INSPECTION REPORT

Humber Hub

12 February 2004

ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall judgement

Where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:
- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, **or**
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory.

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

INSPECTION REPORT

Humber Hub

Contents

Summary

Detailed inspection findings

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Humber Hub (the hub) was established in 2000. The hub operator is Hull College.
The hub offers a range of learndirect courses at 30 learning centres and access points
throughout Humberside, the East Riding of Yorkshire, north Lincolnshire and northeast
Lincolnshire. Centres and access points include further education colleges, libraries,
private training providers and local businesses. The hub also has six points of delivery
(PODs). The hub provision increased significantly in 2001-02. At the time of inspection
there were just over 2,000 learners. Approximately 46 per cent of learners take
information and communications technology (ICT) courses, about 33 per cent take skills
for life courses and 21 per cent take a range of other learndirect courses.

2. The hub management group (HMG), comprising the principal of Hull College, the hub
chair, and representatives from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Ufi, the local
learning partnerships and local education and businesses, direct the operation of the hub.
The hub employs a hub manager and six other staff. In August 2003, the hub started the
process to move to independent legal status. In January 2004, the HMG decided not to
re-tender for the operation of learndirect provision in the area. The hub management
have decided to work towards a partnership with one of the potential bidders for the
contract.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Foundation programmes

3. At the time of inspection there were 514 learners on skills for life courses. At the end
of 2002-03, skills for life provision accounted for 33 per cent of the hub's provision,
exceeding the Ufi's national target of 13 per cent and the hub's own target of 25 per
cent. The target for the 2003-04 financial year is 40 per cent. Most learners attend a
learning centre and complete their courses online, or use CD-ROMs, with some additional
use of workbooks. Ninety per cent of the learning centres provide literacy and numeracy
support, but English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision is limited to four
main centres in the Humber region, where there is a growing population of asylum
seekers and refugees. These four centres are registered centres for the English language
learning instruction system (ELLIS).

Other learndirect provision

4. Since August 2003, 1,506 learners have enrolled on ICT learndirect courses and other provision. Currently there are 1,295 learners in ICT learndirect courses. ICT comprises 46 per cent of the overall provision. Business and other courses make up 10 per cent of the provision. The most popular courses are surfdirect, word processing, introduction to computers and e-mail. One hundred and four learners have enrolled on courses for an examination-based qualification in information technology. Most business enrolments are for courses concerned with tackling discrimination. There have been 180 enrolments for lift truck driving theory. Completion certificates are offered to learners who achieve their learning objectives. Learners are recruited through learning venue promotions, personal recommendations and referral from other agencies. All learners receive an induction, which generally covers information on their chosen courses, health and safety, equality of opportunity matters and procedures regarding making a complaint. Learners receive support and tutoring from subject specialists at learning venues. Online guidance and support are also available to learners who work remotely.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	8
Number of inspection days	32
Number of learner interviews	116
Number of staff interviews	8
Number of subcontractor interviews	50
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	26
Number of virtual learner questionnaires considered	99

Ufi management information provides data on the gender, age and economic status of learners as shown in the tables below.

Gender profile	Humber Hub (per cent)	National (per cent)
Female	43	55
Male	57	45

Age profile	Humber Hub (per cent)	National (per cent)
Up to 24	14	13
25 to 34	19	21
35 to 44	22	24
45 to 54	18	18
55 to 64	15	14
Over 64	12	10

Economic status	Humber Hub (per cent)	National (per cent)
Employed	24	41
In full-time education or training	1	3
In part-time education or training	0	0
Not seeking work	16	2
Registered unemployed	16	13
Self-employed	2	3
Women returners	0	0

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the leadership and management of the hub are satisfactory, as is the approach to equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The quality of learning in foundation programmes is good and in all other learndirect provision is satisfactory.

GRADES

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	3

Areas of learning	Grade
Foundation programmes	2
Other learndirect provision	3

KEY FINDINGS
Achievement and standards

6. **A high proportion of learners on foundation programmes remain on their course and achieve their agreed outcomes.** Many learners progress to other courses and are able to build on their previous successes to seek more challenging targets.

