INSPECTION REPORT

Northern College for Residential Adult Education

07 April 2003

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

Northern College for Residential Adult Education

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Northern College for Residential Adult Education (Northern College) provides teaching and residential accommodation, in a grade 1 listed building, located just outside Barnsley in South Yorkshire. Established in 1978, its mission is to offer educational opportunities to adults from groups and communities who have experienced disadvantage.

2. Courses are available from entry level through to advanced level studies. In 2000-01 there were 75 full-time and 6783 part-time learners. Approximately 60 per cent of learners are recruited from the South Yorkshire area. Most full-time learners work towards a qualification that will provide automatic entry to the first year of university courses. The part-time learners are on a range of short residential courses designed to attract new learners and involve them in learning. The community action programme aims to promote community development and regeneration by training local people in relevant skills. The college also works with other partners and agencies on a number of community projects designed primarily to recruit new learners.

3. The college employs 133 staff, of whom 37 work part time. It is managed by a team of eight senior managers, including the principal. Each senior manager is responsible for a number of middle managers who in turn manage the teaching, administrative and residential staff. Most managers also teach on various programmes. There are 25 teachers, of whom two are part time.

4. The college receives funding from a number of sources. It has an annual budget of £4,200,000, of which approximately 55 per cent comes from South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC), 25 per cent from external sources, for example the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), 15 per cent from local authorities and 5 per cent from external bookings.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Humanities

5. Northern College offers a modular programme of study designed specifically for adults returning to formal learning. The programme runs for nine months each year from September to May, and is open to both full-time and part-time learners. Full-time learners complete the programme within nine months whereas part-time learners have the option of studying for between one and three years. Most learners are full time and reside at the college during the programme.

6. There are 76 learners, of whom 53 per cent are women. Eight per cent of learners are members of minority ethnic communities and 16 per cent have declared a learning

difficulty or disability. Forty per cent of learners are from groups which attract widening participation funding. Eleven per cent have no qualifications above basic skills level 1 on entry to the programme.

7. The curriculum offers optional modules in humanities, social sciences, computer studies, and community learning. In addition, there is a compulsory study skills module. Learners achieve a level 2 college certificate, an access to higher education certificate at level 3, a college diploma at level 3, or a higher education certificate at level 1. The higher education certificate provides direct entry to the second year of a degree course.

Foundation programmes

8. The inspection of foundation programmes covered those short courses where there is a particular emphasis on improving learners' literacy, numeracy, speaking and listening skills. During 2001-02 there were 18 short courses with a total of 212 learners. In the first seven months of 2002-03, there were 330 learners. During the inspection, 32 learners attended three short courses. The courses available include statistics, writing with confidence, reading skills for study, essay writing and basic computer courses. There are also themed literacy and numeracy courses. All courses are externally accredited, with learners gaining basic skills units from entry level to level 2. Courses take place at the college. A co-ordinator leads a team of four staff. Two specialise in literacy and information and communications technology (ICT), one specialises in numeracy, mathematics and ICT, and one is a trainee tutor. They meet formally once a term and produce reports and development plans for literacy and numeracy. Courses are linked to the core curriculum and act as a foundation for learners, helping them to overcome barriers to their progress.

Community action

9. The community action programme offers training for people who want to improve the quality of life in their communities. The aim is to provide an understanding of relevant strategies, and to give people the tools and knowledge they need to be effective as community development workers. The programme is part of the active communities programme, which was created by the college in the summer of 2002. Most courses last from three to five days, and most are residential. Most are externally accredited. The college offers learners its own community regeneration award at levels 2 and 3. This recognises learners' achievement, but is not nationally recognised. Some courses are used as tasters to introduce learners to learning opportunities. Five full-time teachers are responsible for the programme and are supported by a full-time administrator. In 2001-02 approximately 1200 learners participated in one or more of the community action courses.

Other adult and community learning

10. The short course pathways programme consists of short residential courses designed to recruit new learners and to involve them in further learning. Each course lasts two and a half days. Programmes include counselling, confidence building and assertiveness, information technology (IT), local history and the development of education. Frequent one-day taster courses are also provided. The short course programme is supplemented by evening workshops offering literacy, numeracy and IT support. All courses are externally accredited and credits can be accrued by learners towards further qualifications. The courses are free of charge and most learners are residents on campus for the duration of the course. Childcare facilities are available. A programme team of 11 teachers is led by two co-ordinators. Ten short courses took place during the inspection week. Most courses are run at the college, but some take place in local community venues. In 2001-02 over 2,600 learners participated in the college's short course programme.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	8
Number of inspection days	40
Number of learner interviews	210
Number of staff interviews	62
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	4
Number of partner/external agency interviews	7

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

11. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality assurance, are good. The humanities diploma programme is outstanding, whilst the short course programme (other adult and community learning), foundation programmes (literacy and numeracy) and community action are all good.

GRADES

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

Leadership and management	2
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	2

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

Areas of learning	Grade
Humanities	1
Foundation programmes	2
Community action	2
Other adult and community learning	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

12. **Achievement rates on all programmes are good and many are very good.** On most courses, learners are able to gain nationally recognised certificates of achievement. Most learners successfully achieve these. Achievement rates on the humanities diploma programme are significantly above the national average for access programmes. On the short course programme, 95 per cent of learners gain at least one nationally recognised award.

