

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Northern College for Residential Adult Education**

**17 November 2006**



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
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

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

## Northern College for Residential Adult Education

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Northern College for Residential Adult Education (NC) was established in 1978 near Barnsley in South Yorkshire. Its continuing mission is to provide high-quality learning opportunities for disadvantaged individuals and groups. NC is sited in a grade 1 listed building and is currently in the midst of a major building programme as part of a successful Heritage Lottery bid, further supported by funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Yorkshire Forward and the European Social Fund (ESF), which involves restoration work and improvement across the estate. NC was awarded Beacon status by the LSC in 2004.

2. The courses offered range from entry to advanced level, with the diploma programme providing access to higher education. During 2005-06, there were 66 full-time and 16 part-time learners on the diploma programme. NC also runs a substantial programme of part-time courses of various lengths, most of which are residential. In 2005-06 3,427 enrolments on part-time residential courses were funded directly through the LSC, and 765 were funded through the local authorities of Leeds, Barnsley, Rotherham, Sheffield, Kirklees, Doncaster and Bradford. A further 2,108 enrolments came from outreach or non-residential provision.

3. NC receives around half its funding from South Yorkshire LSC, with a direct allocation of £3,037,882 for 2006-07. This is a reduction of approximately 2.7 per cent on the amount for 2005-06. In addition, the college's contracts from the local authorities have been severely cut in 2006-07 because of the reductions in LSC funding for adult and community learning. The college receives other funding through the ESF, Yorkshire Forward, trades unions and voluntary and community organisations. In 2005-06, 27 per cent of NC's funding came from external grant sources, 7 per cent from local authorities, and 16 per cent from catering and residence operations, and external bookings.

4. The reduction in funding has led to a restructure of staffing and of the way the curriculum is organised. The restructure involved some redundancies. The principal of the college reports to the board of governors, and manages a senior management team of five staff, including two academic directors who between them are responsible for the strategic management of the programme areas. Four programme managers are responsible for operational management of the curriculum. There is a team of 25 teaching staff, 17 full-time and eight part-time, most of whom teach on more than one programme. The principal, academic directors and programme managers also teach on various programmes.

### OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 1**

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is outstanding.** Leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality improvement, are outstanding. The quality of provision in social sciences and in preparation for life and work is also outstanding.

6. **Achievement and standards are very good overall.** Retention, achievement and success rates have been maintained at a consistently high level between 2003 and 2006. The diploma programme had high retention and achievement rates at the previous inspection and these have been maintained. Success rates on the programme are good and improving at 78 per cent for 2005-06. Retention and achievement have also remained high both for skills for life and the short-course programme. Skills for Life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Success rates on the short-course programme have remained consistently over 90 per cent. The pass rate for national tests in literacy and numeracy is significantly above the national average at 82 per cent. On the community regeneration programme, the success rate for 2005-06 is good at 81 per cent, although this represents a slight drop on the 88 per cent for the preceding year. Success rates on the trade union programme have been consistently high since 2003, and in 2005-06 they were outstanding at 99 per cent. On the local authorities programme, the rates of retention and achievement of personal learning goals have remained very high at 98 per cent, and success rates are also very high at 96 per cent for 2005-06.

7. Learners on many of the programmes overcome considerable barriers to learning, and gain the confidence and skills they need to improve their lives and their communities. Progression is very good. In 2006-07, 70 per cent of the learners on the diploma programme had progressed from short courses provided by the college. The proportion of learners progressing from the diploma course either to university courses or to employment has remained above 80 per cent for the past three years.

8. **The quality of provision is very good overall.** The 19 learning sessions observed during the inspection were all at least satisfactory and 74 per cent were good or better. Sixteen per cent were outstanding. In the best sessions, tutors are particularly encouraging and motivational, and make very good use of questioning techniques. Learners are very engaged and particularly enthusiastic about their learning, rapidly gaining awareness, understanding and skills. Learners on the diploma programme develop very good academic skills. Group learning is effective, with tasks that encourage learners to share ideas while discussing suitably challenging topics. However, in a few sessions there is insufficient differentiation to cater for the range of learners. Sessions are well planned, and learning is enhanced by good resources. The materials used in classes are clear and informative, and good information and communications technology (ICT) resources are used well to extend learners' skills. Teaching and learning resources to support learners with a disability are particularly good. Assessment procedures are effective. Recent improvements to the NC's systems for planning and monitoring individual learning are encouraging learners to take responsibility for target-setting, and are appropriate to NC's courses.

9. The range of programmes is coherent and effectively meets the needs of learners and their communities. The outreach provision enables the college to work with local communities to identify learning needs and to widen participation in adult learning. Short residential courses at the college are regularly arranged in response to the needs of particular groups. The short-course programme also offers a range of access provision designed to encourage participation and enthusiasm for learning, increase confidence and improve skills. The skills for life programme integrates and supports the development of literacy and numeracy across all programmes, while the humanities diploma provides a good progression route for learners through to higher education. Both the community

regeneration programme and the trade union provision further NC's commitment to social action and education.

