

Workers' Educational Association

Inspection date

Friday 14 March 2008

Inspection number

318287

Contents

Background information	3
Inspection judgements.....	3
Scope of the inspection.....	3
Description of the provider	5
Summary of grades awarded	7
Overall judgement	8
Effectiveness of provision	8
Capacity to improve	8
Key strengths	8
Key areas for improvement	10
Main findings	11
Achievement and standards	11
Quality of provision	11
Leadership and management.....	13
Equality of opportunity	13
What learners like	16
What learners think could improve	16
Sector subject areas	17
Health, public services and care.....	17
Arts, media and publishing.....	20
Humanities	23
Literacy, numeracy and ESOL.....	26
Community learning.....	30

Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1 Outstanding

Grade 2 Good

Grade 3 Satisfactory

Grade 4 Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Health, public services and care
- Arts, media and publishing
- Humanities

- Literacy, numeracy and ESOL
- Community learning

Description of the provider

1. The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is the largest Specialist Designated Institution (SDI) in England with provision in every Learning and Skills Council (LSC) region, as well as a Scottish Association. Over 650 local branches make up the WEA's National Association (the association). Founded in 1903, the WEA is a registered charity with a mission statement to be a democratic, voluntary adult education movement, which is committed to widening participation and to enabling people to realise their full potential through learning. The LSC co-funds 92% of the provision in England through a single national contract with the LSC London East partnership team, which the WEA uses for further education and personal and community development learning. The WEA raises additional funds from a range of other sources and has a considerable number of contracts throughout the country to deliver courses on behalf of councils and other funders of adult and community learning. It does not subcontract any of its own work.
2. In August 2004, the WEA's English districts were reorganised into nine regions and the Scottish Association. A board of trustees governs the WEA, comprising four national officers, four trustees appointed from the English regions and Scotland and four external co-opted trustees. The general secretary is responsible for the overall management of the WEA and reports to the trustees. An association committee acts in an advisory role to the trustees.
3. The WEA organises its provision in nine curriculum management areas and three education strands. These are Community Involvement, Second Chance to Learn and Cultural Studies. Volunteers work with professional staff in each of the nine regions to organise and support the provision. The general secretary, nine regional directors, and a Scottish secretary manage the provision, along with three corporate services directors for education, quality and strategy, resources and finance and business services. The WEA employs 224 full-time staff, 185 part-time staff and 1,753 sessional tutors.
4. At the time of the inspection, 31,538 learners were enrolled on 3,363 courses. In 2006/07, there were just under 80,000 learners on 11,217 courses, of which 90% were non-accredited. Of the learners, 74% were women and 16% were from a minority ethnic background. Twenty-seven per cent of learners were in receipt of income-related benefits and 28% were from disadvantaged areas. Arts, media and publishing is the largest curriculum area, followed by preparation for life and work and history, philosophy and theology. The inspection graded these three curriculum areas, together with health, public services and care. These incorporate judgements from a number of other sector subject areas, the largest of which are information and communication technology (ICT), leisure, travel and tourism and languages, literature and culture.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Sector subject area

Health, public services and care	Outstanding: Grade 1
Arts, media and publishing	Good: Grade 2
Humanities	Good: Grade 2
Literacy, numeracy and ESOL	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Community learning	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. The quality of provision in health, public services and care is outstanding and it is good in arts, media and publishing, humanities and community learning. Literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision is satisfactory. Achievement and standards and the quality of provision are good, as are the WEA's leadership and management and equality of opportunity.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

6. The WEA demonstrates good capacity to improve. The effectiveness of steps taken by the provider to promote improvements since the previous inspection is good. Leadership and management have improved and the arrangements for quality improvement and performance management are good. The focus on improving teaching and learning is strong. Managers use data well to monitor the provision and trends closely. Analysis of the performance of different groups of learners is particularly detailed. Retention rates are high in all sector subject areas and accredited success rates have improved significantly over the last three years. The WEA has maintained all of its key strengths since the previous inspection and rectified almost all of the weaknesses. The grades given by inspectors are higher than those given at the previous inspection for similar aspects of the provision, including leadership and management.
7. The self-assessment process is good. It includes all staff and incorporates the views of many important partners and stakeholders. Trustees have a good awareness of the process. The WEA updated the most recent self-assessment report for 2006/07 for the inspection in February 2008. It is detailed, evaluative and self-critical and presents a concise and accurate summary of the very large range of provision. Data supports many of the judgements well. The self-assessment identifies most of the strengths and areas for improvement and the grades given by inspectors match most of those in the report.