13. **Retention rates exceed 90 per cent on most courses.** Teachers and managers work hard to keep learners on courses by providing high levels of personal and academic support.

14. **Learners achieve skills, knowledge and understanding beyond their main learning goal.** Many have few, if any, previous qualifications or experience of education. Learners on the humanities diploma course reach a very high standard. Adults gain confidence in their own abilities as learners and are often able to help each other to learn.

15. **Learners make good progress on Northern College courses.** The structure and organisation of courses enables learners to extend their knowledge and gain further skills. Many learners improve their personal lives or their employment prospects as a result of their learning. Many learners who come to the college without any educational qualifications progress to higher education. A number of college staff were previously learners at the college.

16. **Learners use their new skills and knowledge to support and encourage others in their communities.** Many courses are designed to help people to improve the quality of life in their local communities. As a result of training at Northern College, learners have made successful bids for additional funding for their communities and, in one case, significantly reduced the local crime rate.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Humanities	1	6	4	1	0	0	0	12
Foundation programmes	0	3	5	3	0	0	0	11
Community action	1	5	3	1	0	0	0	10
Other adult and community learning	0	2	7	2	0	0	0	11
Total	**2**	**16**	**19**	**7**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**44**
per cent		84.09%		15.91%		0.00%		

17. **Most teaching is well planned, makes full use of learners' previous experiences and enables learners to develop both themselves and their communities.** Tutors and learners enjoy working together and motivation is very high in most classes.

18. **The humanities diploma programme is particularly successful in preparing adults for higher education.** It teaches the skills of research, analysis and debate. Course members learn to work effectively with other learners through shared projects, tasks and assignments.

19. **Most resources are good.** Staff are well-qualified and particularly experienced in helping and encouraging new learners. Teaching rooms are attractive and well-equipped. Teachers make good use of display space.

20. **The accommodation is particularly attractive and provides a safe and secure environment which is conducive to learning.** Learners benefit from the residential experience which provides many opportunities to interact with teachers and other learners outside lesson times.

21. **The learning resource centre is well equipped.** It has industry standard computers and an extensive and relevant book stock. Its staff are knowledgeable about the courses and offer expert help to learners.

22. **Learners receive good feedback from tutors** with detailed comments on their assignments and opportunities for follow-up tutorials. Assignments are relevant and well planned to enable learners to achieve their goals.

23. **Courses are organised well to meet learners' aims and potential.** Courses are regularly reviewed and revised in the light of feedback from learners and changing circumstances. The short course programme is effectively integrated with the diploma programme to create a secure progression route into higher education. Most teachers are skilled in linking course content to learners' personal experiences and interests.

24. **College staff liaise effectively with community agencies and organisations** to ensure that community action courses properly meet the needs of local communities. Many courses are designed specifically for individual groups and organisations.

25. **Learners benefit from particularly high levels of support** at the college. Teachers and support staff are skilled in meeting a range of learning and personal support needs. Tutorials are used well on the diploma programme to help learners to plan and review their learning. Additional literacy and numeracy workshops are available during the evening. A range of specialist facilities is available to help learners with specific difficulties and disabilities.

26. **The college provides extensive childcare facilities** and accommodation for learners' guide dogs.

27. **Literacy and numeracy support is built into all college courses.** Additional workshops are available in the evenings to offer extra support. Learners are encouraged to identify their literacy and numeracy needs as part of their overall development. Some specialist short courses offer particularly innovative approaches to language and number development.

28. In a minority of lessons, **some learners' individual needs are not sufficiently met.** Sometimes this is because their individual needs were not identified clearly enough at the start of the course. Sometimes it is because their needs are not sufficiently taken account of in planning lessons. At other times it is because some teachers do not pay sufficient attention to the quieter members of the group.

29. **On some short courses the evidence of learners' achievement is not properly recorded** and matched against the requirements of the award offered. Some learners are not sufficiently aware of the assessment process and what they have to do to achieve awards.

Leadership and management

30. **The college is well led by an open and responsive management team.** Managers give clear direction and have established sound processes for monitoring progress and improving performance.

31. **Staff and governors clearly understand the mission of the college** which is to widen participation and promote social inclusion through the strategic use of residential learning. This is clearly and realistically reflected in the strategic plan.

32. **Course teams are well organised.** Teachers work well together and with support staff to meet individual learners' needs.

33. **The college works effectively with other training providers and partners** to develop programmes, strengthen communities and to promote individual learning.

34. **Most of the college's quality assurance arrangements are good** with careful reviewing of performance against development plans and targets. However, the management information system does not include monitoring retention and achievement

rates for individual qualifications on the diploma programme or reviewing annual trends.

35. **The college makes a significant contribution to equality of opportunity.** It recruits many of its learners from under-represented groups, its course structures promote progression and it provides high levels of support for individual learners.

36. **The college has no specific targets for the recruitment of staff from minority ethnic communities.** In addition, the curriculum and teaching are not reviewed in enough detail to ensure that they reflect the interests and needs of members of minority ethnic communities.

37. **The self-assessment process is thorough.** Inspectors' judgements matched most of those in the self-assessment report.

