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Ms C Welbourn  
Director  
North Yorkshire County Council  
County Hall  
Northallerton  
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Dear Ms Welbourn

**Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: numeracy – tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 and 23 September 2010 to look at your work in numeracy.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with senior staff, tutors and learners; three observations of teaching and learning in numeracy; and a review of the supporting documentation that you provided.

Overall, The North Yorkshire County Council's Adult Learning Service (ALS) is satisfactory at tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives.

**Key findings**

- The ALS has a good understanding of the social and economic factors that have influenced its Skills for Life strategy. These include the very large geographical area the council serves, its predominantly rural nature, and the pockets of deprivation that exist. It also recognises the challenges of targeting the provision at a time of decreasing resources, and the need to prioritise carefully which programmes to provide. The service has increased enrolments in numeracy over the last three years. The council has used Train to Gain well to extend its numeracy provision to council staff and to staff working locally for a national employer.
- The ALS offers programmes in numeracy across all seven geographical areas to provide numeracy provision to the wider community and to

specific groups. These include family learning, family finance classes for fathers in a young offenders institution, and a budgeting course for travellers. However, the service acknowledges that it is not targeting provision successfully in all areas of the county, and that too many of the same learners are returning year after year.

- Teachers are very well qualified; they all have achieved or are working towards specialist qualifications in teaching numeracy at level 5. They make good use of opportunities, such as quality circles, to share good practice and update their knowledge. Although staff have access to email and intranet to facilitate communication between tutors, coordinators and managers, they do not use these well enough across the service to overcome the challenge that such a large rural area presents.
- The skills for life planning and quality improvement strategies do not address sufficiently well many of the issues that are specific to numeracy. For example, the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan make little reference to the planning and delivery of numeracy as a separate subject.
- The teaching and learning sessions in numeracy observed were satisfactory. Teachers used an appropriate range of resources and activities to meet learners' different development needs and help them overcome previous barriers to learning. Overall, tutors plan courses and sessions well, but they do not involve enough the use of computers or small group work.
- Retention in discrete numeracy provision, including family learning is low. Qualifications achieved were satisfactory in 2008/09. In 2009/10, success rates were low for Train to Gain. The service has introduced a more thorough and consistent approach to identify learners' needs at the start of their programmes and follow up absences to increase retention rates. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this work.
- Learners interviewed gain significant confidence to acquire and apply mathematical skills to everyday life. This includes for example, budgeting and shopping, and helping children with school work. Many learners, including council employees, gain appropriate numeracy skills to improve their employability and support their career development.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- reviewing the planning and monitoring procedures to ensure that the service reaches more learners from the targeted geographical areas and groups who are new to numeracy provision
- strengthening communication between teachers, area coordinators, managers and quality improvement officers across the county and tightening the subject-specific focus on numeracy in development planning, quality improvement, and the self-assessment report
- continuing to implement the planned improvements to initial assessment and monitoring absences to increase retention and achievement

- ensuring that learners receive the specific support and teaching they need, including the use of computers and group work, to develop their confidence, motivation, technical skills and understanding of mathematical concepts required to complete their programmes and attain the qualifications.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at The North Yorkshire County Council's Adult Learning Service.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter will be sent to the Skills Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

**Jan Smith**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**