Key strengths

- Good development of learners' skills and knowledge
- Strong leadership
- Excellent partnerships
- Good performance management to promote improvement
- Very good responsiveness to community needs
- Role and contribution of volunteers across the organisation

Key areas for improvement

- Insufficient participation of men
- Insufficient sharing of good practice
- Under-developed arrangements to monitor and report learners' success on non-accredited courses
- Inadequate formal arrangements to monitor learners' progression

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

8. Achievement and standards are good. Retention rates are high for the very large number of learners across all regions and in all areas of the provision. Learners develop a wide range of good skills and knowledge in every curriculum area. Success rates on the small number of accredited courses have improved significantly over the last three years from 60% to 73% overall, particularly in health and care, ICT, ESOL and languages. They are now satisfactory. The success rates for learners on accredited courses who receive additional learning support are very high, as they are for learners on programmes in partnership with employers. The celebration of learners' and volunteers' achievements is particularly good. There are many good individual and group examples of learners' progression, but data on overall progression rates is unavailable. Achievement rates on accredited courses are low at 80%, and there is too much variation in success rates across regions. The success rates for the very small numbers of learners on accredited courses who have a physical disability or who are from a minority ethnic background are below the average for learners as a whole. The grade given by inspectors for achievement and standards was higher than that identified through self-assessment.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

9. The quality of provision is good as is the standard of teaching and learning. More than two-thirds of the lessons observed by inspectors were good or better and only 2% were inadequate. Judgements about teaching and learning match most of those identified through self-assessment. Assessment practices are satisfactory overall, but the arrangements to identify and record learners' progress and achievements on non-accredited courses are weak in some curriculum areas. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory across the large number of venues used by the WEA.
10. The range of programmes to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. Much of the provision is flexible and highly responsive. The WEA recruits a high proportion of new learners, as well as those from minority ethnic groups and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Partnership working is very good. Where relevant, the WEA meets employers' needs very well.

11. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory, as are the arrangements for information, advice and guidance. Many of the tutors and volunteers are former learners and have a very good understanding of adult learners' needs. The grade given for quality of provision by inspectors matches that in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

12. Leadership and management are good, as identified through self-assessment. Strategic leadership and management of change are strong, particularly through the general secretary and senior managers. They have implemented significant structural and cultural changes successfully over the last four years and led the association through a period of recovery and development, while retaining its core purpose and values.
13. Performance management promotes improvement effectively across the WEA. Systems to manage the provision are good, as identified in self-assessment. The monitoring of quality and compliance with the WEA's policies and procedures is rigorous and systematic. Senior managers review regular regional monitoring reports and use detailed action plans to rectify any issues. The use of data at national and regional level to monitor financial performance and learners' success is good. Managers use data effectively to identify trends for different groups of learners. Financial and resource management are good. The WEA has repaid its substantial loan from the LSC and is now building its cash reserves gradually.
14. Partnership working is excellent. The range of partnerships is extensive and enables the WEA to reach its priority target groups successfully. The partnerships are characterised by a flexible approach to meeting learners' needs and high levels of responsiveness. WEA staff attend local adult learning fora and participate actively in local agreements on multi-agency approaches to planning provision.
15. Equality of opportunity is good. The WEA targets its provision in areas of disadvantage and identified need and recruits a high proportion of new learners each year. It makes good use of projects to offer learning opportunities to a wide range of adults. In 2006/07, 16% of the learners were from a minority ethnic background. Men account for only 25% of the total learners and the WEA's race and gender equality plans identify the under-representation of minority ethnic trustees and tutors in its workforce and the actions already taken to rectify this area for improvement.

16. The contribution of volunteers to the WEA is significant. Well-established systems for scrutiny ensure they participate very effectively in decision making. Regional branches, which depend on the work of volunteers, often offer courses in areas with no other provision that would be unviable without volunteers' input. The WEA applies democratic principles to appoint all regional committee members and officers. Trustees have a wide range of skills and experience, which they use very effectively to the benefit of the association.

17. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. The WEA carries out the appropriate checks on all staff working with vulnerable adults and with young people.

18. Arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning are satisfactory. Managers, observers and tutors all have specific guidance on the scheme. Observation records are detailed and the frequency of observations is appropriate. Where observers identify areas for improvement, they follow them up with appropriate action plans and monitoring. The grading of some observations is too generous. Moderation meetings in some regions identify between a quarter and one third of grades awarded as too high. Although managers always feedback to observers this is not the case with tutors. The most recent self-assessment report is accurate in its judgements.

19. The implementation of arrangements to recognise and record progress and achievement on non-accredited courses is satisfactory overall. Managers monitor the development of assessment processes closely and some tutors have developed very effective assessment strategies. Effective practice is not sufficiently consistent across regions and curriculum areas. The WEA has yet to develop a satisfactory alternative to retention rates to provide reliable performance data on non-accredited achievements.

20. The WEA has appropriate arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support. The skills for life strategy is articulated well and has clear targets for learners on discrete courses, as well as an appropriately inclusive vision. The strategy does not explain the arrangements to support other learners in sufficient detail.

21. The WEA does not have adequate formal processes to capture and share good practice systematically. Staff exchange experiences and good practice informally and often, but there are few arrangements in place to share good practice in a more structured way. National dissemination is weak.

What learners like:

- 'Accessible venues'
- 'It feels like one big family' – the friendly and supportive tutors
- 'Childcare is important' – the good arrangements to support learners with children
- 'Starting on a part-time course led me to a new career' – the opportunity to progress to further training and employment
- 'My course has been a life-changing experience' – the positive effect that learning has on learners' lives
- 'I love coming to talk to others in English' – the social benefits of attending courses
- 'It is very important to thank the WEA for giving us the chance to participate in the community'

What learners think could improve:

- 'I would like a certificate at the end of my course' – the opportunity to gain recognition on non-accredited courses
- 'I wish the room was warmer' – the accommodation at some venues
- 'I was not sent a prospectus' – the arrangements to promote courses
- 'Some outlying branches feel neglected'
- 'The access to computers' – the learning resources at some centres

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care

Outstanding: Grade 1

Context

22. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,884 learners enrolled on 168 courses in health and care. In 2006/07, 8,738 learners enrolled on 1,085 programmes, accounting for almost 15% of the WEA's total provision. Most of the learners are aged between 25 and 45 years and 85% are women. Eighteen per cent of the learners have a physical disability and 46% are in receipt of income-related benefits. The WEA employs 172 part-time tutors and six full-time tutors to deliver the provision in this curriculum area. The main focus of the work is personal development, the improvement of learners' physical and mental health and the preparation of learners for employment through 'Helping in Schools' courses. Courses take place mainly in settings used for community involvement and health improvement. Most of the provision is non-accredited.

Strengths

- Excellent development of learners' confidence, health and wellbeing
- Very good teaching and learning
- Highly flexible and responsive range of courses
- Very good support for learners
- Very good leadership and management
- Very strong collaborative partnerships to promote inclusion

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient development of a formal progression framework

Achievement and standards

23. Achievement and standards are outstanding. The development of learners' confidence, health and wellbeing is excellent. Many learners experience considerable measurable improvements in their health and wellbeing, which tutors record in detail on non-accredited courses. Tutors monitor learners' personal targets on exercise programmes once a month and pass this information to learners' link health professionals from their Primary Care Trust. Learners understand the health measurements applied to them and the implications for their own, and their families', health. Staff encourage learners to become reflective practitioners. Learners on the 'Helping in Schools' programmes write detailed learning diaries that evaluate their personal learning accurately. The standard of learners' written work is very good.
24. Success rates are very high on non-accredited courses. They have improved from 93% in 2004/05 to 95% in 2006/07. Success rates on the small number of accredited courses are satisfactory at 69% for last year. Many learners progress to become learning mentors and voluntary community workers.

