

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Warwickshire County Council
Date of visit: 20 November 2008

Context

Warwickshire County Council receives government funding from Coventry and Warwickshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide adult and community learning and work-based learning work-based learning programmes. It receives joint funding from the LSC and the European Social Fund (ESF) to provide work-based learning programmes in care, children's care, customer service, team leading, hospitality, information and communication technology (ICT), business administration and employability programmes for adults who are out of work. The adult and community learning service, located in the Adult, Health and Community Services Directorate of the council, manages the adult and community learning provision.

The Skills Delivery Group has reverted to the former title of Employment Training Warwickshire and remains in the environment and economy directorate of the council. It manages the work-based learning and ESF provision currently offering apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships, national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and Train to Gain provision, as well as ESF programmes. Train to Gain is now directly contracted rather than delivered as part of a consortium. The ESF Sustained Employment through Learning programme has now ended. Employment Training Warwickshire now provides ESF co-financed provision under the Skills for Jobs project.

At inspection in October 2007, the overall effectiveness of the provision was judged satisfactory, with a contributory grade of good for work-based learning. Capacity to improve was satisfactory. Achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management were all satisfactory, with a contributory grade of good in each case for work-based learning. Equality of opportunity was judged to be good. The provision in health, public services and care and family learning were good. Provision in ICT and preparation for life and work were satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

How well have success rates in adult and community learning improved and have they been maintained in work-based learning?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

At inspection, achievement in adult and community learning was satisfactory and success rates in work-based learning were high. The provider has made significant progress in this area. Overall and timely success rates for both apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships have continued to rise year-on-year and are significantly above the national averages. For 2007/08, the overall success rate is 78% and the overall timely success rate 69%.

For non-accredited courses the provider defines retention as course completion with 50% or more attendance. Learners with three consecutive absences without good reason are deemed to have withdrawn. It defines achievement as successfully achieving at least two thirds of the learning outcomes, which are a combination of generic course and personal goals. Using these definitions, retention is high and stable at well above 80%. Achievement on 2007/08 was 84%, slightly lower than the 87% of the previous year but this coincided with a more robust approach to goal setting and assessment of achievement. There are as yet no agreed national definitions of retention or achievement in non-accredited provision with which to compare these figures. Previously retention and achievement had been synonymous.

In the last 3 years, achievement in computer literacy and information technology has risen steeply from 61% to 87% while numbers have nearly doubled. Achievement in ICT Skills for Life at Entry Level is high at around 90%.

The overall qualification success rate for all Skills for Life courses in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) appears low at 71%. However, this includes significant numbers of learners from the probation service whose qualification success rate for 2007/08 had risen to 35% from 24% the previous year. The overall figure also includes a 31% qualification success rate for accredited ESOL courses, many of which have yet to complete sufficient guided learning hours to prepare learners for the full qualification but do have a 74% unit success rate.

What progress has been made in implementing arrangements to recognise and record learners' progress?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

The implementation of arrangements to recognise and record learners' progress and achievement in adult and community learning and on the ESF Sustained Employment through Learning programme was a key area for improvement at the previous inspection. Since then the provider has made reasonable progress to implement them. Both departments have continued to refine and develop the

Recognition and Recording of Progress and Achievement processes in their non-accredited provision. Staff training in this area has continued. Individual learning plan documentation is now common across the council's provision, appropriately adapted for learners in literacy and ESOL programmes. Curriculum groups have introduced appropriate course learning outcomes and staff help learners to articulate their personal goals and objectives. Curriculum staff have introduced some innovative methods of recording achievement, including the use of digital photography where appropriate and the use of learners' diagrams and calculations in numeracy to demonstrate their abilities. Progress is monitored through reviews and ongoing assessment as well as at through end-of-course assessment.

Curriculum staff in essential skills are piloting the introduction of certificates of achievement in non-accredited provision for the rest of the service. This has led to further internal debate throughout the service on the definition of achievement with respect to each generic and personal goal or objective, achievement overall and to assessment methodology.

