

INSPECTION REPORT

Exchange Group, Newcastle Discovery Museum

25 January 2007



**ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE**

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

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

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Data for learndirect

Enrolments are learners who sign up to do a course.

Counted for data is the number of learners who:

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

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

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

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

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CONTENTS

Inspection report

Description of the provider	1
Overall effectiveness	1
Key challenges for Exchange Group, Newcastle Discovery Museum	2
Grades	2
About the inspection	2
Key Findings	2

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The **learndirect** centre is located in the Discovery Museum near Newcastle upon Tyne city centre. The museum is a well-established civic museum that focuses on science and technology. The **learndirect** centre is operated by Exchange Group and is one of the company's network of 25 **learndirect** centres throughout the United Kingdom. The centre was established in August 2005 in the city library. It moved to its current location in August 2006 when the city library closed for demolition. During the period from the start of the current contract with the Ufi on the 1 August 2006, until the 24 January 2007, the centre has enrolled 62 new learners. Of these, 55 enrolled in skills for life courses and seven enrolled in information and communications technology (ICT) courses. Learners take an average of five courses. At the time of the inspection there were 29 learners in total of whom 24 were on skills for life and five on ICT. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language.
2. The centre attracts learners through a combination of recommendations by previous learners, direct marketing, and referrals from agencies including Jobcentre Plus. All learners attend the centre. Skills for life learners complete **learndirect** courses towards qualifications in literacy and numeracy at level 1 and level 2.
3. The centre serves the Newcastle city centre community. The unemployment rate was 3.2 per cent in November 2006, compared with the national average of 2.5 per cent. The 2001 census shows that 6.9 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups, compared with the national average of 9.1 per cent.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** The provision for preparation for life and work is satisfactory. Leadership and management are good as are the arrangements for quality improvement. The arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory.
5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is managed centrally by Exchange Group and the manager and staff of the centre all contribute to a local self-assessment. There is a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and the way in which they have changed since the self-assessment report was written in August 2006.
6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Exchange Group uses a wide range of methods to continuously improve the quality of its provision, all of which are effective. Observation, feedback from learners, quality audits, written procedures, development plans and self-assessment work all contribute to this process. Good practice is shared with other **learndirect** centres and ideas for improvement are routinely collected and used.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR EXCHANGE GROUP, NEWCASTLE DISCOVERY MUSEUM:

- further improve the success rates
- improve the setting and recording of challenging targets for learners
- improve learners' understanding of equality of opportunity
- make better use of self-assessment

GRADES

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

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

Preparation for life and work		Grade 3
	Number of learners	Contributory grade
learndirect	24	3

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	2
Number of inspection days	4
Number of learners interviewed	8
Number of staff interviews	8
Number of community link interviews	1
Number of learner questionnaires returned	37
Number of visits to the provider	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

7. The success rate of 69 per cent shown in the table below is for the two Newcastle upon Tyne centres. The Newcastle Discovery Museum centre has a success rate of 76 per cent in the same period, which is good. The withdrawal rate is low at 3 per cent.

8. Learners gain valuable skills on skills for life courses, which help them gain jobs and progress to other programmes. Learners develop their numeracy and literacy skills such as calculating money and using weights and measurements. Learners make good use of the social aspects of the learning experience and improve their self-esteem and self-confidence.

9. Learners produce work of a satisfactory standard. Assessment by tutors is satisfactory.

2006 Quarter 1	Enrolments	Counted for data	Success rate (per cent)	Withdrawal rate (per cent)
Skills for life	448	377	69	3

The quality of provision

10. Learners receive very good support from tutors. Tutors are readily available to learners and provide effective individual learning support. Learners are given specific help to complete coursework. They receive clear feedback when they submit work. Tutors work well to accommodate learners' specific needs. For example, one learner has been given a personal computer to continue his studies away from the centre. Learners have access to a good range of additional learning materials designed to supplement and enhance **learnirect** resources. Examples of these include numeracy and literacy worksheets and the use of beads and playing cards. Another recent initiative has been the creation of an internet group that provides learners with their own information and discussion forum.

11. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Satisfactory use is made of diagnostic testing to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses and to identify appropriate courses. Individual learning styles and any learning difficulties are identified, but are not always recorded on individual learning plans. All learners have a satisfactory induction to **learnirect** and to their programme. Health and safety is satisfactorily covered at induction and further reinforced by staff at the centre. Information, advice and guidance for learners is satisfactory. Learners receive advice about relevant programmes for further progression.

