



Published: 12 July 2012

## **Norfolk County Council Adult Education and Guidance Service (NAEGS)**

### **Who is responsible for success rates? Improving accountability in adult learning and community education**

#### **Summary**

Poor success rates across 25% of learner responsive provision on long courses led to notices to improve for NAEGS. One of the areas affected was Preparation for Life and Work. This department exemplified the issues facing the provider, a large team of tutors were committed to and cared about learners and their well being but focussed more on retention than ensuring learners reached the end of their programme and qualify in a timely manner. In addition, managers had not introduced effective monitoring systems or performance management. Support from the LSIS Improvement and Development Service across a number of departments helped address these issues leading to more effective practice.

#### **About Norfolk County Council Adult Education and Guidance Service (NAEGS)**

Norfolk County Council Adult Education and Guidance Service (NAEGS) is part of Norfolk County Council's Community Services Directorate. The service provides education and training for a diverse range of over 4000 learners. The majority of learners, almost 2000, are on courses for social and personal development. These courses include recreational programmes, family learning and courses leading to Higher Education or qualifications, for example GCSEs, Fitness Training and Business. Other learners work towards employment qualifications and there are around 250 16-18 year olds following vocational programmes. The provision is offered across many different centres in rural locations, stretching between Norwich, Great Yarmouth, Thetford and Kings Lynn.

#### **The challenge**

In April 2011, Notices to Improve were received in the areas of Health, Public Services and Care, Information and Communication Technology, Arts Media and Publishing and Preparation for Life and Work. This meant that more than 25% of learner responsive provision on long courses was below minimum levels of performance.

So what was going wrong in those areas? Why were success rates so low? The problems were similar across all these areas of provision but this case study focuses on Preparation for Life and Work to explain the issues and how they were tackled. With the support of the LSIS Improvement Development Service, two main issues were identified. The first was the importance of achieving a qualification in a timely way after starting a course. No-one was

taking responsibility for ensuring learners actually achieved a qualification. For example, the Skills for Life team was nurturing and caring. They knew their learners very well and were able to give an individual story about every learner who dropped out or failed to achieve. Their caring approach, although laudable, was not helping learners to succeed. This was exacerbated by poor monitoring systems so that low achievement was showing up too late to be rescued. The managers needed to monitor progress and success and the teaching team needed to understand that it was part of their job role to get people through qualifications in a timely manner and that funding depended on that.

The second issue related to Marketing and Initial Advice and Guidance (IAG). Although marketing materials attracted people to courses, they failed to communicate to learners that they were on programmes designed to lead to qualifications. The fact that a qualification was involved sometimes came as a surprise to learners. IAG was not getting people on the right courses, instead it was aimed at hitting recruitment targets.

### **The activity**

(NAEGS) was allocated a number of days of support with advisers with expertise in different areas from the LSIS Improvement and Development Service. One of these areas was Skills for Life. The team knew that a new way of working was needed and devised a new model of delivery. This was presented to the LSIS IDS adviser who endorsed it and helped to bring about the necessary changes, make improvements and get the notices to improve lifted.

The support took place over a few months so that staff could progress between support days and then reflect on how it was all going before the next phase. NAEGS appointed a member of staff as co-ordinator for the whole project. Their role was to make sure agreed actions happened and liaise between different tutors, departments and the advisers.

The LSIS IDS adviser responsible for Skills for Life suggested a range of activities, some could be progressed by managers within the organisation, others required input and training from IDS.

The main thrust of the activity was for the adviser to work with tutors to bring about a change in mindset and develop the understanding that they had a responsibility for learner achievement. During two tutor development meetings, the adviser was supportive but challenged the current thinking; he invited questions constantly and used a coaching style of leadership. He was able to validate changes to the delivery model and new monitoring procedures introduced by managers so that the team accepted change as it came from an external 'expert'.

In addition, the large pool of tutors was reduced and more hours offered to fewer tutors to encourage greater commitment to programmes.

Other activities supported this fundamental change. Managers were provided with and trained to use the Proachieve data system so they could generate their own reports rather than waiting for them to appear. Previously, reports were often inaccurate and took ages to arrive. Targets were set for

performance, for tutors and for managers. The Skills for Life delivery model was redesigned so that programmes were shorter and sharper. Drop in observations were introduced and welcomed by staff, particularly in rural outposts where some people had been working in isolation. IAG was reviewed and improved and marketing materials emphasised that courses led to qualifications.

### **The outcomes**

In Preparation for Life and Work alone there are many outcomes arising from the LSIS support alongside work by managers. Data is used much more effectively; strategic managers and curriculum design managers monitor retention, attendance, success and timely starts at least monthly.

The number of part time tutors was reduced from 77 to 33 – with more hours allocated to each tutor.

Short courses in Skills for Life are now 10 week blocks, there are no long programmes, aiding more timely achievement. An additional 2 week programme has been added on to the start of courses with activities and tasters to ensure that learners are on the most appropriate course for them. Drop in observations are welcomed by tutors who might receive a visit from any manager. Tutors feel valued by senior managers taking an interest in what they are doing in class.

These outcomes were replicated across all the other areas of the provision.

### **The impact**

Everyone, from senior management to tutors and learners, realises that they must take responsibility for success rates.

Success rates soon showed improvement, for example, at over 70% on Skills for Life programmes by November 2011.

At inspection in November 2011, overall quality of provision was graded outstanding as was 16-19 provision.

*‘The service has dealt successfully with a number of declining success rates and turned them round. Many success rates are above national averages.’*

Ofsted January 2012

The whole exercise gave an opportunity to share good practice across the service – people who had been working autonomously in their small areas came together.

### **The lessons learned**

Although notices to improve were not given in every area of provision, each and every department took part in training and was involved in the improvement plan – the NTIs gave the opportunity to improve the service as a whole not just failing areas.

Recognise that *‘it’s easier to change things when someone external adds leverage and makes suggestions – so welcome external advice’*

Jill Bazire: Strategic Manager, Young People’s Programmes.

Jill also says *‘Providers need to be honest and admit to advisers where the problems are – they are supportive and non judgemental and want to help.’*

Sometimes, staff who have been in post for a long time are reluctant to change. Encourage them to be positive about the benefits supported change will bring.

#### Useful links

<http://www.adulteducation.norfolk.gov.uk/>

*The JISC Regional Support Centres (RSC) and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) support the development of educational e-practice. We may refer to specific products, processes or services. Such references are examples and are not endorsements or recommendations and should not be used for product endorsement purposes.*