

INSPECTION REPORT

**Exchange Group -
Putney Library
learndirect centre**

25 January 2007



**ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE**

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 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 are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

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*

Data for learndirect

Enrolments are learners who sign up to do a course.

Counted for data is the number of learners who:

- achieve their learning aim and pass an assessment if applicable
- withdraw before they reach 75 per cent of the learning outcomes
- complete at least 75 per cent of their learning outcomes, and do not achieve the learning aim within a further 28 days

The *success rate* is the proportion of learners counted for data who achieve their learning aim.

The *withdrawal rate* is those who withdraw before they complete 75 per cent of their learning outcomes.

Completion but not achievement is those learners who complete at least 75 per cent of the learning outcomes attached to any course, but do not achieve their learning aim or qualification, should one be attached to the course.

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The **learn**direct centre is based in the public library adjacent to Putney High Street, South West London, within the London region of the Ufi. It is one of a network of 24 **learn**direct centres throughout the United Kingdom operated by Exchange Group, 14 of which are situated in London libraries. Learners can visit the library at any time during the opening hours of 0900 to 1900, five days a week. The library is also open on Sunday.
2. Between August 2006, the start of the current contract with the Ufi, and December 2006, the centre has enrolled 124 learners. Of these, 89 enrolled for 183 Skills for Life courses and 35 enrolled for 59 information and communications technology (ICT) courses. At the time of the inspection there were 14 Skills for Life and eight ICT learners. Exchange Group also runs a range of other publicly and privately funded training programmes. Skills for Life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language.
3. Currently, all learners attend the centre. Skills for Life learners work towards national certificates in literacy and/or numeracy at levels 1 and 2. ICT learners aim to achieve a specific set of skills or a qualification. The centre promotes the provision through Jobcentre Plus, word of mouth, direct marketing, and through referrals from the library and **learn**direct.
4. Putney is in the London Borough of Wandsworth. The borough has a number of identified pockets of deprivation as well as more affluent areas. Some 13 per cent of the local population are from minority ethnic groups. Approximately 47 per cent of the local population are qualified to levels 4 or 5, which is higher than the London average of 31 per cent. The proportion of school learners gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education at grades C or above is below the national average.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** More specifically, the centre's provision for Skills for Life is satisfactory. Leadership and management are good, as are the arrangements for equality of opportunity. Quality improvement is satisfactory.
6. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The process is appropriately planned and conducted, and includes relevant input from staff. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report. Some judgements were not sufficiently relevant to the centre or supported by good evidence. Inspectors identified two additional weaknesses. They agreed with the grades given for leadership and management and equality of opportunity, but gave lower grades for the area of learning and quality improvement.
7. **The centre has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** The quality assurance system is satisfactory and managers have reacted swiftly to weaknesses identified in the inspection of another centre to put corrective actions in place. There are good monitoring arrangements and the centre is run well by appropriately experienced staff. Action-planning for improvement, and the monitoring of the effectiveness of actions, are thorough. The centre has developed realistic strategies to improve performance including promoting qualifications in ICT to learners. Performance has been good in Skills for Life

during the current **learndirect** contract, with pass rates in national tests improving from the previous year.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR EXCHANGE GROUP - PUTNEY LIBRARY LEARNDIRECT CENTRE:

- improve success rates for ICT
- improve the recording of target-setting and progress reviews
- continue to promote qualifications
- build upon the good initiatives in equality of opportunity to further reinforce learners' understanding
- further develop quality assurance arrangements
- further develop self-assessment to ensure it focuses on the centre

GRADES

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

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		2
Quality improvement		3

Preparation for life and work		Grade 3
	Number of learners	Contributory grade
learndirect	14	3

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. The inspection reported and graded the **learndirect** provision of the Exchange Group's Putney Library **learndirect** centre, together with its leadership and management. There was insufficient evidence to grade ICT although this was included in the evidence collected during the inspection and included in the preparation for life and work area.

Number of inspectors	2
Number of inspection days	4
Number of learners interviewed	11
Number of staff interviewed	5
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	2
Number of learner questionnaires returned	17
Number of visits to the provider	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

9. Success rates for Skills for Life learners are good in 2006-07 at 73 per cent. The withdrawal rate is particularly low at 1 per cent. The current pass rates of the national tests in literacy and numeracy are good at 95 per cent, having improved from 82 per cent in 2005-06. Many learners speak English as an additional language and do well with their literacy and numeracy qualifications. Learners improve their self-confidence. They make good use of their improved skills at work and home, for example helping their children with homework, or using computers at work.

