

# Adult Learning Service Scrutiny report

## March 14th 2011

### Background

1. The Adult Learning Service is managed within the Culture, Libraries, Learning and Leisure division of the Environment department.
2. The service operates from the Thomas Calton Centre in Alpha Street, SE15. This is the main base for direct provision of the service, but in addition to this, 20+ local voluntary sector organisations are commissioned to deliver a variety of learning programmes across the borough. This ensures both easier local access to learning and that we are working with local voluntary sector partners.
3. The service is funded entirely through an annual financial allocation from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA - formerly the Learning and Skills Council). The Council does not provide core funding but does provide support in terms of management, financial, human resources and where necessary, legal advice. The service pays recharges for this support. The Council has also made an allocation of £250,000 capital monies towards the current refurbishment of the Thomas Calton Centre. (see appendix 1 for budget details).
4. The Council's Adult Learning Service is just one of a range of adult learning providers in the borough. It is not the largest or the best-resourced provider, with Southwark College and Morley College both being substantially larger than ALS. London South Bank University also has a major programme of adult learning activity in addition to its degree level and above programmes. ALS complements the services offered by these other major providers and avoids duplication of offer.
5. Adult learning is subject to the OFSTED inspection regime. The last inspection took place in 2009 and resulted in an overall rating of "satisfactory" with many areas of good provision. This is an encouraging result given that the service had unfortunately been somewhat neglected for several years and had stagnated.
6. Over the last few years, and especially in the lead up to and follow up from the OFSTED inspection, significant improvements have been made to the service in order to ensure better adherence to the quality requirements of OFSTED and the SFA, better financial management and a more focused use of resources. Details of the range of improvements are set out in section 30 below.
7. Partly as a result of these improvements, the service was successful in securing a capital grant of £750,000 from the former Learning and Skills Council in 2008 in order to upgrade the learning environment. In addition to this, the Council has invested a further £250,000 in the refurbishment making a total of £1 million investment in the building. This funding has been focused on improving the learning environment and making the building more attractive to learners. However, there are still some building matters that need addressing as this is the first time in many years that there have been major works at the centre.

## **Funding issues**

8. The service is entirely funded through an annual financial allocation from the SFA.
9. SFA funding comes with strict regulations in terms of what it can be used for, quality standards to be achieved and maintained and funding linked learner targets in terms of recruiting “unique” learners, retaining learners and ensuring that they achieve.
10. There are a number of funding streams within the overall allocation from the SFA. Amounts allocated to Southwark in the current financial year are set out in section, but the categories of funding are:
  - Further Education (FE)
  - First Steps
  - Family Learning Impact Fund (FLIF)
  - Wider Family Learning (WFL)
  - Personal and Community Development (PCDL)
  - Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC)
  - Family Learning, Literacy and Numeracy (FLLN)
11. In addition to this there are two small grants totalling about £15,000 per annum – the 19+ Access Fund and the 19+ Childcare FE allocation.

## **OFSTED inspection**

12. Adult Learning is subject to inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). The most recent inspection took place in May 2009.
13. In the two years preceding inspection, considerable work was undertaken to improve ALS. This included a major re-structuring of the service, the improvement of internal and external verification; improved financial management and a strengthened approach to the commissioning of third party delivery. Progress was also been made in diversifying the funding of the service, with successful bids to a number of sources including one for £750,000 from the then LSC’s capital fund.
14. Inspectors use a four point scale to summarise their judgements about Achievement and Standards, Quality of Provision, Leadership and Management and overall effectiveness of provision. Leadership and Management also includes a grade for Equality of Opportunity.
15. Four grades are identified for each area inspected. These are:
  - a. Grade 1 = outstanding
  - b. Grade 2 = good
  - c. Grade 3 = satisfactory
  - d. Grade 4 = inadequate

## **Scope of the inspection**

16. In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local LSC/ SFA or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorates' monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.
17. In addition to reporting on the overall areas identified above, this inspection focused on specialist provision in the following subjects:
  - Arts, media and publishing
  - English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)
  - Literacy and numeracy
  - Community learning
  - Family learning
18. The previous inspection took place in February 2004. All areas were judged to be "Satisfactory" with the exception of Leadership and Management which were rated "Inadequate". This element of the service was re-inspected in May 2005 and was found to be "Satisfactory".

#### **Overall judgements from 2009 inspection**

19. The Overall Effectiveness of Provision was judged to be Satisfactory, as were all subject areas inspected. Achievement and Standards were also judged to be satisfactory, with learner's achievement of their own personal learning goals being "at least" satisfactory. The inspectors noted that overall success rates had significantly improved since the previous inspection, especially for accredited provision.
20. The inspectors also considered that capacity to make further improvements is "Satisfactory". The report highlighted the significant improvements made and the distance travelled since the previous inspection. The inspectors noted that success rates had significantly improved to above the national average, a comprehensive quality framework had been introduced, partnership working was seen as flexible and effective in terms of capacity building, the service offer has been expanded geographically, significant funding secured for the refurbishment of the Thomas Calton Centre and communication and accountability within the service improved following a re-organisation.

#### **Outcomes – areas of good practice**

21. The inspectors judged all areas of provision to be "Satisfactory". The following were identified as key strengths:
  - Good personal support for learners
  - Strong internal and external partnerships to promote social inclusion
  - Strong commitment to improve the quality of provision
  - Good staff development
22. In addition to this, within the overall grades, the following areas were described as "Good".
  - Arts, media and publishing – good development of practical skills
  - Arts, media and publishing – good specialist advice offered by tutors

- English for speakers of other languages – good support for learners in learning sessions
  - Literacy and numeracy – good support for learners
  - Community learning – good standards of work
  - Community learning – good teaching for health and fitness courses
  - Family learning – good planning of courses and teaching to meet learners’ needs
  - Family learning – good partnerships to support learners
23. Although these outcomes were insufficient to achieve an overall rating of “Good” in any of the areas inspected, it is a sound basis for further improvement and indicates the service’s capacity to improve. It is especially encouraging that support for learners was consistently identified as being of a “Good” standard, identifying progress against one of ALS’ key objectives of delivering a learner-centred service.

