report

meeting	Community Services Select Committee
date	19th December 2005 agenda item number

Report of Assistant Director, Regeneration

The Adult & Community Learning Service: Progress on Addressing the Adult Learning Inspectorate Inspection Outcomes, December 2005

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Committee of the progress made to date in addressing the key challenges set following the Adult Learning Inspection (ALI) of the Adult and Community Learning Service (ACLS).

Information and Advice

Background

2. All adult and community learning services that receive funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are subject to inspection by ALI with the inspection assessing the quality of the teaching and learning provided. ACLS was inspected during the week 25th – 29th April 2005 when eleven inspectors were hosted for 57 inspection days. Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework and the possible grades are from 1 (outstanding) to 4 (inadequate).

3. The inspection team looked at five areas of learning as well as "leadership and management". These areas of learning were: information and communication technology; hospitality, sport, leisure and travel; visual and performing arts; foundation programmes and family learning. The outcome of the inspection was that the overall effectiveness of ACLS was graded 4, with the provision deemed inadequate. The details of this are provided at Annex1.

4. This Committee considered the outcome of the inspection of ACLS at its meeting on 18 July 2005 and asked for a further report giving progress in improving the quality of the teaching and learning and in responding to the challenges set by ALI.

Key Challenges

5.   The ALI set the service 10 key challenges to address to improve the quality of its provision. The challenges are detailed below:

- Continue to create new opportunities for disadvantaged learners
- Build stronger communication between the ACLS and teaching delivery staff
- Develop a thorough approach to the assessment of non-accredited achievement
- Share good practice
- Improve the advice to learners about progress
- Develop the effective use of individual learning plans
- Improve curriculum-planning arrangements
- Implement strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- Give more emphasis and guidance on equality and anti-bullying and harassment practices
- Further develop quality improvement measures

6.   A Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) has been developed to address these key challenges and to record progress made against the original inspection weaknesses for leadership and management and each area of learning.   Work to address the challenges identified at inspection is being undertaken although revised LSC priorities in adult and community learning, which are outlined in more detail in paragraphs 14 - 17 of this report, has resulted in additional pressures on the service.

Re-inspection

7.   All services graded 4 at inspection are re-inspected by ALI, normally within a year. We have now been informed that the service will be re-inspected week commencing 9th October 2006. At present the following areas will be looked at:

    Leadership and Management; to include Equal Opportunities and Quality Improvement
    Information and Communications Technology
    Visual and Performing Arts
    Foundation Programmes
    Family Learning

Progress to Date

8.   The PIAP prepared by the service to meet the challenges identified by ALI continues to be updated and modified to reflect planned activity and record that already undertaken.

9. The lead inspector undertook an initial planning visit on 7th October 2005 and the first monitoring visit on 10th November 2005. The purpose of the former was to agree an inspection date and scope the inspection. The latter was to look in more detail at progress made to date in addressing Leadership and Management issues.

10. The lead inspector's overall judgement of progress made to date is that "Overall - actions are being taken but it is too early to judge the impact on the quality of learning hence the overall judgement that little to some progress has been made".

11. The progress that the lead inspector is looking for is "impact on the learner". As new systems are being introduced, we are not yet at the stage where we can gather impact evidence to show that the change has brought about an improvement for the learner. There were however other areas where he felt that the actions that we had taken needed to be more robust and to be revisited.

12. The Service needs to ensure that it's focus remains on the challenges outlined in the ALI inspection report and examples of activity undertaken so far to address these include:

   a. Improving communication and planning with tutors through holding of two successful tutor conferences. This is the first time the Service has done this and was delighted to have between 30 and 40 tutors at each event (these are to be repeated in January).
   b. Issued handbooks to all learners, to ensure consistent information is given, in relation to expectations, equal opportunities, induction and what to do in the event of a complaint.
   c. Issued tutor handbooks to ensure they understand the ACLS mission, how the service operates, and to ensure consistency of approach with quality issues, administration and referrals for learners to specialist agencies.
   d. Strengthened links with Nextstep to ensure all learners have access to information, advice and guidance about other opportunities learners may wish to move onto.
   e. Established a tutor database holding CV information and contact details to ensure tutors are appropriately experienced and qualified to deliver ACLS courses.
   f. Developing the services approach to curriculum planning through the appointment of five curriculum leads for areas of learning
   g. Established a tutor data base holding CV information and contact details.
   h. Appointed a secondee to the management team to increase management capacity which the inspection identified as being under capacity.
   i. Required main providers to produce their own PIAP to show how they intend to address issues within their own organisations.
   j. Set more exacting quality targets for providers regarding retention and success rates
   k. Further developing its approach to equal opportunities including setting up an Equalities Steering Group which will become operational in the new year.

13. As previously reported the LSC will look carefully at ACLS progress against the key challenges and also the outcome of the reinspection to inform their decision making about the future allocation of adult and community learning funds. It is imperative therefore that the service achieves at least an overall Grade 3 at the re-inspection.

LSC Revised Funding and Planning Proposals

14. During August of this year the LSC confirmed its priorities for ACLS for the 2005/2006 year. These priorities were considerably different from previous years and in order to comply the Service, and its providers, have had to make adaptations to both the programme of courses that could be offered and the systems that were required to monitor and manage the new regime.

15. These changes inevitably took a considerable amount of time to implement and have caused considerable upset and frustration for all concerned. This has caused additional pressures for the service whilst it is working to address the inspection challenges and prepare for re-inspection.

16. The recent publication of the national LSC document, "Priorities for Success" has led to a further change to local priorities. The fairly stringent limitations that were originally set in August have now been lifted and the Service is now free to deliver a responsive programme as it had in previous years.

17. The issue of fees is still on the agenda and the Service is currently preparing an options paper for consultation purposes

Statutory and Policy Implications

18. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service. Where such implications are material, they have been described in the text of the report.

Financial Implications

19. The funds are managed by ACLS with clear audit trails being maintained for each separate funding stream as required by the external funders.

Equal Opportunities

20. All activity will comply with Nottinghamshire County Council's equal opportunities policies. The funding agreement with providers has been drawn up by Legal Services to ensure providers agree to comply with this standard. As required by ALI, more in-depth work is required around harassment and bullying policies and procedures.

Implications for Service Users

21.   As progress is made towards each of the key challenges, whilst also maintaining the strengths, the quality of the learner experience will improve.

Recommendation

22.   That Community Services Select Committee note the contents of this report.

Nigel Hamshere
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Director of Resources' Financial Comments
None (CC/RK)

Legal Services' Comments
This report is for noting only and no decision is necessary (JA 07.12.05)

Background Papers Available for Inspection

The Inspection Report Nottinghamshire County Council Adult and Community Learning Service, 29 April 2005

Electoral Division(s) Affected

All

Nottinghamshire County Council – Adult and Community Learning Services

ALI Inspection Grades

Leadership and management		4
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		4

Information & communications technology		**4**
Contributory areas:	**Numbers of learners**	**Contributory grade**
Using IT		*4*
Adult and community learning	342	4

Hospitality, sport, leisure and travel		**3**
Contributory areas:	**Numbers of learners**	**Contributory grade**
Other contributory areas		*3*
Adult and community learning	773	3

Visual and performing arts and media		**4**
Contributory areas:	**Numbers of learners**	**Contributory grade**
Other contributory areas		*4*
Adult and community learning	1,121	4

Foundation programmes		**3**
Contributory areas:	**Numbers of learners**	**Contributory grade**
Other contributory areas		
Adult and community learning	97	3

Family learning		**3**
Contributory areas:	**Numbers of learners**	**Contributory grade**
Other contributory areas		
Adult and community learning	273	3