38. **There are good arrangements for the internal verification of accredited programmes.** The college is strengthening its arrangements for verifying achievement on non-accredited programmes.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths
- open and responsive leadership
- clear strategic direction
- strong commitment and effective arrangements to widen participation
- good staff development and training
- effective additional support for learners' diverse needs
- effective review of performance

Weaknesses
- inadequate action to recruit learners and staff from minority ethnic communities
- insufficiently thorough use of management information to monitor performance

Humanities

Strengths
- high retention and achievement rates
- good progression
- good development of learners' skills in critical analysis and debate
- good development of learners' skills in managing their own learning
- highly effective tutorial support

- good provision for learners with a wide range of support needs

Weaknesses

- insufficient recognition of some learners' individual learning needs

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good achievement rate
- exceptionally highly motivated tutors and learners
- successful process for involving new learners
- very good support for learners with a wide range of needs
- innovative literacy and numeracy strategy

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording and analysis of initial assessment information
- insufficient use of short-term personal targets

Community action

Strengths

- good achievement and retention rates on all programmes
- particularly effective teaching
- thorough consultation with community groups
- good support for learners
- significant benefits to communities resulting from learning
- well-managed and responsive curriculum

Weaknesses

- insufficient account taken of the needs of some learners

Other adult and community learning

Strengths

- good achievement of external qualifications and personal goals
- high levels of learners' involvement in learning
- good progression
- good support for learners
- effective strategies to widen participation

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of individual learning plans
- insufficiently thorough assessment practices

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NORTHERN COLLEGE FOR RESIDENTIAL ADULT EDUCATION:

- the residential experience which gives them freedom to learn away from outside pressures
- the opportunity to make significant changes and improvements to their lives
- making strong gains in confidence and self-esteem
- being offered high levels of guidance and support by teachers and personal tutors
- access to expert tutors
- a learning environment appropriate for adults
- excellent resources and help in the learning resources centre
- friendship and support from other learners
- effective response to complaints
- very good childcare
- 'previously I could not read but now I can beat my husband at Scrabble.'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK NORTHERN COLLEGE FOR RESIDENTIAL ADULT EDUCATION COULD IMPROVE:

- better physical access for learners with restricted mobility
- not having to share bedrooms with strangers on short courses
- more follow-up courses to develop new skills
- provide a non-smoking social area
- more varied meals
- better ventilation in the bar
- more activities for children in the evenings

KEY CHALLENGES FOR NORTHERN COLLEGE FOR RESIDENTIAL ADULT EDUCATION:

- identify learners' needs at the start of their course and to ensure that they are met
- plan individual learning more effectively so that clear, well-understood and attainable targets are set for all learners
- provide easy physical access for learners with restricted mobility
- recruit more learners and staff from minority ethnic communities and more effectively to meet their interests in the planning and teaching of the curriculum

Language of the Adult and Community Learning

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

Single term used in the framework	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning	
Provider	Provider	Any organisation providing opportunities for adults to meet personal or collective goals through the experience of learning. Providers include local authorities, specialist designated institutions, voluntary and community sector organisations, regeneration partnerships and further education colleges
Learner	Learner	Includes those learning by participating in community projects, as well as those on courses. Learning, however, will be planned, with intended outcomes.
Teacher / trainer	Tutor	Person teaching adult learners or guiding or facilitating their learning.
	Mentor	Person providing individual, additional support, guidance and advice to learners to help them achieve their learning goals.
Learning goals	Main learning goals	Intended gains in skills, knowledge or understanding. Gains may be reflected in the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications. Or they may be reflected in the ability of learners to apply learning in contexts outside the learning situation, e.g. in the family, community, or workplace. Learners' main goal/s should be recorded on an individual or, in some cases, group learning plan. Plans should be revised as progress is made and new goals emerge.
	Secondary learning goals	These may include planned-for gains in self-confidence, and inter-personal skills. These should also be included in learning plans where appropriate.
Personal and learning skills	Personal and learning skills	These include being able to study independently, willingness to collaborate with others, and readiness to take up another opportunity for education or training.

Other terms used in Adult and Community Learning

	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning
Unanticipated, or unintended learning outcome	Adults often experience unanticipated gains as a result of being involved in learning. These include improved self-esteem, greater self-confidence and a growing sense of belonging to a community. Gains of this kind should be acknowledged and recorded in any record of achievement.
Subject-based programme	A programme organised around a body of knowledge, e.g. the structure and usage of the French language or ceramic glazing techniques. Students could be expected to progress from one aspect of the subject to another, to grasp increasingly complex concepts or analyses or to develop greater levels of skill or to apply skills to a new area of work.
Issue-based programme	A programme that is based on the concerns, interests and aspirations of particular groups, for example members of a Sikh Gurdwara wanting to address inter-faith relations in their town, or parents worried about the incidence of drug abuse in their locality. Issue-based learning tends to be associated with geographically defined communities, but the increasing use of electronic means of communication means that this need no longer be the case. Progress is defined in terms of the group's increasing ability to analyse its situation, to access new information and skills which will help it resolve its difficulties and generate solutions and its growing confidence in dealing with others to implement those solutions.
Outreach provision	Provision established in a community setting in addition to provision made at an organisation's main site(s). Outreach programmes may be similar to courses at the main site(s) or be designed to meet the specific requirements of that community.
Neighbourhood-based work	The provider's staff have a long-term presence in a local community with a specific remit to understand the concerns of the local residents and develop learning activities to meet local needs and interests.
Community regeneration	The process of improving the quality of life in communities by investing in their infrastructure and facilities, creating opportunities for training and employment and tackling poor health and educational under-achievement. Community regeneration requires the active participation of local residents in decision-making. Changes and improvements are often achieved either directly or indirectly as a result of the adult learning activities which arise from this.