### **Outcomes – areas for improvement**

24. As the service secured an overall rating of “Satisfactory”, the inspectors also identified key areas for improvement. These included:
- Quality of teaching and learning – the inspectors judged too much teaching and learning to be no better than satisfactory
  - Risk assessment of learners’ activities was assessed as requiring improvement
  - Quality assurance systems to be more fully implemented
  - Capture and use of management information required improvement
25. The service management had identified these areas as requiring further action prior to the inspection and were referred to in the self-assessment. The inspectors acknowledged the thoroughness and accuracy of the self-assessment process and report, and judged it to be a sound good.

### **Post-inspection action plan**

26. A post inspection action plan was prepared by the ALS leadership and management team in consultation with tutors and administrative staff. Management and curriculum teams took account of the inspection findings and identified action for sustaining recognised strengths and correcting or addressing areas for improvement. The plan received Member approval through the IDM process.
27. The plan has been monitored, reviewed and evaluated as the work progresses and responsible officers were identified for each task.
28. There are two main areas of action required by OFSTED. These are to improve the quality of teaching and to effectively capture, use and learn from management information.
29. Key actions from the plan include:
- Implementing a quality assurance calendar of actions and conducting a programme of quality assurance briefings

- Raising tutor awareness of “excellent teaching” through observation and the publication of internal “Excellent Teaching” policy
- Reviewing the quality of learning materials
- Exploring work shadowing opportunities with “OFSTED Excellent” providers
- Revising the quality monitoring procedures for sub-contracted partners
- Strengthening the management information system (MIS) team and seeking financial resource to fund MIS improvement
- Recruiting more specialist tutors to sustain and develop the specialist advice already available within the service
- Identifying information and learning technology (ILT) needs and arranging training for Skills for Life (SFL) tutors
- Introduce evening ESOL classes and expand programme of ESOL generally
- Developing MIS to analyse SFL data and utilising this information to plan, deliver and evaluate provision

### **Improvements since Inspection**

29. Significant action has been taken to implement the improvement plan. Some key areas of improvement are set out below.

- 50% more residents now take advantage of adult learning
- More evening provision
- Clearer contracts for subcontracted providers, replacing the previous service level agreements and implementing more rigorous controls on quality through more effective monitoring; we have also offered additional training opportunities to the organisations including in safeguarding issues
- A more systematic, rigorous lesson observation process, including making use of external HMI accredited observers to both observe and train our staff in more effective observation techniques
- Raised staff awareness of what constitutes good teaching and learning through working with OFSTED recognised Beacon providers, including securing time from another provider to support our staff and ALS management visiting and observing a Beacon service
- An improved selection process for the recruitment of tutors
- A bigger tutor pool allowing more flexibility in relation to staff management
- Regular collection and use of learner data
- Courses designed to increase the number of male learners who have historically been under-represented. Examples include cycling proficiency for “dads and lads” and family woodwork courses
- A wider marketing presence
- More use of ILT as an aid to enhance teaching and learning and identification of an ILT champion to promote ILT possibilities to other tutors
- Better quality and range of learning aids including provision of additional handouts, dictionaries and textbooks where appropriate and other basic learning equipment
- The benefit of specialist database expertise to better collate and manage management information
- Greater engagement with government recognised excellent providers
- Continuing strong commitment to staff development, including ensuring new qualification regulations are complied with locally, attendance at external training events offered free of charge by the SFA and other national and regional bodies

## Promotion and marketing

30. The service is promoted in a number of ways, including through the production and distribution of printed publicity, use of the Council's and other websites, taster sessions in the community, schools and in libraries. Some examples of promotional activity over the last year include:
- Brochure each term - distributed to a mailing list of libraries, schools, children's centre, local venues in Peckham and surrounds, Morley College
  - updated Course Directory Provider Portal
  - Hotcourses and Floodlight listings
  - Southwark Web pages
  - Family learning week brochure annually
  - Course information sheets provided
  - Articles in Southwark Life
  - Articles in Southwark News
  - Banners outside the building - various - enrol now
  - Telephone box ad campaign
  - Morrison's receipt discount offer
  - Banner opposite the Town Hall and on Elephant and Castle roundabout
  - Adult learners week brochure input
  - Listings in various Southwark Council events publications - such as Silver, Black History Month
  - Articles in Communiversity - publication from London South Bank University
31. The service continues to raise its profile regionally and nationally through active participation in conferences and events, such as those organised by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. These events are offered to us free of charge.

**Appendix 1.**

<b>Skills Funding Agency grant funding for the Southwark Adult Learning Service</b>		
<b>Funding stream</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Further Education (FE)	£330,543	
Additional learning support	£29,810	
Discretionary learner support	£15,582	Consists of a 19+ hardship fund (£3 850) and a 20+ childcare support grant (£11 732)
<b>Total FE related funding:</b>	<b>£375,935</b>	
PCDL	£498,714	
NLDC	£205,369	
WFL	£28,616	
FLLN	£234,121	
<b>Total Adult Learning Safeguarded funding:</b>	<b>£996,820</b>	
<b>First steps funding:</b>	<b>£449,189</b>	
<b>FLIF funding (Comes to an end on 31 March 2011):</b>	<b>£54,150</b>	
<b>Total funding from the SFA Aug 2010 to Jul 2011:</b>	<b>£1,876,094</b>	