

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **The Marine Society College of the Sea**

**03 June 2005**



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 aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** 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.

### **Pre-inspection analysis**

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

## 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 of 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 in 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*

# INSPECTION REPORT

## The Marine Society College of the Sea

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Marine Society (the society) was founded in 1756 to encourage men and boys of good character to join the Royal Navy at the start of the Seven Years War. It was incorporated by an act of parliament in 1772 to apprentice poor boys to the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy, to equip them with clothing, and to provide them with pre-sea education. The society, the world's oldest seafarers' charity, was joined by the Sea Cadet Association to become The Marine Society and Sea Cadets in November 2004, and thereby became the UK's largest maritime charity. The society is for people who serve, intend to serve, or have served in the Royal Navy, the Merchant Navy, or in the fishing and offshore industries irrespective of their rank, rate, or status. The Marine Society College of the Sea (MSCoS) is an operating arm of the society and is a means whereby those who make a living at sea can continue their education and benefit from the same educational support as their counterparts ashore. MSCoS provides tuition and educational services to professional seafarers. MSCoS works in partnership with the National Extension College and awarding bodies to provide a range of distance learning programmes ranging from level two to degree courses. The office of the society is based in Lambeth in London. MSCoS accounts for approximately one-quarter of the annual expenditure of the society. It has no assets and its income is derived from the society funds, the Learning and Skills Council and other external sources. The director of education and the education support officer are full-time members of staff. MSCoS uses one freelance tutor for general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) English.

### OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 2**

2. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** The leadership and management are good. The arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement are satisfactory. In foundation programmes, the provision is good.

3. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** Throughout MSCoS, there is a self-critical culture and an awareness of the need to raise standards and improve the learners' experience. The National Extension College produces an annual self-assessment report, which is satisfactory and critical. MSCoS contributes to the National Extension College's self-assessment report. Learners' views are taken into account by means of frequent informal interviews and discussions.

4. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Much work has been carried out since MSCoS's previous inspection to establish quality standards in the learning materials and support provided to learners by tutors.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE MARINE SOCIETY COLLEGE OF THE SEA:

- maintain professional and partnership arrangements throughout the maritime and associated industries
- continue to respond to the distinctive and rapidly changing needs of seafarers
- formalise and develop monitoring activities
- raise the profile of equality and diversity throughout the organisation

## GRADES

*grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate*

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

| Foundation programmes        |                    |                    | 2 |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---|
| Contributory areas:          | Number of learners | Contributory grade |   |
| <b>Community learning</b>    |                    | 2                  |   |
| Adult and community learning | 124                | 2                  |   |

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. All aspects of MSCoS's provision were inspected. Inspectors visited the subcontractor, the National Extension College, before the final inspection visit. Inspectors also contacted learners, who were on shore leave before the final inspection visit.

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Number of inspectors                               | 3  |
| Number of inspection days                          | 13 |
| Number of learners interviewed                     | 12 |
| Number of staff interviewed                        | 8  |
| Number of subcontractors interviewed               | 1  |
| Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited | 2  |

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievements and standards

6. **Learners develop advanced skills in their subjects**, while remaining on the course,

despite prolonged periods at sea and being involved in front-line conflicts.

7. **Examination achievements are good**, with high grades, when learners choose to take them. Progression through different levels of courses is good.

### **The quality of provision**

8. **Good distance learning is supported by excellent resources** which are adapted to reflect learners' vocational interests and seafaring experiences. A wide range of subjects is available to study.

9. **Tutor contact with learners is good** with good feedback on assignments. Good records are kept on progress.

10. **Induction is insufficiently formalised**. The induction to the subject varies according to individual tutors, especially those of the subcontractor.

### **Leadership and management**

11. **Good management of learning takes place** through a wide range of maritime and professional organisations. There is good promotion of learning through the seafarers' library, maritime networks and promotional literature.

12. **There is good strategic planning** to create a detailed development plan to increase and improve the provision of distance learning to seafarers.

13. **There is excellent access to learning** through a wide range of activities, including financial assistance, library services and examination management.

14. **Staff have a good understanding of MSCoS's systems**, but most of the quality monitoring and improvement activity is informal. Self assessment is used informally, but a self-assessment report is not produced annually.

15. **Critical data analysis is not used** and there are no formal procedures to capture the data required, particularly that for equality and diversity. An equal opportunities policy does not exist for learners.

