales relating to the quality improvement and self-assessment cycle. The monthly meetings of co-ordinators are designed to have a sharper focus on performance. RALS recognises that this focus has been insufficiently clear as staff changes have meant that management information was not always readily available. It has recently appointed a performance and quality officer to help ensure that managers and co-ordinators have a timely flow of accurate quantitative and qualitative information. It is too early to judge the effect that these changes will have.