7. **Learners on foundation programmes develop good personal and employment skills.** In particular, learners who speak English as an additional language, develop the confidence and ability to speak and answer the telephone in English.

8. **A good proportion of learners on other courses are retained** and achievement is satisfactory. However, some learners make slow progress and do not complete their courses by the planned end date.

Quality of education and training

9. **There is good progression for ICT learners.** They are committed to improving their knowledge and skills and their independent study skills, in order to progress through learndirect courses, into further education or into employment.

10. **Learning venues are appealing and welcoming** and provide a good environment to learn. They are conveniently located in town centres, in the centre of housing estates or close to public transport links.

11. **In most centres there is a good range of specialist equipment for people with disabilities.** This equipment includes large trackball mice, extended screens, adapted keyboards and audio equipment.

12. **There is inadequate initial assessment for some learners.** Most initial assessments are by informal discussion, and many are poorly recorded. Screening for learners' literacy and numeracy needs is ineffective and there is little systematic assessment of learners' knowledge, experience and support needs.

13. **There is inadequate promotion of the full learndirect portfolio by many centres.** Most courses offered are taster and level 1 courses in ICT. There is insufficient provision at level 3. Few centres actively promote business and management courses, and enrolment figures are low.

14. **Most learners receive good individual coaching and support.** Particularly good levels of support are given in centres where there are many asylum seekers and refugees, and to learners with physical or mental disabilities.

15. **The review of learners' progress is weak,** with few short-term targets. Learning plans only include the end date when the proposed qualifications should be included, although in some cases even this is omitted. There is no breakdown into short-term targets showing what learners should achieve over set periods of time.

Leadership and management

16. **The HMG makes good use of its local knowledge and links for decision-making,** and has good links with learning venues.

17. **There is weak management of some aspects of the hub's development.** Business targets are not clearly stated. There is no written strategy for the development of new centres, the use of PODs, to improve penetration into small or medium-sized enterprises and for the implementation equality of opportunity.

18. **The quality assurance system is not yet fully established.** Although many new processes have been introduced, and some have proven to be effective, others have yet to be fully implemented.

19. **The hub has been successful in widening participation** in education and training in the region. In particular it has exceeded its target for course uptake in skills for life programmes.

20. **Monitoring of equal opportunities is weak.** There is insufficient monitoring of learners' understanding and experiences. Many learners have a poor understanding of equality of opportunity and are often unaware of centre or hub policies.

21. **Access for people with restricted mobility, particularly wheelchair users, is poor in some learning venues.** The hub is aware of which learning venues have poor access points, and most of these have adequate interim arrangements while access is improved, or alternative premises sought.

22. **Analysis of feedback from learners on foundation programmes is inadequate.** Learners' views are often collected in a variety of formats, but there is little analysis to identify trends or learning patterns.

23. **Little use is made of data about learners' gender, ethnic origin and disabilities.** There is no analysis of the performance of different groups of learners.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- success in widening participation
- effective measures to improve provision
- good partnerships with other agencies
- good involvement of hub management group

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of some aspects of equal opportunities
- insufficiently established quality assurance system
- weak management of some aspects of hub development

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- very effective initiatives to widen participation
- good individual coaching and support
- well-resourced learning venues
- good and improving achievement and retention rates

Weaknesses

- insufficient analysis of learner feedback
- weak review and target-setting process

Other learndirect provision

Strengths
- good learning venues
- good progression rates
- very effective individual support for learners
- good retention of learners

Weaknesses
- inadequate promotion of the full learndirect portfolio
- insufficient short-term target-setting
- inadequate initial assessment for some learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT HUMBER HUB:

- working at their own pace
- the choice of programmes
- the opportunity to develop confidence and new skills
- the availability of work stations
- the relaxed atmosphere
- the inviting centres with easy access
- the friendly, helpful staff

WHAT LEARNERS THINK HUMBER HUB COULD IMPROVE:

- the working conditions - they should be quieter
- the opening times should be longer
- the computers could be faster

KEY CHALLENGES FOR HUMBER HUB:

- monitor and promote equal opportunities in all centres
- fully establish the quality assurance system
- improve the targets in learning plans and after progress reviews
- increase the promotion and take-up of courses across the whole learndirect portfolio
- develop clearer plans and strategies
- successfully manage the transition of centres to a new hub operator

Ufi – learndirect introduction

Supported online learning is the main medium for **learndirect** learning. It enables learning to take place away from institutions and learning centres in venues such as home or workplace. Ufi makes a promise to learners:

- to offer the time, place, pace and style of learning that responds to their needs
- to give clear information that helps them make the best personal choices about learning programmes and maintain control of them
- to offer learning materials that are relevant to their own work interests and that actively involve them in practical examples and exercises
- to enable them to monitor their progress and record their achievements as they go, not just at the end of a complete programme
- the opportunity, on completion of a set of **learndirect** learning materials, to present evidence of their achievements for credit towards the widest range of nationally recognised qualifications
- easy access to the specialist support they need
- to put them in touch with other people studying the same topics
- to give them the chance to relate their learning to their own longer-term ambitions.

Inspectors judge the quality of learning provided through **learndirect**. Inspectors focus on learners' achievements and evaluate the help and support learners receive from a hub.

Each area of learning, where appropriate, will be graded. If it is not possible to grade individual areas of learning an overall grade will be given. Leadership and management will be graded. Contributory grades will be given for equal opportunities and quality assurance. These grades will be taken into account when determining the grade for leadership and management.

Where the inspection of **learndirect** involves learning centres which have themselves been subject to an inspection in the preceding 12 months, evidence from that previous inspection may be taken into account by inspectors during the current inspection.

ALI will work with other inspectorates to ensure that the formal inspection of **learndirect** is always undertaken by inspectors trained in such inspections.

Language of the University for Industry's learndirect

Terminology varies across the range of education and training settings covered by the *Common Inspection Framework.* The table below indicates the terms appropriate to **learndirect.**

Single term used in the framework	Relating the term to learndirect	
Provider	Hub, learning centre, access point	The organisation responsible for providing the **learndirect** educational service through its network of learning services for publicly funded learners.
Learner	Learner	Any person who is on a **learndirect** course. They may access the course through a learning centre, an access point, at home, or at work.
Teacher/ trainer	Learner support	Ufi has defined seven support roles for learners: 1 Information Provider/Access Enabler 2 Initial Assessor 3 Advice and Guidance Provider 4 Learning Facilitator 5 ICT Coach 6 Virtual Online Tutor 7 **learndirect** Product Champion Roles 1, 2 and 3 give base level support to get the learner started on a course. Roles 4 and 5 give general support to the learner throughout their course and keep records of learner activity. Roles 6 and 7 give subject specialist support. All roles may be delivered virtually and may be combined.
Learning goals	Learning goals	These are learning objectives agreed with the learner at the beginning of their learning. These objectives may be credits towards (or whole) nationally recognised qualifications or targets learners wish or need to reach in order to become more employable or to meet personal learning goals. Attainment of goals may be entered in a learning log maintained by each learner, which is confidential to the learner. Learners may receive a certificate recognising course completion. Records of learning goals are also kept by centre staff.
Personal and learning skills	Personal development skills	These may also include skills to enhance employability.