### **Leadership and management**

#### **Strengths**

- very effective links with partner organisations and professional bodies
- good strategic planning
- outstanding access to wider learning opportunities for seafarers

#### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient monitoring of equality and diversity
- no systematic process to assure quality improvement

## Foundation programmes

### *Community learning*

**Grade 2**

#### *Strengths*

- good teaching and learning
- good material to support distance learning
- good range of learning programmes
- very good arrangements to meet seafarers' needs

#### *Weaknesses*

- insufficiently formalised induction process in subcontracted provision



## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT THE MARINE SOCIETY COLLEGE OF THE SEA:**

- provision is enjoyable and varied with interesting assignments
- friendly staff and tutors who treat you as an individual and care
- good choice of courses
- gives a lot more flexibility to study and sit exams anywhere, despite abnormal working schedule
- low cost of subsidised course
- that MSCoS keeps pace with technologies
- MSCoS acts as 'very good middleman' especially with examination boards
- prompt feedback

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK THE MARINE SOCIETY COLLEGE OF THE SEA COULD IMPROVE:**

- the distance learning - 'I found it daunting'
- the requirements to complete assignments in set time - they are over-prescriptive
- the range of vocational courses - such as certificates of competency

## Language of the Adult and Community Learning Sector

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  |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Provider</b>                     | <b>Provider</b>                                    | 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.  |
| <b>Learner</b>                      | <b>Learner</b>                                     | Includes those learning by participating in community projects, as well as those on courses. Learning, however, will be planned, with intended outcomes.   |
| <b>Teacher/<br/>Trainer</b>         | <b>Tutor</b><br><b>Mentor</b>                      | Person teaching adult learners or guiding or facilitating their learning<br>Person providing individual, additional support, guidance and advice to learners to help them  |
| <b>Learning goals</b>               | <b>Main learning goals</b><br><br><b>Secondary</b> | 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.<br>These may include planned-for gains in self-confidence, and inter-personal skills. These should also be included in learning plans where appropriate. |
| <b>Personal and learning skills</b> | <b>Personal and learning skills</b>                | 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 Community Learning       |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Unanticipated or unintended learning outcome</b> | 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.  |
| <b>Subject-based programme</b>                      | A programme organised around 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.   |
| <b>Issue-based programme</b>                        | 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. |
| <b>Outreach provision</b>                           | 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.   |
| <b>Neighbourhood-based work</b>                     | 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.  |
| <b>Community regeneration</b>                       | 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.   |
| <b>Community capacity building</b>                  | 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 self managing, sustainable communities.  |

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Active citizenship</b> | The process whereby people recognise the power they have to improve the quality of life for others and make 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**

#### Strengths

- very effective links with partner organisations and professional bodies
- good strategic planning
- outstanding access to wider learning opportunities for seafarers

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of equality and diversity
- no systematic process to assure quality improvement

16. MSCoS has very effective links with a very wide range of maritime organisations and professional bodies. Excellent working relationships exist with the Royal and Merchant Navy, Royal Fleet Auxiliary and major shipping companies. Most learners are serving with the Royal Navy. Education officers who are employed by the Royal Navy effectively promote the programmes of MSCoS to ratings and officers. Promotional literature is placed in the learning centres of the Royal Navy and distributed onboard ships. Good partnerships exist with organisations such as Lloyds Maritime Academy, the MPI group and the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers. This has allowed MSCoS to widely promote the learning offered, support the learning with books and media, and organise examinations at sea. Excellent partnerships also exist with the Open University and national centre for the work-based learning partnerships at Middlesex University. The director of education is currently chairman of the Open University/Ministry of Defence liaison group, and higher education credits are being awarded for a range of maritime qualifications. Excellent working relationships have been established with the National Extension College. The number of GCSE courses offered has increased from three to four in 2001 to 18 courses at the time of the inspection. Fifteen subjects are available at AS and A2 level, and one subject is available at AS level only. Further expansion of the curriculum has taken place and programmes such as creative writing and website design are now offered. MSCoS has links with major shipping companies and over 370 ships throughout the world are provided with a library service. Depots for storing books and making library exchanges are situated in places such as Dubai and Singapore.

17. The merger of the Sea Cadet Association with that of the society has resulted in The Marine Society and Sea Cadets becoming the nation's largest maritime charity with greater resources and a wider remit. This includes offering training for the 6,000 adult volunteers who operate with the Sea Cadet Corps. Major restructuring of the organisation has taken place with meticulous planning. A detailed structure of various committees including finance, policy and development and an education advisory group has been established. Members of the advisory group have a strong background in the maritime sector or education and training. All groups have terms of reference along with roles and responsibilities which include monitoring or setting of targets. MSCoS has produced a detailed three-year development plan which sets the future of the organisation along with some targets for retention.

