

**FURTHER EDUCATION
COMMISSIONER ASSESSMENT
SUMMARY**

Lancashire Adult Learning

JANUARY 2015

Assessment

Background

1) Lancashire Adult Learning is Lancashire County Council's adult education service and is part of the Adult Services Directorate of the Council. The service provides mainly non-accredited programmes in community learning but also offers Apprenticeships and short employability programmes to learners aged 16 and over from intermediate level to higher level. Apprenticeships are mainly in business administration and law, health, public services and care and in education and training.

2) Following the Skill's Funding Agency's notification that Lancashire Adult Learning had been graded as inadequate by Ofsted at its most recent inspection the Minister for Skills decided that the FE Commissioner should assess the position of the college in line with the government's intervention policy set out in '*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*'.

3) The FE Commissioner's report is intended to advise the Minister and the Chief Executive of the Funding Agencies on

a) The capacity and capability of Lancashire Adult Learning's leadership and governance to deliver quality improvement within an agreed timeframe;

b) Any action that should be taken by the Minister and/or the Chief Executive of the funding agencies to ensure the delivery of quality improvement (considering the suite of interventions set out in '*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*'); and

c) How progress should be monitored and reviewed, taking into account the Agency's regular monitoring arrangements and Ofsted's monitoring visits.

Assessment Methodology

4) The FE Commissioner, accompanied by two advisers, visited the Lancashire Adult Learning Service over the period 19th – 23rd January 2015. They received briefing information in advance from the Skills and Education Funding Agencies and met with those with overall responsibility for the service, managers and staff. They visited The Lancashire College and toured Nelson and Colne College, the Principal of which has been seconded to the Lancashire Adult College on a part-time basis for six months to support the response to the service's inadequate inspection. They also examined the limited documentation that was available.

The Role, Composition and Activities of the Board

5) Governance arrangements currently are poor. For the past three years there has been little or no challenge or scrutiny of what the service offers. The need for the Council to reduce its budget has impacted significantly on the adult learning service, with the feeling amongst staff that the need to save money has taken precedence over the need to serve learners. The result has been significant cuts, particularly in management numbers, leading to a loss of vision and purpose and an overall diminution in quality.

6) However, the authority now recognises that the situation needs to change and is proposing to establish a board that will lead, monitor and challenge the executive on the adult and community provision for which the council is responsible. The Board would consist of council and non-council members, the latter being in the majority, to provide the appropriate scrutiny and challenge similar to that of a college governing body. The Board in turn would report to the Council's Scrutiny and Performance Committee.

7) It has also recognised that there will need to be significant improvements in the management of the service, the exact extent of which will be determined when the council has reconsidered the scope and extent of its role in this type of provision. In the discussions held with senior staff and the relevant portfolio holder it became clear that the retention of adult and community learning provision was an important contributor to the Council's overall social responsibilities. What was less clear, however, was the need for the Council to provide vocational skills training, where it was recognised that there were other providers with excellent track records within the county that could carry out this work. A refocusing of resources on the key priority is required.

The Senior Leadership Team

8) Lancashire Adult Learning is part of the Adult Services Directorate of Lancashire County Council under the Executive Director of Adult Services and Public Health and with an elected member responsible for the Adult Learning service. Until recently overall strategic management within the Council for the service has been provided by the Head of Cultural Services, with a management team of a Principal and three Assistant Principals covering Business Support and Contracts, Quality Assurance and Community Learning and Learner Services. At the time of the previous inspection this team had had fifteen members.

9) Over the past few years, there have clearly been significant changes in leadership and a major reduction in senior staffing. The situation has still not stabilised. In March 2013, Lancashire Adult Learning's Principal left and the post was temporarily filled by the previous Deputy Principal in an acting capacity, pending wider reviews within the County Council. The Deputy then left on a voluntary basis in August 2013 with the result that accountabilities at the time of inspection were shared across the three Assistant Principals.

10) Looking to the future, it is intended that Lancashire County Council's Council wide restructure will result in creation of a new team of a Head of Service two Co-ordinators and two Learning and Development Officers to be accountable for Lancashire Adult Learning from April 2015 within a new Programmes and Project Management Directorate (PPM). It is questionable, however, as to whether this is sufficient to provide the necessary range of skills and coverage of such a large and geographically spread service.

11) Interim arrangements are now in place in conjunction with Nelson and Colne College. The College Principal is currently devoting half of her time to the service and the Deputy Principal is fully engaged in overseeing the changes necessary following the inadequate inspection. These arrangements will remain until the scope of the service going forward has been redefined.

