

2007-08

Inverclyde Council evaluation report

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLOIM)

Summary

From a review of evidence, discussions with staff, learners and one of the tutors from James Watt College and observation of a class, it is clear that Inverclyde's staff are working extremely hard to provide a range of learning experiences through partnership working. Learning is co-ordinated and developed by the People's Network Officer who, along with the Libraries Manager takes part in the Community Planning and Community Learning and Development processes. The success of Inverclyde Libraries at creating and sustaining effective learning partnerships is further evidenced by two Scottish Adult Learning Partnership awards and a Scottish Qualifications Authority silver lifelong learning award.

There is still potential to develop and improve the range of learning offered but this is dependent on the continuation of the partnerships. James Watt College is under significant financial pressures and changes to their commitment could affect the ability of the library service to deliver learning. Library resources are too scarce to be redirected to maintain the current level of learning. Consideration should be given by the local authority to support the continuation of library-based learning. The largest age-group of learners are amongst the retired and 'rising retired' and it is unfortunate that support for the creative learning strands, which attracted the unemployed and younger learners, was withdrawn by the college. Staffing and technological changes mean that there is potential to build on the existing range of learning opportunities for under 12s. Inverclyde have made considerable efforts to attract and retain learners as well as evaluating learners' feedback on their experiences.

Staff have identified a number of areas for improvement. The ability to deliver these is dependent on the college and other partners. Staff are all committed to seeking new partnerships and are currently in discussions with other learning providers. They are continuing to build on existing good relationships with adult literacy and numeracy teams to promote literacy and develop family learning. Work with younger learners requires some development and should offer potential for development along the same lines of the 'Hack Pack' initiative which attracts teenagers and offers them activities to develop a range of skills.

Strengths

- The range of effective learning partnerships, including James Watt College, LEAD Scotland and the Adult Literacies Team
- Planned collection and evaluation of data from learners aimed at attracting, supporting and retaining learners
- Engagement in Community Learning Strategy
- Hack Pack for teenager learners
- Range of initiatives leading to two Scottish Adult Learning Partnership awards and a Scottish Qualifications Authority silver lifelong learning award
- Flexibility accommodating different learning paces

Background

Inverclyde Council serves a population of around 82,400 located on the west coast, on the Clyde estuary. Inverclyde have seen relatively large increases in their share of data zones in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland between the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 and SIMD 2006. The main centres of population are in Greenock, Port Glasgow and Gourock, and there are a number of smaller communities. The Service has 1 central library in Greenock and 6 community

libraries, with 34.0 (FTE) staff. Inverclyde Library Service has worked closely with neighbouring authorities on joint initiatives and also with local partners in learning.

Process

Building on success: a public library quality improvement matrix, self-evaluation toolkit prepared by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) provides the framework for the process. Inverclyde staff developed themes around Quality indicator 4 Learners' experiences and encouraged all senior management team to contribute. Whilst the staff had understandable concerns about the levels of resources, they focussed on demonstrating the impact of the existing levels of investment. External feedback from one of the tutors from James Watt College and a group of learners was supported by the evaluation forms collected from learners.

SLIC reviewed the evidence and carried out interviews with members of staff and the senior management team on 14th May 2007. SLIC observed a class in progress in the Central Library for a short time and spoke to the college tutor and learners.

Quality Indicator 4 Learners' experiences

The library learning environment

Library buildings vary in their ability to accommodate learners and ICT. The People's Network project provided an opportunity to launch new learning centres in libraries. Whilst the Central Library and the South West Library in Greenock do have self-contained rooms for small classes of up to 12, other libraries do not have separate facilities so tutors have to work within the normal library environment, with its obvious distractions. Self-contained training rooms and provision of small spaces for literacies learners to consult with tutors or for group work would further enhance the learning experience. Over 97% of learners in 2005-6 expressed satisfaction with their learning environment by rating it good or excellent. The Central Library's training room was adequately equipped with PCs and a whiteboard but was in need of refurbishment. There was evidence from the evaluation forms that referrals were working between libraries to meet learners' needs.

Whilst there are good ICT facilities available in most libraries, there is no public access internet to facilitate learning at the Watt Library. The lack of internet access for under-12s restricts the range of learning activity which can be offered. These areas for improvement need to be addressed. Internet access for under-12s will enable younger learners to access *Glow* with its homework resources, learning materials and teacher support, when the Scottish schools digital network goes live. The ICT facilities will require regular and sustained investment and staff skills do need to be continually developed, including accredited courses, to ensure that learners' needs can be appropriately met.

SLIC recognises the challenge of increasing the current percentage of the population of Inverclyde who are registered learners at the library. Staff have to overcome a lack of confidence, which was cited as the biggest barrier to learning in customer feedback, and a lack of aspiration, as well as presenting lifelong learning as a worthwhile lifestyle choice. This has to be balanced with staff capacity to manage demand for learning in the event of successful promotion to new learners. Currently classes are full and provision of computers per 1000 population is above the Scottish average. Capacity issues need to be addressed before the performance can be improved.

Promotional materials are made available by the library staff to advertise learning opportunities and there are regular articles in the press. Whilst there is a need to attract new learners from the non-library user group, this has to be balanced with availability and capacity to meet increased demand.

Range of learning

Currently, Inverclyde Libraries are delivering 23 classes per week in four locations. During the last three sessions, 1844 customers have been engaged in formal learning, although other activities such as Hack Pack, Inverclyde Arts Programme, Summer Reading Challenge, War Detectives and Cleaner, Greener, Safer projects all contribute to lifelong learning.

