

Exchange Group Newcastle-under-Lyme Centre Reinspection

Adult Learning Inspectorate Inspection Report 9 January 2007

Reinspection date

6 December 2007

Inspection number

317807

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management is judged to be inadequate.

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

- Grade 1 – Outstanding
- Grade 2 – Good
- Grade 3 – Satisfactory
- Grade 4 – Inadequate

Description of the provider

1. The Exchange Group Newcastle-under-Lyme centre is based in the public library of the Staffordshire town, within the West Midlands region of the UfL. It is one of a network of 28 **learndirect** centres throughout the United Kingdom operated by Exchange Group. The centre provides training in skills for life and information and communications technology (ICT). At the time of the reinspection there were 13 learners on ICT courses. Exchange Group also runs a variety of other publicly- and privately-funded training programmes.
2. All ICT learners attend the centre for their training. They aim to achieve a qualification or other personal learning goals. The centre promotes its provision through word of mouth, direct marketing, and through referrals from the library and Jobcentre Plus.
3. Newcastle-under-Lyme is in north Staffordshire close to Stoke on Trent. The area comprises densely populated urban areas and a large rural area. The borough has some areas of serious deprivation. Keele University is nearby and there is a large student population. Approximately 3.5% of the local population are from minority ethnic groups and 25% are qualified to levels 4 or 5.

Grades

grade1= outstanding, grade 2= good, grade 3= satisfactory, grade 4= inadequate

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

Information and communications technology			4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
learndirect	12	4	

Preparation for life and work			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
learndirect	16	2	

Grades awarded at reinspection

Information and communications technology		3
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Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
learndirect	13	3

About the reinspection

4. The reinspection covered the provision of information and communication technology (ICT). No other aspects of **learn**direct provision were inspected or graded. At the previous inspection ICT was inadequate. At reinspection the provision in this area was satisfactory. At the previous inspection the overall effectiveness of the provision was satisfactory. Following the reinspection this remains unchanged.

Number of inspectors	2
Number of inspection days	4
Number of learners interviewed	7
Number of staff interviewed	8
Number of employers interviewed	0
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1
Number of visits to the provider	1

Areas of Learning

Information and communications technology		3
	Number of learners	Contributory grade
learndirect	13	3

5. Exchange Group Newcastle-under-Lyme centre offers ICT training at levels 1 and 2. From the start of the contract with the Ufi on 1 August 2006, up to 31 October 2007, a total of 324 learners enrolled on ICT courses. Of those learners who have completed their programme since 1 August 2007, 32 achieved a qualification and 45 were working towards other personal learning goals.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this reinspection:

Strengths

- Good use of targets for each learning session
- Effective initial assessment and guidance
- Good use of management information to monitor progress

Weaknesses

- Insufficient proactive support and feedback for learners
- Insufficient emphasis on teaching and learning in self-assessment

Achievement and standards

		Enrolments	Counted for Data	Success rate (%)	Withdrawal rate (%)
ICT	2006/07	275	248	47	6
	2007/08*	49	44	77	4

Note: 2007/08* data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first 3 months of the Ufi Sheffield contract year

6. Success rates for learners on ICT courses have improved over a period of six months and were 77% in the three-month period from August 2007. This is substantially higher than the success rates at the time of the previous inspection, which were 39%. However, since August 2007, the completion of personal learning goals has counted as success. Learners make good progress towards their qualification or personal learning goals, helped by the introduction of a system of targets for each session they spend in the centre. The targets are agreed between the learner and a tutor. Progress is reviewed against the targets at the end of the session. This strength was identified through self-assessment. Withdrawal rates have also improved and are low.
7. Learners enjoy their programmes and substantially improve their confidence in their ability to learn ICT skills, often from a low starting point. They acquire a satisfactory level of ICT skills during their training, contributing to their economic and social wellbeing. However, they are not always confident in their use of skills they have learnt earlier.

The quality of provision

8. Initial assessment and guidance are effective. All ICT learners complete initial assessments in numeracy and literacy as well as in ICT. These are used to identify any additional support needs before undertaking the relevant ICT programme. The necessary support is given by qualified staff. Learners are then well equipped to cope with the demands of their programme.
9. The learning centre is well located in the centre of town and is easily accessible. It has an adequate standard of accommodation, although workstations have little space. Computers are of sufficient specification. They are reliable and provide good connectivity to **learndirect** systems. Opening times are limited to those of the library within which the centre is located, which restricts access for learners in full time employment.
10. Learners are very satisfied with the quality of the **learndirect** learning materials used to support their programme. A comprehensive set of additional materials are available and used by learners, some drawn from other sources and some devised by the provider's staff.
11. Tutors are not always sufficiently proactive in offering support to learners or checking that they are learning. Many learners adopt a trial and error approach to passing assignments by answering the multiple choice questions repeatedly until they get the answer right. This weakness was not identified through self-assessment. Tutors provide clear explanations when learners ask for help. The satisfaction of learners with their support, measured in a recent survey, has fallen. There is insufficient awareness or use of the feedback for learners from their tutor that is available on the **learndirect** system. Little use is made of verbal feedback given during sessions. Learners rely mainly on the brief feedback to be found on the target sheet, reviewed at the end of each session. It does not adequately reinforce or consolidate the learning or help learners to improve their performance.
12. Since the previous inspection staff have acquired qualifications in ICT. They are now adequately qualified in ICT and many have themselves completed the **learndirect** programmes they provide.
13. Health and safety is covered at induction and is reinforced by posters and notices around the centre. Learners are reminded by staff of the need for correct posture and frequent breaks during their work and they understand all the aspects of health and safety as it applies to the centre.

Leadership and management

14. The progress of ICT learners is monitored effectively. The system in use for monitoring progress of skills for life learners at the time of the previous inspection has been extended to include ICT. A comprehensive range of management information is used very effectively to manage training. Exchange Group has designed and developed its own computer management information systems, matched to the needs of the learning centre and its head office.
15. The communications between Exchange Group managers and centre staff were excellent at the previous inspection and have improved further. There are more frequent meetings between senior managers in London and the staff in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Quality monitoring has increased.
16. Teaching and learning is insufficiently addressed in self-assessment. Self-assessment in ICT is based on too narrow a range of evidence, predominantly the success rates. The most recent full self-assessment report was produced in August 2007, based on the views of managers and staff, and the feedback of learners. ICT was judged to be unsatisfactory. The main weakness identified in the self-assessment was the continuing low success rates. An update before the reinspection indicated a rise of the self-assessment grade by two grades as a result of the improved success rates in the previous three months.
17. The promotion of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity has been improved since the previous inspection. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. They are well aware of how they should expect to be treated and what to do if they believe they have been unfairly treated. Less emphasis is placed on learners' responsibility towards other people.