Quality of provision

25. The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are very good, as identified in self-assessment. Tutors plan detailed schemes of work well and take careful account of learners' individual needs and different levels of physical ability. Staff are very enthusiastic and well motivated. They value and respect all learners highly and create an extremely positive learning environment. Tutors use a wide range of teaching and assessment methods to deliver classes that are well paced, active and interesting. Tutors explain, and refer to, learning outcomes frequently during learning sessions. They take physical measurements to confirm and reinforce learning and to demonstrate the achievement of personal learning outcomes. Staff respond sensitively to learners' individual questions during exercise classes without causing disruption to the remainder of the group. Initial assessment is very good, as is the assessment of learners' health and safety. The recognition and reporting of personal achievements on non-accredited courses are thorough.
26. The choice of programmes and activities to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The range of courses is highly flexible and responsive, as identified in the self-assessment report. The WEA recruits learners with little or no previous experience and raises their aspirations very successfully. There are single sex groups for people wishing to support victims of domestic violence and an extensive range of programmes for learners with specific health needs, such as multiple sclerosis and mental health conditions. The WEA targets many of

its courses at under-represented groups, for example, the long-term unemployed and homeless people. Courses take place at times that are very convenient for learners with families. School placement arrangements for learners on 'Helping in Schools' programmes are very good. Learning venues are close to main transport routes and are very accessible. Many have good facilities for refreshments and for learners to socialise in groups. The development of a formal progression framework is insufficient. Much of the learners' progression relies on the informal efforts of individual tutors.

27. Support for learners is very good. The encouragement given to learners to join courses is extensive. Staff telephone learners before they enrol to ensure they join courses at the right level. Support continues throughout learners' courses and upon completion when staff assist learners to progress to further training and/or employment. Head teachers and health professionals use their expertise very well to provide specialist support in partnership with tutors. The good arrangements for childcare allow many learners with young families to participate in courses.

Leadership and management

28. Leadership and management are very good. Self-assessment identifies strong leadership and management of change. Regional managers provide clear strategic direction to ensure that they meet targets and the provision complements that of other providers in local communities. The provision has a very clearly identified purpose. Curriculum managers meet regularly to monitor quality improvement and to analyse performance data. Staff in curriculum group meetings review course outlines, tutor reports, health and safety and learner support requests carefully. Observations of teaching and learning are comprehensive and accurate. When observers identify areas for improvement and development needs, they monitor tutors performance carefully. Staff share good practice effectively. The self-assessment process is comprehensive, self-critical and evaluative and identifies the key strengths and areas for improvement accurately. Managers use evidence from a wide range of sources to make judgements.
29. Partnerships to promote inclusion are very strong. The WEA has very good collaborative working relationships with a wide range of voluntary and government bodies. Healthcare organisations work closely with staff to provide a coherent referral system and supportive learning opportunities. The partnerships offer particularly good opportunities to increase awareness and skills to support women experiencing domestic violence, good support for the frail elderly people, adults at risk of diabetes and coronary heart disease and those recovering from drug and substance misuse.

Arts, media and publishing

Good: Grade 2

Context

30. Arts, media and publishing is the largest area of provision with 10,317 learners enrolled on 846 courses at the time of the inspection. In 2006/07, there were 22,693 learners on just over 3,000 programmes, accounting for almost 25% of the total provision. The distribution of the provision varies across the nine regions with five of them delivering almost 80% of the courses. Forty per cent of learners are aged 65 years or more and 77% are women. Approximately 40% of the learners last year were new to learning. Most of the provision is non-accredited and includes creative writing, art in the ancient world, calligraphy, life drawing, stained glass and painting for beginners. Four full-time tutors and 563 part-time tutors teach in this area of learning. Each area team has a curriculum area leader to manage the provision and a tutor organiser who monitors courses and observes teaching and learning.

Strengths

- Good development of learners' skills
- Good teaching and learning
- Very good celebration of learners' work and achievements
- Good collaborative work with partners

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient standardisation of quality improvement processes
- Poor resources at some venues

Achievement and standards

31. Achievement and standards are good. Learners develop good skills. In stained glass classes, learners who have recently started their course are already accepting commissions for their work. Learners on a creative writing course sell their work for publication. In practical art, learners have good observational drawing skills and perception. Many learners choose to complete additional work at home, ranging from further research to more practice to perfect their skills. Learners are highly motivated and many consider classes to be the highlight of their week. Retention rates are high. Group visits to art galleries and museums provide valuable cultural links and enrich learners' lives. Attendance is satisfactory, as is the success rate on the very small number of accredited courses.