	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning
Community capacity building	The process of enabling local people to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to take advantage of opportunities for employment, training and further education and to become selfmanaging, sustainable communities.
Active citizenship	The process whereby people recognise the power they have to improve the quality of life for others and make a conscious effort to do so: the process whereby people recognise the power of organisations and institutions to act in the interests of the common good and exercise their influence to ensure that they do so. Adult learning contributes to active citizenship.

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT   Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths
- open and responsive leadership
- clear strategic direction
- strong commitment and effective arrangements to widen participation
- good staff development and training
- effective additional support for learners' diverse needs
- effective review of performance

Weaknesses
- inadequate action to recruit learners and staff from minority ethnic communities
- insufficiently thorough use of management information to monitor performance

39. Leadership is strong within an open and responsive management team. The principal and senior management team give clear direction and have established effective processes for reporting and monitoring progress and performance. Staff value the critical consideration of their areas that takes place during annual reviews by the standards committees. The college places importance on developing teaching and learning. Meetings of the whole college academic staff begin with individual members of staff sharing good practice in teaching and learning with colleagues. The principal, leading by example, was one of the first members of staff to do this.

40. The strategic plan for 2002-03 is well written and outlines a clear mission and vision. Eight strategic objectives are accompanied by sound operational outlines of how these will be achieved. The governing body has a strong grasp of the college's key aims for widening participation and inclusion. They are also aware of the major financial issues facing the college regarding external funding for development of the curriculum and maintenance of the college's grade 1 listed building.

41. The college has a tradition of strong commitment to inclusion and community regeneration. Just over half the learners come from groups which attract additional funding and many have not taken part in education and training since they left school. There is a wide range of strong partnerships, at a local, regional, national and international level. Partnership arrangements and effective networking are used to develop programmes which contribute to neighbourhood regeneration. For example, the college works in partnership with a training provider to train and support mentors who help and advise community workers within their own local area. The college has well established links with the trade union movement, local authorities and a range of

voluntary organisations in South Yorkshire which have resulted in innovative residential and community-based learning. Learners benefit from the intensive and transformational experience of studying in groups away from their home environment. Many learners take the skills they have gained back into their community and effectively change the lives of others.

42. Staff development needs are identified following appraisals with line managers. Tutors' performance is evaluated thoroughly. Teaching and learning observations are carried out by peers and by line managers as part of the appraisal process. Any concerns about teaching and learning are dealt with through staff development activities. Applications for staff development are clearly linked to the strategic plan. Part-time tutors are included in the appraisal process and are observed. Part-time staff also have a formal system of contact and support through regular meetings with the co-ordinator for part-time tutors. Detailed, constructive feedback is recorded and shared with staff members. There is extensive professional development and skills training. All staff are also entitled to a fixed sum of money annually for personal development.

43. The college has a clearly defined basic skills strategy, and the support it provides for literacy and numeracy is good. Development of literacy and numeracy skills is integrated with all college provision. There is an innovative strategy for developing courses with a particular emphasis on literacy, numeracy and language support. However, on some short courses with mixed-ability groups, learners' literacy and numeracy needs are not always adequately met.

44. The residential facilities are managed effectively. They allow learners to study on their own or in groups. Some learners on short courses have to share bedrooms. Classroom accommodation is satisfactory with suitable furniture. The library is situated in a beautiful converted long gallery, and has a good range of books, CD-ROMs, videos, newspapers and periodicals. It is open seven days a week and during the evenings until 8.00 pm. ICT resources are good with open access in IT classrooms and in the library, including fast Internet access. Staff are well qualified and highly motivated, taking a pride in the ethos of the college and work they do.

Equality of opportunity   Contributory grade 2

45. Equality of opportunity is central to the mission and work of the college. It has effective arrangements to meet a wide range of learning and support needs. An additional support co-ordinator identifies learners' needs before a course begins. A large team of trained learning support workers offers a range of practical help in the classroom. The college provides specialist technology, resources and facilities to enable adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate fully in the classroom and in college activities. For example, a hoist and sling and a mobility scooter are available for learners with mobility difficulties and there is accommodation for learners' guide dogs. A wide range of specialist IT equipment is available, including a Braille embosser and speech and magnification software. The college has a children's day centre which offers free childcare seven days per week and is highly valued by the learners.

46. The college has satisfactory equality of opportunity policies and complaints and grievance procedures for learners, other users of the college and staff. There are also policies setting out specific procedures for dealing with complaints about sexual or racial harassment. The equal opportunities action plan contains objectives for raising and monitoring awareness and the college has recently established an equal opportunities committee.

47. Quantitative targets are set at programme level. Data on equal opportunities are collected and analysed. However there are no specific, overall measurable targets in the action plan to increase the numbers of staff from minority ethnic communities. The college has a race equality policy, but no implementation plan. Its self-assessment report identified the need to take more action to recruit staff and learners from minority ethnic communities. There are no full-time staff from minority ethnic communities. Some of the college's courses are designed to meet the needs of certain minority ethnic groups and these are successful in involving new learners. However, this involvement is not replicated across the college.

48. Improvements have been made to the physical access and facilities for people with disabilities. There is clear signage throughout the college which is also in Braille. However, there is still restricted access to some parts of the college for learners with restricted mobility.