**10. Learning and personal support for learners is outstanding at NC.** Learners who require additional in-class support for a sensory or learning difficulty receive discrete and sensitive assistance from learner support workers. There is assistive technology available in classrooms and the library to facilitate in-class and independent learning. Resources for independent study are outstanding. The library is particularly well resourced and is open and staffed for 70 hours a week. Learners can use the computer suites outside course time, and have 24-hour access to a study room which includes ICT facilities. Literacy, numeracy and ICT workshops are provided outside course times to give additional learning support. All learners have appropriate access to information, advice and guidance, through a qualified member of the college staff and through appropriately timed visits from external agencies. Learners also have good and timely access to the college's counselling service. Although constrained by its grade 1 listed building, NC has been particularly successful in providing for the needs of learners with a disability, and has been very active in ensuring that the learners themselves shape the improvements. Childcare arrangements are very good.

**11. The inspection team had a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is well established and inclusive, involving learners, staff and governors. Each programme area and support area produces both an annual report and a quality improvement plan, which are used in the self-assessment and strategic planning processes. The self-assessment report itself is accurate and analytical, and the improvements identified have been acted upon and monitored well through the action-planning process. Almost all the grades awarded in the self-assessment report matched those given by inspectors.

**12. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to maintain the high quality of provision.** At the previous inspection, NC's leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality assurance, were judged good, as were foundation programmes, community action, and other adult and community learning. The humanities programme was judged to be outstanding. Since then, NC has maintained or improved upon its high performance. The provision in preparation for life and work has improved. Weaknesses identified by the previous inspection have been remedied, and improvements in equality of opportunity and quality improvement have been particularly successful. NC now provides leadership to other providers in the adult and community sector on quality improvement.

## **KEY CHALLENGES FOR NORTHERN COLLEGE FOR RESIDENTIAL ADULT EDUCATION:**

- continue to maintain relevance and offer leadership to the communities it serves
- identify and secure major funding streams to support its purposes
- make better use of management information in the diploma programme to identify and monitor actions for improvement
- expedite the introduction of nationally recognised accreditation for the short-course programme

## NORTHERN COLLEGE FOR RESIDENTIAL ADULT EDUCATION

- further develop networking arrangements

### GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

<b>Leadership and management</b>		<b>1</b>
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		1
Quality improvement		1

<b>Social sciences</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<i>Sociology and social policy</i> Adult and community learning	90	1	

<b>Preparation for life and work</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Adult and community learning	31	1	
<i>Access programmes</i> Adult and community learning	60	1	

### ABOUT THE INSPECTION

13. NC was previously inspected by the ALI in February 2003, and was judged to be a good provider. Three inspectors visited NC over five days in November 2006 on a light-touch inspection. One inspector carried out a one-day visit before the main inspection week to sample the weekend provision. The humanities diploma provision was inspected and graded, as was preparation for life and work. Classes in community development, and business administration and law were sampled to gain an overview of the full range of provision, but were not graded or reported on separately. Because of the uncertainty about the status of the outreach provision, it was not inspected.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learners interviewed	38
Number of staff interviewed	47
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	3



## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- very effective strategic and operational management
- good staff development
- extensive and very effective networking
- successful strategy for the provision of skills for life
- outstanding equality and diversity practices
- particularly effective quality improvement measures

### **Weaknesses**

- no significant weaknesses

## **Social sciences**

### ***Sociology and social policy***

#### *Strengths*

- good success rates
- good progression
- good teaching and learning
- very good development of academic skills by learners
- outstanding support for learners

#### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient analysis and use of management information data in the diploma programme

## **Preparation for life and work**

#### *Strengths*

- good achievement
- very good progression
- very good teaching and learning
- particularly good support for learners
- successful targeting of provision at those experiencing disadvantage

#### *Weaknesses*

- no significant weaknesses

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NORTHERN COLLEGE FOR RESIDENTIAL ADULT EDUCATION:**

- 'it's broadened my horizons'
- the good mix of learners
- being treated like an adult
- the structured, calm and encouraging teaching style
- the enthusiasm of teaching staff
- the way learners help each other
- 'the tremendous support'
- being encouraged to look at things from different angles
- learning time management and study skills
- the very good access to the library and to the computers outside class time
- 'you feel at home straight away'
- 'a smaller college helps you gain confidence'
- 'the residential - you're not distracted'

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

- the car parking
- the number of courses - some are over-subscribed
- the number of nursery places - there are too few
- the access to security outside normal college hours
- 'I'd like an on-site shop for essentials'
- 'not a great place to be at the weekends if you're residential with small children and don't drive'
- the size of classes - large diploma classes result in pressure on resource books in the library