18. The two members of staff maintain their own professional development. The director of education has been in post for 18 years and the education support officer has been in post since December 2004. The freelance tutor has been used for 15 years and has held senior posts in the further education sector. Learning resources are good.

19. The management of additional literacy, numeracy and language support is satisfactory. All Royal Navy personnel have to have a required level of literacy and numeracy to enter the service. All MSCoS's applicants are given detailed advice and guidance as to the requirements of the programmes of learning. If particular help is needed, for example with sentence structure, this is given by individual tutors in their feedback to learners. A detailed leaflet has been produced on dyslexia for professional seafarers, detailing the support available.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 3**

20. Exceedingly wide variations of systems exist to allow seafarers very good access to learning opportunities. A wide range of financial support is available, ranging from interest-free loans to bursaries and scholarships. In 2004, scholarships to the value of £29,000 and loans of £56,300 were awarded. The default rate on loans is historically low at less than 5 per cent. In 2004, a total of 670 libraries were dispatched to ships comprising some 85,000 books. The library service responds to specific requests, and textbooks are available to purchase at a subsidised rate. Typically, each library consists of between 100 and 400 hardback fiction and non-fiction reference books which are refreshed three times a year. For many learners, the contact with the library service is the beginning of a route to learning. MSCoS sponsors and organises an annual competition for seafarers which effectively promotes and encourages an interest in artistic and literary expression. Detailed written and verbal feedback is given to all entries. Previous entrants have moved through the learning system to become full-time authors. In 2004, the competition attracted 79 entries from 42 seafarers. MSCoS is the only organisation that has permission from awarding bodies to carry out public examinations at sea or at foreign locations ashore. MSCoS is an effective conduit for administering examinations for other qualifications such as ship surveying for the relevant awarding body. A wide range of publicity channels are used to promote MSCoS's activities, these include a quarterly magazine, fliers and brochures which are distributed throughout the maritime sector and, increasingly, the society's website.

21. Although the promotion of learning is good, MSCoS does not monitor equality and diversity sufficiently. Data is not kept to establish trends such as the proportion of women against those employed in maritime services. MSCoS does not have an equal opportunities policy for learners, only that inherited from the Sea Cadet Association. Those learners who are with the subcontractor have access to equal opportunities information in the handbook. At enrolment, learners receive a copy of MSCoS's charter which outlines MSCoS's mission and obligations to learners. It briefly states what the learners' rights and responsibilities are. In the subcontractors' guidance, rights and responsibilities of learners are clearly stated. MSCoS's complaints process and its responsibilities under the Charities Act 1993 are also outlined. There is information on complaints in the charter, but no procedure on how to report the complaint, and the contact person is no longer employed by the society. There is no mention of equality and diversity in any of the terms of reference for the committees of the society.

**Quality improvement****Contributory grade 3**

22. MSCoS's quality improvement and management activities are carried out by the small management team, comprising the director of education and the education support officer. There are a small number of formal quality improvement procedures and processes, many of which have been developed or strengthened recently. However, most quality monitoring and quality improvement activity is informal. The director of education and education support officer have a very good understanding of MSCoS's systems and of the formal and informal quality improvement activities taking place. Double marking of assignments takes place to assure the standard of learners' work. The society's education and training advisory group has frequently discussed and carried out actions relating to quality improvement and actions on the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

23. Much work has been carried out since MSCoS's previous inspection to establish quality standards in the learning materials and support provided by tutors. Thirty-three of the 34 subjects available at GCSE or advanced level are now provided as part of the National Extension College's CoNECt scheme. A detailed service level agreement is in place to govern the quality of work carried out by the subcontractor. MSCoS's director of education and the education support officer both have frequent meetings with senior staff at the National Extension College, and also take part in formal MSCoS co-ordinators' meetings to review procedures and quality arrangements with the subcontractor and other partner institutions. The National Extension College operates a quarterly audit of learners' progress, which is shared with MSCoS. In addition, MSCoS has an electronic alert system to identify protracted periods of learner inactivity or lack of contact between tutors and learners. However, some learners' progress has been slow and there have been some occasions when contact between tutor and learner has not occurred for some time.