Successful courses are based on ICT or literacy, and support for the creative classes was withdrawn by the college. These classes were attracting the unemployed, women and younger age groups, so it is disappointing that these could not be continued. Discussions with other providers seek to extend the range of courses available and make a selection available online. Customer feedback indicates interest in a range of programmes such as digital photography, genealogy and languages, as well as ICT.

Inverclyde took part in a pilot project for SLIC which offered access to ScotlandsPeople, a key genealogical database. The evaluation report shows that 70% of the users were over 61, with 62% never having used the resource before. 60% of the respondents went on to use Inverclyde libraries, with 30% subsequently joining a genealogy class and 10% taking up ICT classes.

The leadership of the People's Network Librarian has helped to provide direction and cohesion with library-based learning. Structured data collection about learners means that previous uptake of courses is recorded, motivation for learning, pace and level of learning are recorded as well as overall evaluation. The Libraries Manager and the People's Network Librarian make an active contribution to Community Learning and Development and Community Planning. Once the future of the college, who are a key partner, is secured the next step will be to formalise existing arrangements in a strategic plan for library-based learning. This should address all age groups and profiles to bring structure, quality and equality of opportunities to all interested in taking up learning through libraries.

Addressing the needs of learners

Library users are benefiting from low tutor to learner ratios, which are well below college norms and the way in which the courses can be tailored to meet individual needs. This allows learners to learn at a pace which suits them, allowing them to build up their confidence in using IT and develop competences within a supported environment. Learners expressed their satisfaction and many were returning for more advanced courses. The tutor expressed her view that the library-college partnership was effective as these learners would not be attracted by the college environment and that links were made for those who did want to progress to more advanced qualifications.

Delivery has been enhanced by facilities for the visually impaired, online learning, e-learning and interactive CD ROMs. There are good links with LEAD Scotland and the Inverclyde Council on Disability, as well as links with the Adult Literacies Team. One of the learners consulted had progressed from a literacies class to an Information Technology qualification. The provision of adaptive technologies, awareness of the

impact of dyslexia and flexibility with pace of learning all contributed to the success of learning in Inverclyde libraries.

Feedback from learners demonstrates high levels of satisfaction, over 96% rated courses good or excellent in 2005-6. Over 73% responded that they would attend another course. Motivation for learning most often stemmed from a desire to learn new skills (83%) and the next categories included family learning (15%) and to socialise (10%). The Scottish Adult Learning Partnership has made two awards to Inverclyde library learners, which reflects the success of individual learners.

ICT training was carried out as part of the People's Network training programme and all members of staff are ECDL qualified. Following 'train the trainer' sessions, additional in-house training was carried out. Five senior members of staff have received presentation skills training from James Watt College. This has helped to cascade other skills and 1.5 (FTE) staff are dedicated to ensure learning for staff and the public is co-ordinated and carried out effectively. Some members of staff have received literacy awareness training so that they are better able to understand the needs and feelings of emerging readers. Job descriptions have been reviewed so that staff are responsible for providing basic levels of assistance and supporting users but college staff and partnerships run formal classes. Further staff training will be required if libraries are to play an increased role in supporting learning and to take into account advances in ICT. For example, staff have indicated that they would like to develop on-line learning which will help improve access to learning but may have implications for staff skills.

Partnership working in learning

Both the Libraries Manager and the People's Network librarian are involved in the Community Learning and Development Strategy Group. Libraries also support the Adult Learning and Literacies Sub Group, Adult Guidance Network, Scottish Adult Learning Partnerships and the James Watt College Liaison Group.

James Watt College are a key partner and this was recognised with the SQA Lifelong Learning Award in 2006 which recognised the work of both partners in delivering real and sustained learning opportunities to learners of all ages. Over 600 learners aged 30 to 85 have received SQA units in a variety of subjects including PC Passport, digital photography and genealogy.

There are concerns about the impact of the uncertainty about the future direction of the College. Maintaining the current success of library-based learning depends on the contribution which partners bring, so this should be monitored carefully and planning put in place to ensure the continuation of programmes. Increased staffing would enable the library staff to offer learning and skills development, such as information literacy and support for online learning.

The partnership working extends beyond James Watt College and includes LEAD Scotland and the Adult Literacy Team. Partnership working increases the resources available and this balances the current, very low level of investment in Inverclyde's libraries, whose current expenditure on library materials is the second lowest in Scotland per 1000 population.

Other links with local providers of tertiary education have been sought. Links with LEAD Scotland and the Adult Literacy Team have nurtured closer working relationships with literacies tutors. Working closely with literacies tutors at local level

has resulted in literacy-related events and ensured take-up of opportunities provided within the Learning Connections and Scottish Library and Information Council national strategic partnership project, Big Plus in Libraries. Literacy collections in libraries have been significantly improved and are well-used.

Next steps

Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building new partnerships or seeking further funding from the local authority to ensure continued provision of learning in the event of the James Watt College withdrawing support. • Extending the current range of learners beyond the retired and rising retired • Attracting a greater percentage of the population to learning • Upgrading buildings and computer facilities • Further staff training

Levels

This report uses a six level scale, as follows:

- excellent - outstanding, sector leading
- very good - major strengths
- good - important strengths with areas for improvement
- adequate - strengths just outweigh weaknesses
- weak - important weaknesses
- unsatisfactory - major weaknesses

Quality Indicator 4 Learners' experiences	
Extent to which the environment stimulates and motivates learners	Good
The range of learning opportunities	Good
Provision for learners with differing abilities and aptitudes	Good
Partnerships enabling progression with others	Good

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