12. The centre is well located in the Discovery Museum close to the town centre and has good access to local transport and parking. Access for people with mobility difficulties is satisfactory. Resources at the centre are satisfactory. The training room is equipped with modern furniture and good use is made of wall space for display purposes. A range of adaptive technology is available for learners, but there are no adjustable tables, and one part of the centre has little space for placing support materials. Centre opening times are limited by the museum and learners are only able to attend in the evening on one day a week.

13. There is inadequate use of targets for learners. Progress reviews do not involve the setting of actions to be completed by the time of the next review. Learning goals and targets are not systematically recorded. Most targets are not clear, time bound or measurable, and there is little emphasis on the nature and content of learning. Reviews take place regularly but learners are not encouraged to work at their full potential. There is regular discussion to ensure learners are ready to complete online assessments.

Leadership and management

	All Ethnic Groups	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese/Other	Mixed	Not Known	White
Enrolments	1,840	125	171	44	21	9	1,470
Completion rate (%)	93	99	96	86	95	78	93
Achievement rate (%)	75	75	67	55	55	100	77
Success rate (%)	70	74	65	48	52	78	71
Withdrawal rate (%)	7	1	4	14	5	22	7

14. The staff and manager of the centre have access to an excellent information and communications system that links them to the Exchange Group managers in London. They use it effectively to manage the provision on a daily basis. One key spreadsheet shows

them how they are performing against a range of agreed targets, including enrolments and achievements. When a new learner is enrolled the spreadsheet is automatically updated. The system clearly identifies learners who have not visited the centre during each week and may be at risk of leaving early. It also indicates those learners who have exceeded their target completion dates.

15. Exchange Group managers based in London monitor very closely the performance and quality of the centre's provision. They monitor the data in the management system on a continuous basis. They make frequent visits to the centre to discuss performance and quality. The centre manager meets with all of the directors, managers and key central support staff of the Exchange Group once a month. A weekly newsletter distributed through the management information system keeps the manager and staff up to date.

16. The booking system is used to make best use of the resources and to allow learners to use the centre at a time that suits their needs. It is also effective in managing progress and maintaining attendance. Staff telephone a learner an hour after they fail to arrive for a booked session. This is effective in minimising withdrawals.

17. Staff training and development is very well managed. For each job role the detailed knowledge and competence are specified. When staff are trained in each element a record is updated on the management system. Frequent short staff reviews are recorded in the same way. The system reminds managers when training and reviews are due.

18. Observation of teaching staff is carried out by their manager. An observation is scheduled for new members of staff after three months with the centre. All staff are observed at least twice a year. The observation records are well structured to encourage consistency. The records contain recommendations for improvement. The management system indicates when observations are due.

19. Quality improvement is achieved through a range of effective activities. Feedback from learners, obtained from the Ufi and within the centre, is used effectively. The results from a Ufi survey were used to produce a development plan to tackle a few areas where the centre fell short of the national average. The improvements were made and their effect was apparent in the significantly better feedback in those areas three months later.

20. All key processes are defined in well-written guides held on the management system. These are used to maintain consistent quality and to train new staff. Quality audits are fully established. As well as noting administrative errors, the audits have identified potential problems in teaching and learning, such as if a learner has been enrolled onto an inappropriate course, enabling corrective action to be taken quickly. An online ideas box allows staff to contribute suggestions for improvements to managers and directors in London. The facility is frequently used and is systematically reviewed by managers. There are many opportunities for sharing good practice with other centres within the Exchange Group. Self-assessment is good with all staff contributing to the centre's individual self-assessment report. The centre has not given sufficient weight to the importance of success rates in the report but the importance is now acknowledged by managers.

21. The centre identified in its self-assessment report in 2005-06 that learners' understanding of equality of opportunity was a weakness. Induction has now been strengthened. A clear leaflet is included in the welcome pack for learners to supplement the detailed equal opportunities policy. Learners are reminded about equality of opportunity at progress reviews. Learners' understanding is now satisfactory. Promotion of equality of opportunity is also satisfactory. The centre manager is aware of the statistical breakdown of

the learners at enrolment and on completion and achievement. He has initiated marketing activities aimed at particular minority ethnic groups that are under-represented.

22. Following the relocation of the centre more marketing has been carried out to maintain enrolment levels.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- excellent management systems
- well-managed provision
- good quality improvement arrangements

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- good success rate
- very good support for learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate use of targets for learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT EXCHANGE GROUP, NEWCASTLE DISCOVERY MUSEUM:

- staff take time to explain things
- staff develop good working relationships with learners
- the opportunity to gain valuable skills
- the flexibility of the booking arrangements
- learners look forward to attending the centre

WHAT LEARNERS THINK EXCHANGE GROUP, NEWCASTLE DISCOVERY MUSEUM COULD DO BETTER:

- the space available at the centre for learning
- the promotion of the provision