Quality assurance   Contributory grade 2

49. The college has a well-written quality assurance system called the integrated performance review framework. It clearly outlines the function, responsibilities and meeting agendas for all college teams. Annual targets and performance indicators are carefully set and agreed for most academic, residential and administrative functions. Thorough reviews of individual programmes and service and support functions are conducted annually. Self-assessment is part of the procedure. There are six-monthly reviews of progress toward specific targets. A whole-college development plan contains detailed actions from programme level and service and support functions to self-assessment reports. The targets and actions agreed in development plans are very closely monitored by the quality systems co-ordinator. Extensive feedback is collected from learners and used effectively to evaluate teaching, learning and a wide range of services. External consultants are used to review many aspects of the college's work, including teaching and learning observations. The information they provide is used effectively in action-planning.

50. The framework covers most aspects of quality assurance thoroughly. However some key elements such as induction and initial assessment are missing. There are checklists and information about these activities but no standards against which they could be measured. These weaknesses were identified during self-assessment.

51. The whole-college self-assessment report and the programme level self-assessment reports contained nearly all the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. The college failed to identify weaknesses in the use of management information data to

monitor progress towards individual qualifications.

52. Programme reviews are thorough and include self-assessment. Reviews of learners' retention and achievement rates are part of the self-assessment process. However the data presented to inspectors show an optimistic view of learners' progress. For example data provided for the diploma programme do not show the achievement rate for individual qualifications gained as part of a course, nor do they show trends over time.

53. There are satisfactory arrangements for internal verification on the college's accredited programmes. Reports from the external moderators for both the diploma and short course provision are positive about the internal verification processes. Verification arrangements for the college's non-accredited provision are being strengthened.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Humanities   Grade 1

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- high retention and achievement rates
- good progression
- good development of learners' skills in critical analysis and debate
- good development of learners' skills in managing their own learning
- highly effective tutorial support
- good provision for learners with a wide range of support needs

Weaknesses

- insufficient recognition of some learners' individual learning needs

Achievement and standards

54. Achievement and retention rates have been consistently high and significantly above the national averages for access to higher education programmes in humanities for the past three years. In 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02 the achievement rate was 73 per cent, compared with national averages of 49 per cent, 48 per cent and 54 per cent respectively. Over the same period, retention rates for learners at the college were 88 per cent, 77 per cent and 80 per cent compared with national averages of 68 per cent, 66 per cent and 69 per cent.

55. Although approximately 90 per cent of learners have no qualifications above basic skills level 1 when they start, they reach a standard that is above the norm for access courses. By the end of the first term, many learners are already producing well-researched and constructed assignments.

56. Progression into and out of the diploma course is good. This year almost half the learners have joined the diploma programme from one of the college's short courses. As learners' skill and understanding increases, they progress through more and more challenging study modules. In 2001-02, 70 per cent of learners secured a place at university. Learners leave the college as coherent, critical thinkers, and many successfully gain work in professional roles where they apply their skills to improving the lives of individuals and communities.

Quality of education and training

57. Learners develop high levels of skill in critical analysis and debate. They are often asked to present their interpretations or findings to the whole group after reading a text, or researching a topic. Frequently the task involves working collaboratively with their peers. In these situations, learners offer sensitive and subtle judgements, and debate is lively. Tutors are highly skilled at enabling learners to relate their own ideas to theoretical perspectives. All assignments have clear criteria that set standards for the assessment of critical thinking. Specific assignment-related targets are set, and clear and supportive advice is given. Academic tutorials are used to refine and develop learners' work and their skills in argument. Learners recognise the importance of developing the skills of argument and critical analysis in preparation for entry into higher education. However, in some lessons, particularly during lively group discussions, tutors do not always enable quieter learners to participate and assert their views. This weakness is reflected in findings from the college's own lesson observations.

58. Learners value the opportunity to relate their own life experiences to what they learn on the course. In a lesson on community regeneration, one learner made a thoughtful presentation about an approach to reducing criminal behaviour which clarified the relationship between policy and practice. However, in mathematics lessons, learners are not encouraged to link their developing numerical skills to the topics they are studying in other parts of the course.

59. The diploma course successfully teaches learners how to manage their own learning. At the beginning of the programme learners receive high levels of support. This gradually reduces as their confidence increases. The course commences with a five-week introductory module which successfully teaches learners how to build arguments, analyse materials, write essays, conduct research and write reports. The module includes an induction to the programme. Learners are encouraged to identify their own learning goals and how to achieve them. In the mathematics module, the tutor has introduced a test that learners use to assess their own progress and then create an action plan for further study.

60. Learners benefit from the detailed comments provided by teachers on assignment record sheets. These include advice on the development of their study skills as well as on the content and response to the assignment question. Tutors discuss and agree assignment comments with each learner.

61. Tutorial support is comprehensive and well organised. All learners are assigned a study skills tutor and a personal tutor during their introductory module. The tutors work together to support the learner. At the end of the introductory module, the study skills tutor continues to provide support if necessary, whilst pastoral and academic support is provided by the personal tutor. Few learners have basic difficulties with literacy or numeracy at this stage, but additional support workshops are available throughout the course for those who need it.

62. Personal tutors meet their learners every week to review learning and to help

learners reinforce connections between the various elements of their course. Tutorial documents are detailed and well maintained. They effectively record learners' personal and academic development.