Other terms used for learndirect

	Relating the term to learndirect
learndirect	Ufi's learning services are provided under the brand name **learndirect**. Learners can follow a wide range of courses, over 80 per cent of which are available online. The aim is to help those who study through the Internet, at home, at work, or in one of up to 1,300 **learndirect** centres.
Hubs	Hubs are an association of organisations which provide **learndirect** educational services through identified learning centres, access points, Virtual Learning Centres (VLCs) and Points of Delivery (PODs). Hubs may operate on a geographical, sector or company basis. Hub operators act on behalf of a hub and contract with Ufi to provide **learndirect** educational services. Hub operators may be a lead body (usually a college) or a separate legal entity formed for the purpose.
Hub management/ steering group	The body which oversees the strategic direction of a hub.
Hub manager	The hub manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of a hub.
Learning centres	If they so wish, learners may follow a course using, if appropriate, the computing equipment in a learning centre. Staff at the centre will help the learner to use the equipment and other supporting material. They will provide base level support and general support when required.
Access points	At access points, computing equipment is available to learners. Staff at the access points, however, will provide learners with first-line support.
Virtual Learning Centres (VLCs)	VLCs are operated by hubs and run as administrative learning centres with the same requirements for learner monitoring and learner support as other learning centres, but the learners registered with the VLC do not attend the centre.
Points of Delivery (PODs)	PODs are mobile workstations which can be used flexibly within hubs, although they are mainly targeted at small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Some specially funded PODs are **only** available to SMEs.
Course	Most **learndirect** courses have notional learning times of between 10 and 30 hours. Some are short 'taster' or 'bite-sized chunks' with notional learning times of one or two hours.
Individual learning log	Each learner may use their individual learning log to record their personal details; broad learning goals; the courses taken; the current course being followed and their plans for their future development.

	Relating the term to learndirect continued
Retention	Retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point.
Learner-defined achievement	Where a learner has demonstrated attainment of agreed targets.
Completion	Where a learner has completed all the stages of a **learndirect** course and received validation of this by a tutor.

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT   Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- success in widening participation
- effective measures to improve provision
- good partnerships with other agencies
- good involvement of hub management group

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of some aspects of equal opportunities
- insufficiently established quality assurance system
- weak management of some aspects of hub development

24. The involvement of the HMG is good. The members of the group have a wide range of experience which they use to help manage the hub. There is representation from all the local learning partnerships, the LSC, Ufi, business partnerships, local educational institutions and the private sector. The HMG members have a clear understanding of the major issues of the provision and receive regular briefings. They make good use of their local knowledge and links to make decisions in the hub and have good links with learning venues. The members of the HMG visit centres to talk directly to staff and learners.

25. There are good partnerships with other agencies. Centre and hub staff are actively involved with a range of local groups. These links are used to the advantage of learners, who, for example, can be referred to specific support groups to meet their needs. Centre staff involvement with other groups also helps them to share good practice and be aware of the particular needs of the local community.

26. Staff development is satisfactory. Staff development needs are discussed at annual appraisals and during the regular reviews. Training is provided to develop staff in their role and to meet their own aims. Staff are all suitably qualified. The hub's staff are appraised each year and also have regular reviews.

27. There is satisfactory use of management information. Centre staff receive adequate data from the hub. The hub's staff have developed a good learner information database which has been offered to all centres as an option to use instead of their existing system. The database is well thought out and was developed in consultation with centres. Data about learner performance are used effectively by the hub to provide information to

management and centres and are also used to develop elements of the provision. Learner data about equality of opportunity are available but are not used effectively.

28. Communications within the hub and between the hub and centres are satisfactory. Concerns by centre staff about the level of communication have been effectively resolved. The hub now has a very good communications policy, which is clear and effectively describes the role and nature of communications. There have been effective discussions with centre staff about communications. There are regular staff meetings, regular meetings of the HMG and regular meetings for centres and practitioners. There has been improvement in the structure of some meetings. For example, subgroups from the practitioners' group have been created to deal with specific matters such as quality assurance and funding. All meetings are recorded, although some of the minutes are not clear and there is some poor recording of decisions and actions.

29. The management of some aspects of the hub's development is weak. Previous business plans have been clear and detailed, but the most recent business plan, which was produced in April 2003, is not clear. There are no clear targets, and strategic outcomes are not clearly stated. There is no written strategic plan. Some centres are uncertain about their targets. There are insufficient strategies for the development of new centres, and for the use of the PODs. There is a strategic aim to improve penetration into small and medium-sized enterprises, but there is no clear plan about how this will be achieved. There is no action plan for the implementation of equality of opportunity.

