

INSPECTION REPORT

Exchange Group Newcastle-under-Lyme Centre

9 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. Exchange Group centre is based in the public library of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, within the West Midlands region of the Ufi. It is one of a network of 24 **learndirect** centres throughout the United Kingdom operated by Exchange Group. From the start of the current contract with the Ufi on the 1 August 2006, up to the 8 January 2007, the centre has enrolled 112 learners. Of these, 58 enrolled for 347 courses in skills for life and 54 enrolled for 128 courses in information and communications technology (ICT). Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. At the time of the inspection there were 28 learners of whom 16 were on skills for life courses and 12 were on ICT courses. Exchange Group also runs a variety of other publicly and privately funded training programmes.
2. Currently all learners attend the centre for their training. Skills for life learners work towards national certificates in literacy and/or numeracy at levels 1 and 2. ICT learners aim to achieve specific skills or a qualification. 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. Appropriately 3.5 per cent of the local population are from minority ethnic groups and 25 per cent are qualified to levels 4 or 5.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** More specifically, the centre's provision for ICT is inadequate. Provision is good for preparation for life and work. Leadership and management, quality improvement and equality of opportunity are satisfactory.
5. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The centre's self-assessment process is appropriately planned and conducted and now includes all staff. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report and the weaknesses identified. However, inspectors identified additional weaknesses. For one area of learning, and for leadership and management, they awarded lower grades than those given in the report.
6. **The centre has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** The quality assurance system and monitoring arrangements are satisfactory. The self-assessment report and development plan provide useful basis for further improvement. Action-planning for improvement, and the monitoring of the effectiveness of actions, are thorough. The centre has implemented realistic strategies to improve performance, especially in ICT, and has improved its performance in skills for life during the period of the current **learndirect** contract.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR EXCHANGE GROUP NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME CENTRE:

- improve success rates in ICT
- develop more effective target-setting for all learners
- continue to develop ways to reinforce and evaluate learners' understanding of equality of opportunity
- further improve arrangements for quality assurance with particular reference to the moderation of self-assessment judgements and grades

GRADES

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

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

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

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

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The inspection reported and graded the skills for life and ICT provision of Exchange Group's Newcastle-under-Lyme centre and its leadership and management.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	6
Number of learners interviewed	9
Number of staff interviewed	5
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1
Number of learner questionnaires returned	29
Number of visits to the provider	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

8. Success rates for skills for life learners are good at 74 per cent to date in 2006-07. The withdrawal rate is low at 4 per cent. The current pass rate for the national tests in literacy and numeracy is currently 100 per cent compared with 96 per cent in 2005-06. Many learners significantly develop their self-confidence and improve their personal skills.

9. In ICT, learners achieve good computing skills and the confidence to use them. For example, one learner started with an introductory course, progressed quickly to level 2 courses, and now uses computers for a range of personal applications.

10. Progression is satisfactory between course levels in ICT. Many learners choose to broaden their range of skills rather than progress to a higher level.

11. Success rate for learners on ICT courses are low at 39 per cent. This is significantly below that for the average of all **learn**direct centres in the West Midlands region and for England as a whole. Of the 10 learners who started their ICT qualifications in 2005-06, none succeeded. The centre has now reviewed and restructured the course and the necessary training for staff. Many learners who enrol for ICT qualifications do not take the examination at the end. However, since August 2006, 21 learners took an examination-based computer qualification and 20 have now passed. Currently, a third of learners enrolled for ICT courses are taking level 1 courses without a qualification aim. They have very recently been offered the opportunity of taking a level 1 qualification without charge. Withdrawal rates from courses are similar to regional and national figures at 9 per cent.

Q1 and Q2, 2006	Enrolments	Counted for data	Success rate (%)	Withdrawal rate (%)
ICT	117	94	39	9
Skills for Life	247	202	74	4

The quality of provision

12. In ICT a very good range of additional learning materials is available to help consolidate learning and provide practice exercises for learners. Learning materials produced by centre staff are used well to ensure learners have acquired necessary skills.

13. The learning centre is well located within the town centre library and is easily accessible by learners. It provides adequate accommodation, although workstations do not provide learners with adequate space. There is not enough space in the centre to always provide confidentiality during enrolment. Sufficient computers, with appropriate specifications, are provided. Computers are generally reliable and internet connections are good. Good attention is given to health and safety. This is covered at induction and reinforced by posters and notices around the centre. Learners are reminded by staff of the need for correct posture and frequent break during their work.

14. Enrolment and induction are satisfactory and cover all necessary issues. Tutors follow clear guidance notes. However, the coverage of equality of opportunity is generally not sufficiently detailed or reinforced, particularly when learners re-enrol.

15. Assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills is satisfactory. A diagnostic skills check identifies learners' strengths and weaknesses well and helps tutors identify appropriate courses. Most learners are placed on appropriate courses.