Quality of Provision

How much progress has been made in the provision of advice and guidance?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

At the previous inspection, initial advice and guidance was a specific strength in the ESF Sustained Employment through Learning programme. Since then, the provider has made significant progress in providing information, advice and guidance in Employment Training Warwickshire and adult and community learning, both of which have achieved the matrix standard for initial advice and guidance. The innovative use of the Barrier Breaking Officer in Employment Training Warwickshire enables a wide range of hard-to-reach learners to access learning. Effective assistance is given to learners with disabilities to enable them to participate in programmes, and adaptive technology is well used to support learners. The adult and community learning service is extremely responsive to local needs, and supports the most disadvantaged learners. Good working relationships exist with a wide range of partners, and initial advice and guidance workers signpost learners to other appropriate provision to ensure effective progression routes are clear. Informal initial advice and guidance is also provided by sessional tutors, and targeted staff development has been undertaken to ensure that they are well informed about other learning opportunities. In some cases, initial advice and guidance is offered which exceeds the LSC contractual expectations; for example, probation clients are given access to computers and support outside class times, to enable them to complete curriculum vitae to assist in jobsearch.

Leadership and Management

To what extent has the provider's strategic direction been made clear?	Insufficient progress
--	-----------------------

The provider has made insufficient progress in making the strategic direction clear. The identification of this issue at the previous inspection made it a high priority and action was quickly taken to implement a full review of the purpose and focus of both Employment Training Warwickshire and adult and community learning. While a number of similarities between the two aspects of the provision were identified, a larger number of differences were also made clear. Both aspects of the service rely entirely on external funding and the review process has helped the provider to become more aware of the degree of risk this creates. An accurate internal report had been formulated for the October 2008 Cabinet meeting, but more far-reaching financial and organisational factors have led to a delay in this process. The process of review has become broader, encompassing other aspects of the council's provision. The review process has been overtaken by the normal cycle of financial and strategic planning, in which the review has become mired.

However, in this uncertain operating environment, the provider is still engaging with learners so that they are not disadvantaged. Moreover, the staff of Employment Training Warwickshire and adult and community learning are working more co-operatively during this period of uncertainty to identify and share good working practices.

How has learners' understanding of equality and diversity been further developed?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

Overall, equality of opportunity was judged to be good at the previous inspection. However, the further development of learners' understanding of equality and diversity was a key area for improvement. The provider has made significant progress in this area. Equality and diversity are included in the induction for all courses, when learners are also given a new 'Welcome to Learning' booklet, which includes positive imagery and a commitment to equality. Learners now agree to abide by the council's equality and diversity policies when they sign the redesigned learner agreement. Tutors negotiate appropriate rules of behaviour with learners during their first session. Equality and diversity issues are integral to some units in work-based learning and are further promoted and reinforced at review. Tutors use faith calendars, news articles or issues arising in class to instigate discussions on equality and diversity. In Skills for Life classes, tutors make extensive use of citizenship programme material to contextualise learning and further learners' understanding in this area. Curriculum teams regularly audit training resources and remove inappropriate material. A lively discussion with a group of learners showed that they had a good understanding of both their rights and responsibilities and also

an appreciation of the difference between the aims of relevant legislation and continuing practices in society.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How well do the latest self-assessment arrangements and quality improvement plans drive continuous improvement?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The provider has made reasonable progress in ensuring continuous improvement through the self-assessment and quality improvement plan arrangements. Separate self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans have been formulated for Employment Training Warwickshire and for adult and community learning, taking into account the views of staff, learners, employers and community organisations. Both self-assessment reports are self-critical, and make effective use of relevant data to support judgements. The quality improvement plans are extremely thorough, identifying clearly what improvements are to be made, and by whom, within realistic timescales. The monitoring of progress is good, with regular quarterly reviews, ensuring that issues on which progress is insufficient are identified.

At the previous inspection, self-assessment arrangements on the ESF Sustained Employment through Learning programme were judged to be inadequate. Poor aspects of the programme were identified clearly, and improvements were planned into the design phase of new Skills for Jobs programme to rectify the areas for improvement.