Equality of opportunity   Contributory grade 3

30. The hub has developed a comprehensive set of well-written policies and procedures relating to equality and diversity. Centres are required to have their own appropriate policies and procedures or to adopt those of the hub. The hub has provided a suitable range and number of training events on equal opportunities for centres. It has provided centres with points of contact and telephone numbers for help with a wide range of subjects concerning learners with disabilities. These include advice on support for those who have visual and hearing impairments, and for people with dyslexia.

31. The hub collects data on learners' gender, ethnic origin and disabilities. The data are then analysed and compared with local population data. The analysis is reported to the HMG and a report is given to centres which shows the hub and centre breakdown. However, little use has been made of these data. Targets have been given to centres to match their learner profile to that of the local community. Some centres have developed initiatives to target under-represented groups, but many have not. There has been no analysis of the performance of different groups of learners.

32. The hub has been successful in widening participation in education and training in the region. In particular it has exceeded its target for course uptake in skills for life programmes. Centres have developed good links with external agencies to allow access for learners who would not normally participate in learning. However the hub does not have a clearly articulated strategy to widen participation. It has six PODs, but there is no

overall strategy for their deployment or use. There is no agreed strategy to develop the full range of learndirect provision across the region.

33. The centre has a clear and comprehensive complaint and praise procedure which appropriately integrates with centre and Ufi procedures. However, records of complaints are inadequately maintained. Copies of e-mails are kept, but the records do not include adequate details on the resolution of the complaint. It is not clear if all complaints have been adequately dealt with.

34. Monitoring of equal opportunities is weak. The hub has recently introduced a programme of quality monitoring visits to centres and this includes monitoring of centres' equal opportunities arrangements. However, as recognised in the self-assessment report, there is insufficient monitoring of learners' understanding and experiences. Many learners have a poor understanding of equality of opportunity. They are often unaware of centre or hub policies. Equality of opportunity is not always sufficiently covered during the learners' induction.

35. Access for people with restricted mobility, particularly wheelchair users, is poor in some learning venues. The hub is aware of which learning venues have poor access points and most of these have adequate interim arrangements while access is improved, or alternative premises are sought. However, action plans to deal with the situation are weak and are not prioritised. Other centres have good access and many have good resources to support learners who have a disability.

Quality assurance   Contributory grade 3

36. The hub has a comprehensive range of procedures for centres to follow and a separate quality assurance statement. Procedures were revised in September 2003 and they are now clear, easy to read and informative. Procedures clearly detail the way in which the hub will monitor the quality of the provision. The hub has produced a clear and informative monthly newsletter for learning venues. However, it has not been produced on a regular basis. The learning venue handbook has been revised to include the new procedures. This handbook is clear and informative.

37. The hub has been effective in developing measures to improve provision. New staff have been recruited. There has been a good improvement in the quality assurance paperwork, and the self-assessment process has been improved. A centre logbook has been introduced for centres to record concerns and monitor their progress. An effective system has been developed to allow centres to share good practice. A formal centre monitoring and action-planning process has been introduced, and it is used effectively to monitor performance and the implementation of improvements. Visits are recorded, as is non-conformance. Visits include all aspects of the hub's operations and include a content and quality check of learner files. Although many of these measures are recent, there is already evidence of their impact on learners' experiences. The hub's staff have a clear and detailed understanding of the quality assurance system.

38. Learner feedback is captured by the centres and by the hub directly. Individual

learner matters are dealt with and changes are made which enhance the quality of provision. Learner feedback is analysed by the hub, but there is insufficient detailed analysis of feedback at individual centres. Centre agreements are satisfactory and contain adequate reference to quality assurance.

39. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. Each centre produces its own report which is moderated by the hub. The hub's staff develop a draft self-assessment report which is then circulated for comment. The draft is presented to the HMG, which gives final approval. The hub has produced three reports. The self-assessment report is used to produce a detailed development plan, which is effectively monitored. Inspectors studied the self-assessment report which was produced in November 2003 and found that, while the paragraphs were more descriptive than judgemental, the report was a fairly accurate assessment of the provision. The grades given by inspectors matched most of those in the self-assessment report. Inspectors graded other learndirect provision and equality of opportunity at one grade lower than that in the self-assessment report.