10. ICT learners develop good computing skills. Most ICT learners focus on developing particular skills, and the confidence to use them, rather than gaining qualifications. Progression between course levels in ICT is satisfactory, although many learners choose to broaden their range of skills rather than progress to a higher level. Withdrawal rates from ICT courses are significantly below regional and national figures, at 4 per cent.

11. The success rate for learners on ICT courses is low, at 40 per cent, significantly below that for the average of all centres in the London region which stands at 49 per cent. The centre now provides free and subsidised ICT qualifications.

Q1 & Q2, 2006	Enrolments	Counted for data	Success rate (%)	Withdrawal rate (%)
ICT	49	35	40	4
Skills for Life	120	89	73	1

The quality of provision

12. A very good range of additional learning materials is available in Skills for Life and ICT to help consolidate learning and provide practice exercises for learners. These have been devised by centres within the Exchange Group and are available on the company intranet. Learners are given information about relevant internet sites to access from home. Those without access to a computer away from the centre are given printed copies of exercises and many find these useful in consolidating new skills.

13. The **learn**direct centre is well located within the town centre library and is easily accessible. It provides a good work environment and learners attend the centre frequently, using a well-managed booking system to help ensure adequate staffing. Although the workstations are close together good centre management ensures there is usually plenty of space between learners. Sufficient computers are provided with reliable and quick internet connections. Good attention is paid to health and safety at induction and throughout the courses. Learners are reminded by staff each time they attend the centre of the need for correct posture and frequent breaks. This is also reinforced by posters and notices.

14. Enrolment and induction are satisfactory and cover equality of opportunity, health and safety, centre rules, and how to access training programmes. Tutors follow clear guidance to ensure that a satisfactory experience is given to all learners. Although there is not enough space in the centre to always provide confidentiality during enrolment, a library office can be used if required. Enrolment and induction are scheduled to ensure adequate staffing. Questionnaires completed by learners following induction show that most can demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and health and safety. Previously

there was no reinforcement of equality of opportunity when learners re-enrolled, but this now takes place.

15. Assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills is satisfactory. Diagnostic skills checks are used to identify learners' abilities and help tutors to identify appropriate courses. Learners are placed on appropriate courses and understand how to progress to further courses. Where potential learners have significant language issues they are referred to more appropriate providers, including several further education colleges.

16. A good range of courses is offered. Most learners on Skills for Life courses take between five and six courses each. Learners on ICT courses generally take at least two or three courses.

17. Satisfactory individual support is provided. All learners are greeted, made comfortable, and prepared for study at their workstation. Tutors are attentive and supportive, providing clear explanations when learners ask for help. With numeracy, good use is made of other websites to provide alternative methods of solving a problem while in the centre. Some learners use these alternative sites at home, while others have information printed off for them. At busier times, tutors do not always identify if a learner requires help.

18. The recording of target-setting and progress reviews is poor. Summaries of learners' progress are recorded, rather than the agreed actions such as completing an exercise at home to consolidate learning. The use of a learner progress file that learners complete on attendance has been recently improved. Some learners do not allow sufficient time at the end of a session to enable discussion to take place with tutors.

Leadership and management

	All Ethnic Groups	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese/Other	Mixed	Not Known	White
Enrolments	469	40	88	27	12	5	297
Completion rate (%)	96	100	98	89	92	80	96
Achievement rate (%)	66	53	58	54	73	50	71
Success rate (%)	63	53	57	48	67	40	68
Withdrawal rate (%)	4	0	2	11	8	20	4

19. There are very effective links between the Exchange Group head office and the centre. Centre managers attend monthly managers' meetings held in the head office in London. Operation managers are used well to update centre managers on developments and to share good practice. These meetings are supported by weekly newsletters that provide information on changes in procedures and practice. E-mails and telephone calls are also used extensively. The centre manager updates centre staff following the meetings. A wide range of support material for managers and staff is available on the company intranet and is used in the Putney Library learndirect centre. Exchange Group quality team and the operations manager frequently visit the centre. The centre manager has a good understanding of management procedures and issues and of his overall role. Support is given to the centre by a Skills for Life tutor qualified at level 4. Staff from a head office pool are used to provide support and to cover holidays or other activities such as liaison with Jobcentre Plus.