24. Throughout MSCoS there is a self-critical culture and an awareness of the need to raise standards and improve the learners' experience. The MSCoS's self-assessment process is at an early stage of development, and the current self-assessment report is the first produced since 2002. The report was insufficiently evaluative in its identification of weaknesses in provision. Some of the strengths in the self-assessment report matched those given by inspectors, but some were no more than normal practice. Some weaknesses in provision were not identified in the self-assessment report. The director of education produced the current self-assessment report with limited input from other members of MSCoS's staff and its tutor for directly delivered programmes. The National Extension College produces its own annual self-assessment report, which is satisfactorily self-critical, and to which MSCoS contributes. National Extension College also has a range of formal procedures for quality improvement. However, it does not contribute directly to MSCoS's self-assessment report, although information from their self-assessment report is used in preparation of MSCoS's document.

25. Learners' views are taken into account through frequent informal interviews and discussions, and many learners are personally well known to the managers of MSCoS. At enrolment, learners receive a copy of MSCoS's charter which outlines the society's mission and obligations to learners. MSCoS's complaints process and its responsibilities under the Charities Act 1993 are also outlined. A feedback questionnaire is included with the charter, but most learners have not made use of this mechanism. Interviewed learners commented very positively on the level of contact they had with MSCoS's managers and tutors, and felt their views were taken into account during self-assessment and programme evaluation. Learners with the National Extension College are sent a satisfaction questionnaire and

course completion questionnaire as part of a formal self-assessment and course review process.

26. MSCoS has two separate computer systems to record learner information, and data is available in a number of configurations relating to learner numbers, progress and achievement. There is a good system to record tutor comments on learners' progress, and the system is well used by managers to monitor progress. Data is kept on the retention and achievement of learners, but there are no formal procedures for analysis of data or for reviewing the quality of training across years or by user groups. MSCoS's practice not to capture and analyse learner data in the form of an individual learner record has been accepted as reasonable by the Learning and Skills Council.



## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Foundation programmes

### Grade 2

| Contributory areas:          | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Community learning</b>    |                    | <b>2</b>           |
| Adult and community learning | 124                | 2                  |

27. The GCSE and A level courses are studied in science and mathematics, English, languages and a wide range of humanities subjects. All the GCSE and A level courses, except English, are provided by the National Extension College. Courses are delivered by means of distance learning, and most learners study at sea, although some are shore based, particularly at Royal Naval and Royal Marines bases. Provision excludes foundation subjects, which are offered by partner providers, including the Royal Navy. Progression routes include work-based learning maritime and related degrees with the University of Middlesex, Open University 'Openings' courses and undergraduate courses, all of which make allowances for the fact that most learners will be studying at sea. An examination-based computer course is available to purchase. A range of professional short courses and new business, vocational and personal development short courses are also available. Twenty-nine subjects are currently being studied by MSCoS learners.

### **Community learning**

### **Grade 2**

#### *Strengths*

- good teaching and learning
- good material to support distance learning
- good range of learning programmes
- very good arrangements to meet seafarers' needs

#### *Weaknesses*

- insufficiently formalised induction process in subcontracted provision

### **Achievement and standards**

28. Retention on all courses is very good. Learners are frequently retained on courses despite spending long periods at sea and, in some cases, being involved in front-line conflict duties and military exercises. Many learners have developed advanced skills in their subjects. Most are able to identify progress made on courses, new skills and understanding developed during learning. Most learners do not wish to pursue courses in order to achieve qualifications at GCSE and advanced level. Most learners study to develop their interest and skills in a subject, but choose not to enter for examinations or seek certification at the end of a course. MSCoS's funding body recognises the non-standard nature of the provision and does not set targets for achievement of qualifications. When learners do choose to complete courses and take examinations, achievement rates are good, with a very high proportion achieving the highest grades. Progression across courses and from levels 2 and 3 to diploma, undergraduate or

professional qualifications is good.

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

| Other government funded           |         |   |         |   |         |   |         |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| Other government-funded provision | 2004-05 |   | 2003-04 |   | 2002-03 |   | 2001-02 |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |  |
|                                   | No.     | % | No.     | % | No.     | % | No.     | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |  |
| Number of starts                  | 27      |   | 55      |   | 25      |   | 46      |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |  |
| Retained*                         | 0       |   | 0       |   | 0       |   | 0       |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |  |
| Successfully completed            | 0       |   | 2       |   | 6       |   | 5       |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |  |
| Still in training                 | 27      |   | 53      |   | 17      |   | 27      |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |  |

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

### The quality of provision

29. There is much good distance learning. There are academically well-qualified and vocationally experienced tutors who enthusiastically encourage learners beyond course and specification requirements. Tutors work at a pace which suits the learners' needs and job demands. One tutor is preparing a learner to take a GCSE in human physiology in only six months. Other tutors have given learners well-planned activities that are less intrusive to their work commitments while they are at sea or, exceptionally, even when learners have been involved in conflicts overseas. Tutors are sensitive to the particular needs of seafarers who are working on distance learning material and are able, in some cases, to adapt learning resources and reading materials to reflect learners' vocational interests and seafaring experiences. The best learner files show evidence of copious tutor feedback and learner responses, forming a written dialogue across a range of very different courses.