40. The quality assurance system is not yet fully established. Although many new processes have been introduced, and some have proven to be effective, others have yet to be fully implemented. Some centres are not fully aware of all the new processes. The centre monitoring strategy has identified some areas to be improved; however, it has not yet completed a full cycle. There are insufficient teaching and learning observations in some centres. This has been recognised by the hub and it is working with centres to develop a sound process. Some centres do not have records of hub quality assurance checks. There are several centres where the learner feedback is not analysed to identify trends.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Foundation programmes   Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very effective initiatives to widen participation
- good individual coaching and support
- well-resourced learning venues
- good and improving achievement and retention rates

Weaknesses

- insufficient analysis of learner feedback
- weak review and target-setting process

Achievement and standards

41. The achievement and retention rates are good. For 2001-02, the completion rate of courses was 60 per cent, and by 2002-03, the rate had increased to 70 per cent, with 16 per cent still in learning. The retention rate for both years is around 90 per cent. For 2003-04, data indicate that the upward trend is continuing.

42. Learners develop good personal and employment skills and increase their confidence. Those who speak English as an additional language have the confidence and ability to speak and answer the telephone in English. They are able to confidently discuss their progress using English. Many learners have progressed onto other courses and are able to build on their previous successes to seek more challenging targets. Some learners' work is good, but most is satisfactory.

The following table shows the completion and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

learndirect																	
learndirect																	
	2002-03		2001-02														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts¹	3109		1257													
Retained²	2743		1183	94												
Successfully completed	2161		761	61												
Still in learning	494		20	2												

1. Learners are counted once for each course on which they are enrolled
2. Retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point

Quality of education and training

43. The centrally located and welcoming centres are well resourced and furnished. They have broadband internet access, and computer equipment and software are to industry standards. Four centres have good specialist software packages for those who speak English as an additional language. These centres are located in areas with a high proportion of people from minority ethnic groups and asylum seekers. Learners from other centres are often referred to these four centres where staff are trained to deliver these courses. All centres are able to provide up-to-date skills for life computer-based learning packages in numeracy and literacy. Learners are following a wide range of programmes which include measurement, volumes and reading skills. Staff are well qualified and there are good ratios of staff to learners. Specialist staff are available to advise on the support of learners with dyslexia, dyspraxia and other barriers to learning. There is a reliable system of referral between centres to provide appropriate provision for individual needs. In most centres there is a good range of specialist equipment for people with disabilities. Equipment includes large trackball mice, extended screens, adapted keyboards and audio equipment. Some venues do not have suitable access for wheelchair users.

44. There is good individual coaching and learner support. Particularly good levels of support are given in centres where there are many asylum seekers and refugees, and to learners with physical or mental disabilities. Tutors patiently give detailed explanations to learners, who value this ongoing support which motivates them to complete their courses. In some centres staff visit learners in their homes if they are unable to visit the centre for health or other reasons. They often install software on learners' own computers to enable them to access the learndirect materials more easily. Support is well recorded in detailed learning logs.

45. Initiatives to widen participation are very effective. There are very good external links with agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, the probation service, mental health agencies

and minority ethnic groups. Learners who are referred by the probation service combine learndirect courses on literacy and numeracy with weekly group sessions in one of the learning centres. An outreach centre in the Chinese community enables learners to access a bespoke ESOL learning package, facilitated by a Chinese tutor. Learners quickly improve their language skills and appreciate the social interaction with other members of their community. In one centre, learners with learning and other difficulties, visit the centre for a taster evening of courses on offer, and many have enrolled on courses. At another centre a group of learners with muscular myelitis is supported in a discrete learning room where they are able to gain confidence before joining other learners in the main computer suite.

