



Published: 12 July 2012

## **Sandwell Adult and Family Learning Service** **Driving quality improvement through a user-friendly data system**

### **Summary**

Sandwell Adult and Family Learning Service worked closely with an adviser from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) Improvement Adviser Service to improve staff's use and understanding of data. Quality improvement and self-assessment were not being informed sufficiently by detailed evidence. A new more comprehensive user-friendly system was introduced which allowed staff to have far more understanding of the application of data and to take more ownership of their contribution to improving the overall quality of the provision.

### **About Sandwell Adult and Family Learning Service**

Sandwell Adult and Family Learning Service (the service) is part of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. The service provides formal and informal learning opportunities from three main and two satellite sites plus approximately 70 community venues, for example libraries, sports centres and community faith centres. The service has a strong commitment to serving the residents of the borough. The learner group is very diverse and includes a high proportion of vulnerable adults.

### **The challenge**

Sandwell Adult and Family Learning Service needed a management information system that helped them to respond to changes in funding and awarding bodies swiftly to ensure that they became a pro- active rather than a reactive service. Managers noted there was poor communication between the data and curriculum teams; staff did not take ownership of data issues and did not understand the current system well enough to use it effectively. With delivery taking place in approximately seventy venues and with very few administration staff it was vital to provide tutors with a system which they could easily access and which provided them with useful information. The service offers many multi-level and multi-unit classes and therefore needed a very user-friendly non-time consuming system.

### **The activity**

A data specialist from the Improvement Adviser Service with a strong practical background in dealing with similar issues met with senior staff from the service including the adult and community learning manager, the head of service and the resources development manager. He reviewed the current management information system which was providing a basic set of data. He provided guidance to the service as to how they could produce more detailed

reports in a variety of formats and then subsequently how to drill down into those reports to gain more information.

The new system allowed every possible combination of factors to be analysed at headline and underpinning level. The service worked closely with the adviser to gain a clear understanding of how to use data as a contemporary tool focusing on the quality of the learner experience at all stages of their journey.

The staff team were very motivated to improve and responsive to any advice and guidance offered by the adviser. Staff were supported to understand how best to input data and how to use it to inform and evaluate their delivery. They gained a better understanding of how to track a learner's progress via data input from the learner's very first contact with the service. They started to use data intelligently to inform all aspects of their work.

Regular data meetings began to take place with key issues being reported back to senior management.

### **The outcomes**

- Monthly data meetings involve the curriculum team and provide an opportunity to review practice.
- Tutors are now taking much more ownership of their delivery. They have a clear picture throughout the year of performance outcomes rather than on an annual end of year basis.
- Each member of staff can review and compare each other's performance.
- Data is much more contemporary, accurate and timely.
- Analysis of data is now much less time consuming. Top line data can be easily drilled down to individual learner, course and venue providing a means to instantly highlight and action any area of underperformance.
- 'At risk' learners are now identified and supported much more quickly.
- Staff track progress against learning aims much more frequently.
- Attendance and punctuality is followed more closely and any patterns quickly noted and actioned.
- Data indicates areas where the service is not delivering to the community allowing this to be swiftly addressed by the setting up of new courses.
- Data is presented in a variety of formats according to what the user requests; for example, visually for those who find this more accessible and meaningful.
- The service has a much better understanding of which groups are under-represented and puts on marketing to attract them.
- The service has a clear understanding of which times and days are more popular with learners for attending and completing courses.
- There is now much more accurate and timely data available to inform self-assessment.

### **The impact**

Kerry Davison, Resources Development Manager noted 'It is now a much more data driven service. We are more proactive and we meet the demands of the residents of the borough much better'.

The provision is now performing much more consistently across the many diverse sites it operates from.

Overall success rates have significantly improved, for example in ICT they doubled in 2010/11 from the previous year.

There has been 3% rise in under-represented groups on courses in 2010/11.

The Ofsted December 2010 inspection report noted 'Performance is closely monitored'.

### **The lessons learned**

The senior management team has learned that it is never an option to stand still and that quality improvement is an on-going and ever changing process. Staffs at all levels now have the confidence to input, interrogate and manipulate the data system and to take ownership of performance management. They can appreciate the value of quality improvement measures and the need for close monitoring of the learner at all stages of his journey. The service has learned how to be much more responsive to the community it serves and to be more efficient in its working practice.

### **Useful links**

- Sandwell Adult and Family Learning website <http://www.learnsafl.ac.uk/>

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