The Quality of Provision

12) The Ofsted Inspection that took place from 3rd to 7th November 2014 made the following judgements:

- Overall effectiveness – Inadequate
- Outcomes for learners – Requires improvement
- Quality of teaching, learning and assessment – Requires improvement
- Effectiveness of leadership and management – Inadequate

13) The Lancashire Adult Learning Service has produced a draft post-inspection action plan (PIAP), which currently fails to address all the issues flagged up by the inspectors. Overall the PIAP is underdeveloped and input focused. It lacks clearly measurable outcomes and milestones and would benefit greatly from a RAG rating against a data dashboard. The objectives should also be clearly aligned with the Ofsted improvement judgments.

14) Self- Assessment is similarly weak and undeveloped. A report for 2013/14, for example, has yet to be produced. This is largely attributable to a previous absence of senior management and a lack of clarity about responsibilities at the level of Assistant Principal.

15) Data recovery and management is poor and systems lack ‘drill down’ functionality. Monitoring student performance has been unsatisfactory and progression is not well tracked. Managers and staff have been hampered by systems which make it difficult to produce appropriate reports.

16) The interim Deputy also believes that Lancashire County Council needs to review its procurement policy for education specific systems and software, and review the IT support services to enable it to function effectively and in a timely manner. Failure to do this will result in ineffective monitoring both of progress against the PIAP and the monitoring of individual learner progress. As a first step in this process the service is adopting Pro-Achieve to assist in the monitoring of student progress.

Teaching and Learning

17) There are policy and procedures for the observation of teaching and learning which are loosely aligned to capability procedures. In 2013/14 201 or 87% of observations were deemed to be good or outstanding, 21 were graded 3 (requires improvement) and 8 were awarded a grade 4 (inadequate). However, this is inconsistent with the Ofsted report which reported that too little teaching was good or better. The service would benefit from external validation of their graded observations.

18) The current policy states that all establishment and hourly paid tutors who teach over 250 hours per year will be observed annually and tutors teaching less than 250 hours annually will be observed at least once every two years. There is no logic in this differential approach.

19) The speed at which inadequate teaching is eradicated is too slow and should be addressed. A grade 3 or 4 observation, for example, results in an “informal” action plan, followed by a monitoring period of three months. If there has been no improvement a

'formal' action plan is issued with monitoring over a further two month period whereupon the tutor is re-observed and, if a grade 2 is not achieved the review period is likely to be extended. This is overly protracted and could result in learners being inadequately taught for almost 6 months before the capability procedure is brought into play.

Conclusions

20) Lancashire Adult Learning has undergone a period of major management cuts as part of the general savings needed to be made by the Council which has left the service with insufficient resources to provide a quality service

21) Interim arrangements have been put in place to manage the service on a day to day basis until such time as the Council has re-examined the scope and purpose of what it is offering. These arrangements are very recent but are already beginning to have a positive impact.

22) Overall the provision of adult and community learning is seen as an important part of the council's strategy to develop local communities but it is felt that the delivery of qualifications and skills could be better provided by the colleges and other providers in the area.

23) Consequently there is an opportunity arising from the present situation for there to be some rationalisation of provision across the county for the benefit of learners. Discussions should be held with the Lancashire Principals, other vocational providers and the SFA to take these ideas forward in an appropriate way. This would then allow Lancashire Adult Learning to concentrate on its core purpose and contribution to the council's overall community strategy with a more appropriate level of management resource.

Recommendations from Further Education Commissioner

1. The Lancashire Adult Learning Service should restrict its activities to Adult and Community Learning.
2. The SFA should consider more appropriate ways of delivering the skills programmes currently being offered through the Lancashire Adult Learning Service by using colleges and providers with greater experience and success in the delivery of this provision.
3. Governance arrangements for the Adult Learning Service should be introduced that involve both council and non-council representatives to determine the strategy for the service going forward and to provide suitable monitoring and challenge of the executive.
4. The Council should ensure that there is sufficient management time and an appropriate structure to deliver a high quality Adult and Community Service.
5. New arrangements for quality assurance should be introduced as a matter of urgency that prioritise the improvement of teaching and learning and the production of an appropriate self-assessment report and quality improvement plan.
6. The Post Inspection Action Plan should be revised by aligning it more closely with the weaknesses identified by Ofsted and with clear responsibilities, actions, milestones and monitoring arrangements.
7. The FE Commissioner should undertake a monitoring visit at the end of the summer term to review progress.

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