16. A good range of courses is offered. Learners on ICT courses generally take between two and three courses each. Learners on skills for life courses take between five and six courses each.

17. Learners are provided with satisfactory support. Tutors provide clear explanations when learners ask for help. However, tutors are not always sufficiently proactive in advancing their views.

18. Target-setting for learners is inadequate during mid-course reviews on longer courses, such as ICT, and end reviews on skills for life short courses, when learners progress from course to course. Reviews are often a summary of learners' progress without any clear actions. Where actions are recorded targets are not sufficiently precise. Goals during learning sessions are not clearly set and a progress file completed by learners is not well used. Informal discussion takes place with learners about what they intend to cover in a session, but this is not recorded or checked. Learning plans do not always specify short-term learning goals.

Leadership and management

Q1 2006	All Ethnic Groups	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese/Other	Mixed	Not Known	White
Enrolments	953	43	22	40	6		842
Completion rate (%)	94	91	95	95	67		94
Achievement rate (%)	76	90	86	74	100		75
Success rate (%)	71	81	82	70	67		70
Withdrawal rate (%)	6	9	5	5	33		6

19. Communications between Exchange Group managers and centre staff are excellent. Good attention is given to managing the **learnirect** centres from a central head office. The centre manager and his staff fully understand what is required of them and are given appropriate support. There is an extensive range of programmed visits to the **learnirect** centre by middle and senior managers, together with telephone and e-mail contact and reporting. The centre manager meets frequently with the operations manager to debate and discuss issues and developments, and also maintains good contact by telephone to monitor key aspects of business and performance. Scheduled meetings of centre managers reinforce these arrangements. The operations manager and the quality and compliance manager work together effectively.

20. A comprehensive range of management information, including data, is used well to manage training. Exchange Group has designed and developed its own computer based management information systems, matched to the needs of the learning centre and its head office. Managers and staff fully understand the systems and performance, who their learners are, and what they are doing. Exchange Group database is used very well to review performance and set targets. The computer-based learning plan is effectively used to plan and record staff development and appraisal. Attention to health and safety is good.

21. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Exchange Group has clear quality assurance structures and processes. The quality and compliance manager leads a small team. Working closely with the operations manager, they monitor action against improvement targets, using visits to the centre and analysis of data. There is generally a good awareness by staff of what needs to be improved, and action plans indicate improvement, such as in

the outcomes of skills for life learners. The low success rate for ICT learners is clearly identified as an area for improvement, with steps already taken to rectify this weakness.

22. The centre produced its first self-assessment report and development plan just before the inspection, although Exchange Group has produced them for some time. Exchange Group has improved the process for generating the self-assessment report. All centre staff are now involved in the development of the report. Good use is now made of various sources of evidence including learners' feedback on their courses. The scheme for the observation of learning is appropriately planned. Actions to improve initial induction have been implemented. There is some effective sharing of good practice in relation to the use of additional learning materials. Inadequacies with target-setting have not been identified.

23. Overall, equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Exchange Group has appropriate equality and diversity and disability policies, and a disability statement. These generic documents are supported by a useful leaflet on dignity and respect in **learn**direct centres. For the centre, Exchange Group meets its statutory obligations under the relevant race relations, equality, and disability legislation. There is good analysis of equality of opportunity data.

24. There is insufficient reinforcement and evaluation of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity. This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report. Staff are now working to raise the profile of equality and diversity and improve learners' understanding of relevant issues. However, some learners' understanding of equality and diversity is not adequate. Reinforcement of their understanding is not particularly well dealt with in some sessions. There is no ongoing evaluation of learners' understanding. However, there is now analysis of learners' responses to the induction questionnaire in relation to the equal opportunities policy

25. The moderation of self-assessment report judgements and grades is not sufficiently thorough. Although the self-assessment report identifies many of the issues the centre needs to tackle, many of the strengths are no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses and in all cases, other than one, they gave lower grades than those in the report. Some of the report does not relate specifically to the centre.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- excellent communication between Exchange Group's managers and the learning centre
- comprehensive and well-used management information

Weaknesses

- insufficient reinforcement and evaluation of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity
- insufficiently thorough moderation of self-assessment judgements and grades

Information and communications technology

Strengths

- good skills development by learners
- good range of additional learning materials

Weaknesses

- low success rates
- inadequate target-setting

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- good success rates

Weaknesses

- inadequate target-setting

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT EXCHANGE GROUP NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME CENTRE:

- its location - 'it's right in the town centre'
- the support from staff - 'staff are very helpful and patient'
- the learning environment - 'our work area has a very friendly and cosy feel'
- 'helping me understand my grandchildren's computer work'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK EXCHANGE GROUP NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME CENTRE COULD DO BETTER:

- the provision of courses in rural areas - 'offer courses nearer to where I live - it's not that convenient if you live out of the town'
- hours of opening
- the size of the room in the library used by the centre
- the privacy given to learners
- the number of courses without exams