20. The monitoring of centre and staff performance is particularly effective. Comprehensive management information systems are used well to record and monitor centre and staff performance. The operations manager works closely with the centre manager during monthly visits to set and review performance targets. Putney has met or slightly exceeded the targets set by the Ufi and is classified as a low risk centre following Ufi audits. Training

needs following quality audits are recorded and followed through. The improvement in staff understanding is checked through interim reviews. Annual appraisal takes place in which learning goals are set, and these are monitored on a quarterly basis. There is good staff development for all staff from induction onwards, recorded on a company computer system. The system allows follow-up to assess the outcome and effect of the training in terms of improved knowledge and skills. Managers and staff show a clear understanding of company systems and the reasons behind them. Good support is provided for staff wishing to progress within the company and there is a clear progression route. An operations manager responsible for a different set of centres carries out a further audit on a quarterly basis and assesses the performance of the centre.

21. There are good initiatives to target participation of under-represented groups at the centre. There are particularly good links with Jobcentre Plus, which have been developed and maintained by two centre staff. One or both of these staff visit the local office at least twice a week to talk to potential learners, many of whom have low literacy and numeracy levels. An office area is made available for interviews and good working relationships are maintained with Jobcentre Plus staff. There are also good links with local further education colleges, which enable referrals to be made for specialist language support. There are also other initiatives to help learners into learning and achieve qualifications, such as offering free or subsidised ICT courses. There is good analysis of equality of opportunity-related data. There have been several good marketing initiatives to help in the achievement of equality and diversity impact measures, targeting organisations such as charities and sporting groups. There is good achievement of these targets which are thoroughly analysed for performance and compared with relevant local information. There is good use of alternative funding to support disadvantaged learners. For example, unemployed learners from the 50-65 age group are being supported through an ESF-funded project. The centre also offers commercial-specific skills-based ICT courses at prices that can be more competitive than unsubsidised **learn**direct courses. Seventy-five per cent of the learners are enrolled on courses funded by **learn**direct.

22. Overall, there is good provision for equality of opportunity. Centre managers' monthly meetings cover a variety of relevant equality and diversity issues such as training in mental health awareness and updating of policies. This is shared with centre staff. Exchange Group has appropriate equality and diversity and disability policies and a disability statement. These are supported by a useful leaflet on dignity and respect in the Putney Library **learn**direct centre. This is well written. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is generally satisfactory. A post-induction learner questionnaire also checks understanding. The centre has posters in different community languages. There is good access for people with restricted mobility. Staff do not discuss with learners any equal opportunities issues that may be relevant at their workplace. Enrolments for courses have recently been changed to include additional coverage of equality of opportunity.

23. Quality assurance is satisfactory and there are comprehensive arrangements in place. The observation of support provided for learners covers all aspects of the learners' experience and takes place against set criteria. However, formal observations of teaching and support have not yet taken place with sufficient frequency. No clear evaluation is made of the overall quality of teaching and support. The quality team visits regularly to check learner records. A summary report is produced that lists issues and the corrective action to be taken. These corrective actions are signed off as complete by the centre manager and are checked at the next visit. Individual training needs as a result of audits are drawn up. More frequent visits take place if necessary. Learner feedback is analysed and action plans are put in place.

24. The self-assessment report does not make sufficiently clear judgements about the centre itself. The process is inclusive and fully involves centre staff in identifying strengths and weaknesses. However, many judgements are not sufficiently specific to the centre and refer to judgements related to the provider. Insufficient evaluation is made of the effectiveness of teaching, learning and training and supporting evidence for many of the judgements is not provided. Insufficient use is made of the outcomes of centre monitoring and improvements made. The development plan does not always provide targets which are sufficiently quantified. Some good progress has been made in taking action to improve on issues arising from a recent inspection of another centre.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very effective links between head office and the centre
- good monitoring of centre and staff performance
- good initiatives to target participation by under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- insufficient centre focus in self-assessment

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- good success rates

Weaknesses

- poor recording of target-setting and progress reviews

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT EXCHANGE GROUP - PUTNEY LIBRARY LEARNDIRECT CENTRE:

- 'it's got great public transport on the doorstep'
- 'staff are very friendly and helpful'
- 'it's a great place to study'
- 'the centre is an oasis of calm'
- 'the way they helped me to get qualifications in numeracy'
- 'I much prefer this method of study to being in a class being taught'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK EXCHANGE GROUP - PUTNEY LIBRARY LEARNDIRECT CENTRE COULD BE BETTER:

- 'to ensure there are always enough headphones'
- 'to check if we need help more often'