46. Induction is satisfactory. Learners are able to recall information relating to their course, how they will be assessed, the complaints procedure and health and safety. Initial assessment is thorough. Tutors use a wide range of assessment tools, including computerised and paper-based packages, supplemented by centre-devised materials. Ongoing assessment is satisfactory, and is either carried out online or by using learndirect workbooks which are marked by tutors. Most learners are given assignments which are regularly set and marked, and tutors give constructive feedback.

47. The review process is weak. There are no short-term targets, and there is some confusion in many centres as to what should be covered in reviews. Reviews do not take an overview of how a learner is progressing, nor do they update targets if necessary. Learning plans only give the end date when the qualifications should be completed, although in some cases even this is omitted. There is no breakdown into short-term targets to show what learners should achieve over set periods of time. It is difficult for either the learner or assessor to monitor the learners' progress against time-bound targets. A significant number of learners take longer than the planned time to complete their course. Although initial assessment is satisfactory, it is often poorly recorded. Several centres are in the process of developing better paperwork to improve and standardise practice.

48. Analysis of the feedback from learners is inadequate. Learners' views are often collected in a variety of formats, but there is no analysis to identify trends. Concerns with individual learners are dealt with, but are not always recorded. There is an over-reliance on informal verbal contact.

Leadership and management

49. There is clear communication between the hub and centres. Centre staff share practice with other providers in regular hub practitioner and subject specialist meetings, which are hosted in rotation by the centres. Staff development is good. Staff receive regular appraisals and are encouraged to attend training events that are sponsored by the hub, as well as external courses. Specialist staff in literacy, numeracy and ESOL from some centres are training staff in other centres to deliver skills for life programmes. Some centre staff are taking part in a skills for life advocacy programme to promote literacy and numeracy across the hub. There is satisfactory promotion of equality of opportunity in most centres. The hub has productive links with a wide range of agencies that work with

disadvantaged and disengaged learners.

Other learndirect provision   Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good learning venues
- good progression rates
- very effective individual support for learners
- good retention of learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate promotion of the full learndirect portfolio
- insufficient short-term target-setting
- inadequate initial assessment for some learners

Achievement and standards

50. Retention rates are good. The retention rate for 2002-03 was 80 per cent. During 2002-03, the completion rate of ICT courses was satisfactory at 64 per cent and 59 per cent, respectively, for all courses, and 17 per cent of learners are still in learning. Retention rates have improved at some venues following improvement in the resources and support for learners. At the time of the inspection, overall achievement rates are satisfactory. However, some learners make slow progress and do not complete their courses by the planned end date.

51. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Most learners are using computers for the first time and they increase their confidence in their ability to use the computer and access the internet. Learners develop useful practical ICT skills and produce appropriate word-processed documents, simple but functional databases and spreadsheets, and presentation slide shows. Some have learnt to use and manipulate digital images. They use their newly acquired skills for personal fulfilment or to enhance their career prospects. Many learners express pleasure in their achievements and are motivated to go on to further learning.

The following table shows the completion and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

learndirect																	
learndirect																	
	2002-03		**2001-02**															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts[1]	6657		5145													
Retained[2]	5386		4671	91												
Successfully completed	3924		3262	63												
Still in learning	1174		121	2												

1. Learners are counted once for each course on which they are enrolled
2. Retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point

Quality of education and training

52. Individual support for learners is very effective. Many learners find it daunting to attend a learning environment for the first time since leaving school. Many come with little experience and some have a poor educational background. Facilitators are very enthusiastic and motivated to work with these learners. They are skilled at encouraging and reassuring learners and at helping them to overcome their anxiety. Staff have appropriate qualifications and satisfactory development plans. All staff have, or are working towards, teaching qualifications. Facilitators work hard to meet the differing needs of individual learners. They provide learners with good individual coaching, personal support and encouragement. During workshops, learners are encouraged to ask questions. Facilitators have good listening skills and give learners friendly and sensitive help to overcome their difficulties and apprehensions. Learners also receive good practical support. One learner who is housebound is being well supported through frequent home visits. Some ICT learners are visited in their workplace and their progress is discussed with their employer to allow them time off to work towards their learning goal. Learners who are working towards a management qualification are visited each week by their facilitator.

