

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Sandwell Metropolitan Borough
Council – Adult and Family
Learning
Date of visit: 12 June 2008

Context

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council – Adult and Family Learning (SAFL) provides adult and community learning across six towns in the Sandwell area. Overall responsibility for the provision lies with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC), under the cabinet member for education and children's services schools and lifelong learning. Approximately 1,000 learners start a course with SAFL each year.

The previous inspection was in November 2006. The organisation's capacity to improve, information and communications technology (ICT), leisure, travel and tourism were judged to be good. The overall effectiveness, leadership and management, the approach to equality of opportunity, quality improvement, arts, media and publishing were judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

How has SAFL continued to improve achievement and standards?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection achievement and standards were overall satisfactory. Success rates for 2006/07 are high overall at 88%, and have consistently improved each year since 2004/05. Success rates are 79% for accredited courses and 95% for non-accredited courses. All individual sector subject area rates are consistently good or better.

Much improved course advertising materials clearly identify courses, their content and levels. This has enabled learners to more accurately choose the correct course content and level most suited to their needs and has improved closer matching of courses to learners.

A new attendance policy has enabled course managers to more quickly identify courses with poor attendance on a monthly basis rather than previously when

monitoring was conducted quarterly. A new individual learning plan has been introduced which enables more specific target-setting and better measuring of success on non-accredited courses. While this is at a pilot stage, these new processes are appropriate for purpose and clearly identify how a learner is progressing and achieving.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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A key challenge for SAFL was to improve further teaching and learning. SAFL has made significant progress in this area. SAFL has established an effective and thorough system of lesson observations. Teachers receive clear written and verbal feedback. Outcomes from observations are used promptly by managers to prepare action plans which successfully improve teachers' performance. Managers analyse the outcomes from observations to provide a particularly effective programme of staff development covering the different aspects of teaching and learning. Arrangements are in place to ensure accurate observation, including grade moderation, paired observations and external assessment. At the previous inspection, teaching and learning observations had a focus on administrative processes. They now focus clearly on learning and the subject being taught. Teaching and learning observations conducted by SAFL show a consistent increase in the proportion of good or better grades for lessons. Nearly all teachers now hold a teaching qualification and a relevant subject qualification, an issue in the past. SAFL now only recruit qualified and experienced teachers. Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching and learning has contributed substantially to increasing success rates to a high level.

How has SAFL ensured the responsiveness of the service to meet the needs of the community?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, a key strength was how well the range of provision SAFL offers meets the needs of learners and Sandwell's learning priorities. SAFL has made significant progress in maintaining this strength. Provision remains available in 11 sector subject areas and from entry level to Level 3, with careful attention to ensuring that the range of courses can provide progression from one level to the next. However, data on the numbers of learners progressing is not routinely available. SAFL sustains careful curriculum planning to avoid duplication with other providers. SAFL maintains particularly effective communications with the borough's different communities to ensure the range of provision it offers meets their needs. The provider has continued with the clear and very effective focus on skills for life and lifelong learning. Since the previous inspection, SAFL has reviewed its offer to local communities and groups. SAFL has improving partnerships with local schools to

ensure better learning opportunities for families. There are a small but increasing number of courses for young people not in education, employment or training.

What progress has SAFL made in further developing literacy and numeracy?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, a key challenge for SAFL was to further develop and establish literacy and numeracy training. Since this time, progress has been made in carrying out the 2006/08 strategic development plan for skills for life of SMBC with an impact on the SAFL provision. Through achievement of the strategic plan, more tutors have been able to access appropriate skills for life specialist qualifications, and the Sandwell Consortium for skills for life of which SAFL are a key partner is being supported by SMBC in improving learner engagement. Much use is made of learning champions and a network of neighbourhood workers of SMBC who signpost prospective learners to either family learning or discrete literacy and numeracy provision. Since the inspection, many courses have become longer in duration and are now accredited courses. However, it is too early to assess how this has impacted on the participation of literacy and numeracy courses.

Leadership and Management

What progress has SAFL made in improving the promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection the promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum was identified as an area for improvement. Since this time SAFL has appointed diversity champions within the curriculum areas. A much greater emphasis has been placed in the observation of teaching and learning process as to how equality of opportunity and diversity is promoted within lessons. A very good checklist has been provided for tutors to check that the best possible use is made of opportunities to promote equality of opportunity and diversity within schemes of work and lesson planning. The manager with specific responsibilities for equality of opportunity and diversity monitors a sample of these completed checklists and interviews a sample of tutors each year. A report of the outcomes of this monitoring is provided to the equality of opportunity and diversity board. Diversity champions and curriculum managers share examples of good practice that tutors have used to promote equality of opportunity and diversity effectively in their classes. For instance an ICT assignment has been devised to meet the needs of a particular minority ethnic group.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How has SAFL continued to improve the quality of the self-assessment process and development plan?	Reasonable progress
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SAFL is making reasonable progress with its arrangements for self-assessment and improvement planning. The self-assessment process is comprehensive, involves all staff and takes account of the views of learners. Thorough arrangements are in place to evaluate each aspect of SAFL work including sector subject area, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management. The self-assessment report is detailed, informative and evaluative. Most strengths and areas for improvement in the report provide an accurate assessment of the performance of SAFL. Sometimes the structure of the report is difficult to follow, a few strengths identified are normal practice and some text is too descriptive. SAFL have established arrangements for improvement planning. A detailed improvement plan based effectively on the self-assessment report identifies clear actions on how to improve provision. The plan effectively covers areas for improvements, actions responsibilities, target dates, success criteria and progress. Managers review the progress of the plan at regularly monthly meetings to ensure actions are leading to improvements.