63. Learners with a broad range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities are readily integrated into classes, and their needs are met in discreet and sensitive ways. One visually impaired student gave a very detailed account of how the support he had received at the college had enabled him to progress from short courses to the diploma. Learners with dyslexia have the help of a scribe in lessons. Learners' needs are discussed at the student progress committee where action is recommended and monitored. Learners also value the informal support and encouragement all staff provide.

64. Resources are good. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Teaching accommodation is suitable for adult learning. The residential environment enables learners to discuss topics and to help each other outside classes. The learning resource centre is well-equipped with industry-standard computers and an extensive and relevant book stock. Learning resource staff are knowledgeable about the diploma course and offer expert help to learners. In some lessons, few resources are used other than the tutors themselves.

Leadership and management

65. The leadership and management of the diploma programme are good. The curriculum reflects the changing social and economic environment. The course is well organised and tutors work well together. Lesson plans and schemes of work use a common format. Tutors understand the purpose and content of the programme. They adopt a consistent approach which is helpful to learners. Quality assurance arrangements are understood well and used effectively. Assessment is thorough and internal monitoring arrangements promote consistency of standards. Course review procedures are thorough and are effectively implemented. Learners' views are an integral part of the evaluation of courses and other activities. The overall structure of the course is regularly revised in the light of feedback from learners. The self-assessment is accurate and shows a clear recognition of the main strengths and weaknesses in this area.

Foundation programmes   **Grade 2**

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good achievement rate
- exceptionally highly motivated tutors and learners
- successful process for involving new learners
- very good support for learners with a wide range of needs
- innovative literacy and numeracy strategy

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording and analysis of initial assessment information
- insufficient use of short-term personal targets

Achievement and standards

66. In 2001-02, 85 per cent of learners achieved externally accredited awards at levels ranging from entry level to level 2 and the retention rate was 99 per cent. Learners progress rapidly and develop good communication skills. They learn to express their views in a group setting, ask relevant questions and make good eye contact when speaking and listening. When learning computer skills, they show good progress in interpreting symbols and in using technical terms. Many learners who have built up their skills and confidence through attending several short courses are able to lead small group discussions or coach fellow learners. Learners also make good progress with literacy skills and produce work of a high standard including poetry, note taking and writing instructions. Reading skills are also well-developed, with learners acquiring scanning and skimming skills and quickly learning to cope with relatively complex texts. Learners are able to explain how they apply their skills in a range of contexts, including in the family, at work and in the community.

Quality of education and training

67. Teaching is good. Seventy-three per cent of observed lessons were good or better and 27 per cent were satisfactory. In the better lessons, the purpose of each activity is clear and the methods and materials are suited to learners with literacy needs. In computer courses some excellent task sheets are used which have large print and clear instructions. Learners progress particularly well in lessons that have a practical focus. Lessons that use oral work as a starting point also produce good learning. The weaker lessons are too slow, involve too much talking by the tutor and start from abstract concepts. The handouts in a few lessons are poorly laid out, with dense blocks of text

and some difficult language. A few learning materials are out of date.

68. Tutors and learners are exceptionally highly motivated. Tutors provide positive role models and inspire learners with a sense of purpose and a desire to learn. Learners are attentive and hard working, and the rate of attendance at lessons is excellent. Learners show great determination to overcome what are often major barriers, not just in terms of literacy and numeracy, but also in terms of disability or extreme social exclusion. Staff and learners make good use of the opportunity for informal learning in a residential setting.

69. There is a successful process for involving new learners in programmes. The mix of experienced and new learners on the short courses works well, with the more experienced learners encouraging the new ones. The experienced learners show great empathy. The college values the skills and experience that new learners bring with them, and builds up their confidence and self-belief. Tutors are particularly good at responding to new learners. They do not discuss literacy and/or numeracy needs until learners are confident enough to do so. The short course format enables learners to get involved in learning in manageable stages and to progress through the programme at their own pace. Progression is good. Thirty-two per cent of the learners on the diploma course progressed from basic skills programmes.

70. Learners receive very good support that effectively tackles barriers to learning. The college's child care arrangements are particularly highly valued by learners. Learners with disabilities are completely integrated into groups. The needs of learners with dyslexia are well understood. All such needs are discussed in a down-to-earth way and practical solutions are found which put the learner in control. Staff are flexible and responsive in providing additional individual support for learners outside group lessons. Peer support is particularly strong, enhanced by the residential setting.

71. Resources are good. ICT resources are of a good standard. The computers have fast internet access and printing facilities and data projectors are available. Staffing levels are generally good, but in the computer courses, classes with 12 learners are only just manageable.

72. Learners' work is continuously assessed, with supportive, informal feedback throughout the short courses. Learners receive good written feedback when they submit work for formal assessment but do not always fully understand the assessment criteria. Tutors do not always point out how a particular task relates to the assessment criteria.

73. There is insufficient recording and analysis of initial assessment information. Tutors use a range of information sources to help them understand individual learners' needs. They have recently introduced a system of phoning each learner before the courses start to discuss their needs and aspirations. Learners and teachers find this useful and it generates sufficient information to enable teachers to plan for individual needs. Teachers also gather large amounts of information about learners' needs during each short course, through observing learners' performance and by talking to them. However, this information is not systematically recorded or analysed to form the basis of a useable

individual learning plan. The individual learning plan has little value, because learners complete it in a group setting, with little guidance.