30. There are very good arrangements to meet seafarers' study needs. Learners who choose to complete qualifications, achieve very good grades in their examinations, despite the considerable logistical difficulties of being at sea for extended periods. Learners have frequent contact with their tutor, sometimes more than weekly. A clear record is kept of all contacts, and comments are recorded for each assignment. Learner activity is reviewed centrally and a record is kept on the management information system as well as by tutors. Comments on marked work are positive and provide advice on ways to improve performance.

31. Learners receive very good levels of financial support in the form of grants and loans administered by the society. Considerable efforts are made to ensure that learners can receive their course documents and learning materials at frequently changing overseas addresses, including dockyards, shipping agencies, harbour offices and naval bases. In some cases, learners have been able to collect documents from an overseas port during a stop-over of only 48 hours. MSCoS has a unique dispensation from awarding bodies and from the Open University to allow learners to sit examinations aboard ship, subject to the oversight of the master. The society's exchange library scheme provides 85,000 books a year to ships' companies, and has done much to encourage learners to take the first steps in the process of learning.

32. MSCoS offers a good range of courses at levels 2 and 3, and there are good progression opportunities to undergraduate, diploma, post-graduate and other programmes at a number of universities. A total of 18 learners have progressed to higher level study in the past six years. There are 34 GCSE and A level programmes available, either delivered directly by MSCoS or as part of a subcontract arrangement with the National Extension College. GCSE courses are offered in four languages, in a number of science subjects and in a wide range of arts and humanities subjects. Fifteen subjects are available at AS and A2 level, and critical thinking is available at AS level only. The A level courses provide good progression opportunities for learners who complete GCSEs. New courses have recently been introduced in 19 subjects providing business skills, management training, accountancy and book-keeping, or personal development opportunities for learners. Nine of the new courses are non-accredited. There is also a good range of opportunities for introductory study with the Open University, through the 'Openings' programme, and many learners also pursue undergraduate courses. Learners receive good guidance and advice on course choices from MSCoS's director of education or education support officer.

33. The management of additional literacy, numeracy and language support is satisfactory. All Royal Navy personnel have to have a required level of literacy and numeracy to enter the service. All MSCoS's student applicants are given detailed advice and guidance on the requirements of the programmes. If particular help is needed, for example with sentence structure, this is given by individual tutors in their feedback to learners. A detailed leaflet has been produced on dyslexia for professional seafarers, detailing the support available.

34. Arrangements for the induction are insufficiently formalised. A general induction to MSCoS is provided, and during this process learners receive a copy of MSCoS's charter. For learners who follow MSCoS's directly delivered English courses, induction activities are carried out by their tutor on first contact. The scale and nature of these inductions varies. Learners on National Extension College courses do not always receive induction from their tutors. Tutors do not always have full details of learners' employment situation or study needs, and there is no formalised induction activity to allow tutor and learner to exchange information.

### **Leadership and management**

35. Leadership and management for community learning is good. The director of education and the education support officer have a very good knowledge of their learners and have a good system for monitoring their progress and needs. There are very good links with professional and educational bodies. Learners benefit from the expanding range of vocational provision now available. The self-assessment report graded the direct and indirect provision separately. Some of the strengths identified were no more than normal practice, but it gave a good account of the provision overall.

36. On all distance learning courses there are good materials to support learning. For GCSE English courses, there are good tutor-developed study materials. Study packs are provided for each piece of literature, and these give clear historical and contextual information. The language used in study packs is clear and accessible for learners. A comprehensive examination preparation pack is available for each learner. Professionally produced GCSE and A level CoNEct materials for National Extension College courses skilfully guide learners through their assignments and other learning activities. All National Extension College materials are well suited to the demands of study on board ship and provide well-paced activities to guide learners through specifications. The language used in

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all study packs is clear and accessible for learners.