53. There is good progression for ICT learners. They are committed to improving their knowledge and skills and their independent study skills in order to progress through learndirect courses, into further education or into employment. Some learners progress from Jobcentre Plus-funded provision to learndirect. Most learners progress from learndirect taster courses to level 1 courses. Many learners enhance their skills with further level 1 courses, and some progress to level 2 courses. Some learners progress to non-learndirect courses and some gain employment.

54. Learning venues are good. They are appealing and welcoming and provide a good environment to learn. They are conveniently located in town centres, in the centre of housing estates or close to public transport links. Many learners are new to using

computers and the staff are sensitive to their fears and apprehensions. Many venues offer additional services which learners can easily access. Some venues have a good range of adaptive technologies for learners who have a physical or sensory disability, while other venues can access these adaptive technologies through the hub. A few of the venues are not accessible to wheelchair users, and two have a referral procedure to enable wheelchair users to use other venues. Staff from these venues take these potential learners to visit other partner venues. Many of the sites are well equipped with computers and peripherals and some have data projectors and interactive whiteboards. Resources in other venues are satisfactory.

55. Induction and assessment are satisfactory. In most venues there is a planned induction that covers an introduction to the site, aspects of health and safety and equality of opportunity, as well as showing learners how to use the computer and access their course. Venues have an induction checklist to ensure all elements are covered. Learners feel that the induction is effective in enabling them to start their learning. Many learners are also unsure how the venues' equality of opportunity policy is applied in practice. Tutors check the learners' assignments and confirm that a learner has completed them satisfactorily. At most venues there is little written feedback about how answers could be improved.

56. There is inadequate initial assessment for some learners. Most learners have an initial guidance interview, to help them choose a course at a suitable level; however, a few do not. Most initial assessments are by informal discussion, and many are poorly recorded. Screening for learners' literacy and numeracy needs is ineffective and there is little systematic assessment of their knowledge, experience and support needs. Learners have the opportunity for a skills check or other diagnostic assessment, but few take this opportunity, and some learners encounter literacy or numeracy difficulties.

57. There insufficient short-term target-setting. Individual learning plans focus on completion dates which may be several weeks or months ahead. There are few short-term targets against which learners can measure their progress, especially in the early part of the course when they are apprehensive. In most centres, there are arrangements for recording learners' progress through regular review meetings. These take place either in the centre or by telephone. The reviews concentrate on the learners' satisfaction with their progress to date. They do not check or enhance the learners' understanding, set intermediate milestones, and review the course end date. In some centres, records of learners' progress are inadequate, although one centre has a particularly effective review process.

58. There is inadequate support for the full learndirect portfolio by many centres. Most of the courses are taster and level 1 courses in ICT. There is insufficient provision at level 3. Few centres actively promote business and management courses, and enrolments are low. Some centres offer a narrow range of courses. There are few virtual and remote learners, and little use is made of the online services offered by Ufi. One centre has been successful in attracting individual learners and small and medium-sized enterprises, but there is no systematic approach to measuring local needs, identifying staff skills shortages for delivery of level 3 courses, or raising the awareness levels of staff and prospective

learners, across the hub as a whole.

Leadership and management

59. Communication at centre level is good. Some centres with few staff hold informal meetings to identify operational concerns, and these are resolved promptly. Appropriate staff attend monthly hub management and operational meetings. These meetings help to share good practice across centres and to disseminate information between the hub and learning centres. Staff development is satisfactory. Centres have accurate data for retention, achievement, success and withdrawal rates. However, not all centres make good use of these data. Staff in many venues are uncertain of the targets they are trying to achieve.

60. Equal opportunities policies are well understood by staff, but this knowledge is not disseminated to learners. Most centres have data on disadvantaged groups, but do not effectively use these to form strategies. There are satisfactory procedures for dealing with complaints in centres and most learners are aware of the procedure.