74. There is insufficient use of short-term, personal targets. Learners generally express their goals in very broad terms, for instance, 'get onto the diploma course' or 'improve my English'. The individual learning plan which learners complete at the first lesson does not lead to the identification of measurable, realistic short-term targets. At the end of the course, when learners record their achievements, they rarely link them to the goals they stated at the outset. They generally refer to the course content. At final tutorials, it is sometimes difficult for tutors to focus the discussion, because they do not have clear targets against which to review learners' progress.

Leadership and management

75. The college has an innovative literacy and numeracy strategy. It responds positively to the national agenda, to local needs and to the needs of learners. The college recognises that learners may wish to join programmes for different reasons and by using different routes. Learners may follow a relatively conventional path, for instance, developing their study skills or attending drop-in tutorials. Others may choose a more unusual, themed course such as 'Northern Soap' where they plan and write a soap opera, or 'Murder Mystery' where they design a game. Alternatively, they can sign up for a basic computer course, where the literacy element is integral to a broader programme. This is leading to some highly innovative work, developed through learners and teachers working in genuine partnership. The curriculum is consistent with the college's mission and core values. It is an effective vehicle for reaching out to learners and enabling them to choose their own routes to improving their skills.

76. The curriculum is well managed with a clear set of objectives and a realistic development plan. Teamwork is good. All staff contribute to continuously improving the curriculum. However, there are a few areas where standards vary. In particular, not all the handouts are equally readable, and not all lessons use the most suitable methods.

Community action   Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good achievement and retention rates on all programmes
- particularly effective teaching
- thorough consultation with community groups
- good support for learners
- significant benefits to communities resulting from learning
- well-managed and responsive curriculum

Weaknesses

- insufficient account taken of the needs of some learners

Achievement and standards

77. Retention and achievement rates on all courses are good, ranging from 80 to 99 per cent over a three-year period. Most courses show a slight improvement between 1999 to 2002. Standards achieved by learners are very good. For example, learners become confident enough to run training courses. Some have developed a community forum, following short courses taken at the college. Community activists trained by the college, develop good leadership skills. All learners speak positively about the growth in their confidence as a result of attending courses at the college. Learners demonstrate new skills gained during training. Learners achieve their personal learning goals and produce good-quality work. Learners on an IT course produced presentation slides for community workers and activists.

Quality of education and training

78. Teaching is particularly effective. Tutors research and prepare carefully for training events. Lessons are well-structured with diverse teaching strategies used to match learners' needs. Teachers make good use of questions to emphasise teaching points and to draw on learners' prior learning. There is good participation by enthusiastic learners. Learners express high levels of satisfaction about the standard of the teaching. Staff are well-qualified, experienced, enthusiastic and responsive. The residential aspect of provision helps learners to focus on learning. The environment is conducive to learning. Rooms used for teaching are spacious, appropriately equipped and have plenty of overspill space for small group activities.

79. The college carries out thorough and effective consultation with community groups,

using outreach workers to ascertain their needs. It runs bespoke courses for organisations when requested. The college held a well-planned consultation day attended by over 90 potential learners. Evaluation of the day has been used effectively to influence the design and content of courses.

80. There is good support for learners, about which they are very positive. Effective additional support is given by learning support workers. Helpful advice is given to learners before and after courses, and staff make themselves available for additional tutorials outside lessons. The residential environment provides many opportunities for learners to work together and help each other.

81. Communities benefit significantly from the learning taking place at the college and within communities. Many learners had no qualifications when they started courses at the college but now have higher education qualifications. Many learners gain employment as community workers. Communities are clearly improved by learners using the skills acquired through college courses, for example, in bidding successfully for funding to aid community projects. In one project, former learners effectively used community audit techniques taught at the college. This resulted in the creation of an action plan which successfully reduced crime by in the area by 75 per cent over a 12-month period.

82. The needs of some learners, especially those who lack confidence or have literacy support needs, are not taken sufficient account of. Initial assessment of learners' needs is weak. The assessment is often little more than a self-declaration by the learner. There is insufficient reference to learners' identified needs during courses and little differentiation in classroom activities. Occasionally during observed learning sessions learners with literacy needs or low levels of confidence were inadvertently embarrassed by tutors. One was required to write points on a flip-chart, another was cajoled into getting up at the front of the class, in the presence of other learners. On short courses learners' needs are not always adequately met. On longer courses there is appropriate identification of, and support for, literacy and numeracy needs. There is insufficient use of individual learning plans. Some plans are not completed and many are insufficiently detailed. There is insufficient guidance from the college about the completion of pre-course documents, including learning plans. Comments made on learning plans are general and do not focus enough on learners' needs. Some learners did not realise that they had an individual learning plan, and were unaware of some aspects of the group learning plan. On one short course one of the goals was for the group to reconcile differences and become more unified. This information had not been effectively communicated to all the learners, and some were unaware of it.

Leadership and management

83. The curriculum is well managed and responsive to learners' needs. Managers make good use of enthusiastic tutors and community workers and there is effective teamwork. For example, on an IT course specifically designed for community workers and activists, the IT tutor liaised with community regeneration tutors to ensure that the course material was relevant to the learners. The work produced by learners was of good quality and

particularly relevant to their work in the community. Courses are carefully reviewed and appropriate changes made where necessary. There are good partnerships with other organisations which lead to effective community capacity building. The college provides good support for other training providers in local communities. Highly motivated community outreach workers effectively involve learners who would not normally consider college education. Taster sessions are used well to remove barriers to learning.

84. Assessment and verification practices, as well as lesson plans and schemes of work, are good. The self-assessment report was accurate, well written and clear.

85. Learners have a satisfactory awareness of issues relating to equal opportunities, although there is occasionally inappropriate use of language by some tutors during lessons.

Other adult and community learning   Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good achievement of external qualifications and personal goals
- high levels of learners' involvement in learning
- good progression
- good support for learners
- effective strategies to widen participation

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of individual learning plans
- insufficiently thorough assessment practices

Achievement and standards

86. Achievement of learning and personal goals on the short-course programme is good. Ninety-five per cent of learners gain at least one externally accredited qualification. Learners also develop a good range of skills, knowledge and understanding beyond their main learning goal. They gain the confidence to work in groups and help each other. They also develop communication skills which enable them to have a greater level of involvement in their communities and homes. One learner is able to offer advocacy support to a tenants' group. A learner with disabilities is a volunteer in a day centre offering support and assistance to others with the same disability. Some older learners use their new computing skills to support their grandchildren with homework.

87. Learners enjoy residential study and value its social and personal benefits. They find it has a real impact on the pace of their learning and achievement. Many learners recognise the way their lives have been transformed by these experiences. They use their new skills and knowledge to support and encourage others in their communities.

Quality of education and training

88. Learning is well planned, with clear aims and outcomes. Most teaching makes full use of learners' experiences and prior skills and challenges learners to develop an understanding both of themselves and their wider communities. A range of teaching styles and methods is used effectively, providing differentiated learning for groups of learners with individual needs. Groupwork is used particularly well to extend communication skills and enable learners to develop the wider skills of working and learning with their peers. Learners value the supportive and sensitive nature of much of

the teaching. It successfully promotes learning to many individuals who previously have not participated in formal education since they left school.

89. Accreditation is used well to establish clear progression routes for learners. Unit accreditation enables learners to build credits towards further awards. Learners can take a series of short courses leading to a college award which can be used as part of the entry requirements for the diploma course. Of learners on the current diploma programme, 45 per cent have come from the short-course programme. Many learners who began by taking short residential courses are now in higher education or working in their communities. Several previous learners are now members of the college staff. One project to attract learners from under-represented groups has recruited 814 new learners in the past eight months, of whom 217 have progressed to other courses. There are regular taster sessions at which learners' opportunities to progress are fully explained. After taking five short courses, learners are encouraged to discuss their further learning options at an individual tutorial.

90. Learners receive highly effective personal and academic support from teachers. They clearly recognise the relevance of their learning and the progress they are making. Many learners speak of the confidence they have gained through attending the college. They view the supportive environment they work in as highly conducive to learning. Learners develop communication skills that enable them to work with and support other learners. Additional evening workshops and individual tutorials are used to help learners with additional needs. There is good support for learners with disabilities, making effective use of learning support workers, specialist equipment and other resources. Free childcare is available. An extensive advice, guidance and counselling service is available to all learners.

91. The short course programme is having considerable success in attracting learners who are under-represented in adult education. Last year 49 per cent of learners came from groups which attracted extra funding for widening participation. Seventy-one per cent of learners were unemployed or unwaged and 30 per cent declared a disability. There is effective and productive liaison with communities across the region resulting in off-site provision planned on the basis of local needs and taught in accessible local venues. Community-based staff work successfully with under-represented groups to develop and provide local courses. Effective work is also done to identify potential groups of learners and attract them to taster days. One group from a day centre for people with mental health problems spent a day doing craft activities and looking at the history of the college building and grounds. Several of them subsequently enrolled on a local history course at the college.

92. Resources are good. Learning resources are appropriate for the learners and suitable for the tasks set. Learners value the residential experience which allows them to study without the interruptions and responsibilities of everyday life. Child care is readily available. Some adults on residential programmes have to share bedrooms, and some parts of the college are not easily accessible to learners with restricted mobility. Learners benefit from learning support workers who have access to specialist equipment and materials. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced.

93. There is good provision for learners with literacy and numeracy support needs. Learners' needs are identified initially through the application process and then further by course tutors. Where necessary, learning support workers are available to help meet these needs. Opportunities to improve learners' literacy and numeracy are identified at the course planning stage and integrated with the primary aim of courses. Help with literacy and numeracy is also available at a series of evening workshops.

94. Individual learning plans do not always set measurable goals for learners. Some lack sufficient detail or are not fully completed. Not all learners have clear enough aims to help them to identify their progress. Learners' needs are not sufficiently identified by the learning needs questionnaire. Where extra learning needs are identified, arrangements to meet them are not secure enough. The structure of the short course means that not all learners' needs are met in the short time available.

95. Assessment practices for the accredited awards are not always thorough enough. There is very little cross-referencing of evidence. Learners' evidence is not always recorded precisely enough. Some learners do not understand the assessment process or how to achieve credits. Tutors do not always monitor individual learners' progress sufficiently. Learners are sometimes asked to self-assess their tasks without necessarily getting feedback from their tutors or confirmation that the task has been completed successfully.

Leadership and management

96. The management of the short-course programme is effective. All staff recognise and respond to the college's mission to widen participation by recruiting learners from under-represented groups. Regular course reviews contribute to a process of course development and quality improvement. Feedback from learners further strengthens the review process. All teachers have been observed. Good practice is shared through a particularly effective system of peer group observations.