Quality of provision

32. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good, as identified through self-assessment. Tutors have extensive specialist knowledge and many are skilled practising professionals. They use their experience very well in the classroom where learners benefit from their knowledge of current methods and levels of expertise. Tutors have high expectations of learners and lessons are vibrant and challenging. They set targets and use well planned activities to stretch more capable learners. Learners are able to identify the progress they make and enjoy the professional and stimulating interactions they have with tutors. The use of information learning technology (ILT) as a teaching resource is insufficient.

33. Assessment practices are satisfactory. Some tutors do not fully understand the importance of recognising and recording learners' achievements and do not monitor and measure their progress meaningfully. The recording of learners' initial assessments is not sufficiently thorough. Some tutors have devised their own feedback sheets to record learners' progress and achievements well, but do not share this good practice with other staff.

34. Programmes and activities meet the needs of learners' interests well. The celebration of learners' work and achievements is very good. It ranges from frequent exhibitions in every region to events to publicise the achievements and diversity of learners. 'Create 07', an arts festival that ran for a month, involved 650 learners in 120 different events, such as singing, dancing, music and art workshops.

35. Collaborative work with partners is good, as identified through self-assessment. Good partnerships exist with mental health and carer organisations and Asian women's groups. An art course run in collaboration with a residential home for elderly people led to an exhibition at a prestigious local art gallery. Some courses take place in collaboration with social services to help adults back into learning and with local universities to encourage progression to higher

education. The targeting of provision in areas of disadvantage and identified need is good. The WEA offers animation courses for learners with learning and/or physical disabilities in one region and staff combine these with local fundraising and arts funding to initiate new learning group partnerships. Learners with physical disabilities improve their keyboard skills through music classes and there are mime programmes for learners with Alzheimer's disease and other debilitating ailments. Work with learners with mental health conditions uses arts and crafts to develop their confidence.

36. Support and guidance for learners are satisfactory. Tutors provide appropriate individual support for adult learners and are skilled in identifying those learners who need further additional support. Good partnerships with social services and other external agencies enable learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate fully in courses.

Leadership and management

37. Leadership and management are good, as identified in the self-assessment report. Managers have implemented successful actions to improve the responsiveness of the provision. They communicate well with staff to inform them of new developments through regular meetings and newsletters. Monitoring of performance data is good. The standardisation of some quality improvement processes is insufficient. The judgements in some observations of teaching and learning do not support the grades and the written evidence is too general. The implementation of processes to recognise and record achievements varies too much across the different regions. Some key staff do not have personal development targets.
38. The resources at some venues are poor. Most accommodation is satisfactory, but some venues have cramped classrooms, which are untidy and unwelcoming. The specialist resources at some centres are inappropriate. In one class, the arrangements to darken the room to show slides were ineffective.

Humanities

Good: Grade 2

Context

39. Humanities is one of the largest curriculum areas. In 2006/07, 14,061 learners attended 1,131 courses in this sector subject area. Half of the provision takes place in the Yorkshire and Humber, Eastern and Southern regions. At the time of the inspection, 5,734 learners were enrolled on 336 programmes. Courses include local and family history, geography, philosophy, theology and archaeology. Almost 75% of the provision takes place in the week during the daytime, with a small number of programmes at the weekend. Seventy % of the learners are women and 90% are aged over 55. In 2006/07, 23% of the learners were new to learning. Less than 1% of the learners are from a minority ethnic group. Regional managers are responsible for 279 part-time tutors who deliver the provision.

Strengths

- High retention rates
- Good development of learners' skills and knowledge
- Much good teaching and learning
- Good professional development for tutors

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient focus on targeting some particular groups of learners

Achievement and standards

40. Achievement and standards are good. Retention rates are high, as identified in the self-assessment report. In 2006/07, the overall retention rate was 96% for this very large area of the

WEA's provision. Retention rates have been consistently high over the last five years. Attendance is satisfactory. The attendance rate during the week of the inspection was 75%.

41. Learners develop good skills and knowledge. On many courses, they carry out extensive research to learn much about family histories and local archaeology. Learners have access to a wide range of original source material. In one lesson, learners were able to interpret eighteenth century documents, such as wills, diaries and letters, through careful studies of photocopies of handwritten papers from the period. Many learners develop computing skills that enable them to work on their projects between classes. They work collaboratively and enrich peers' experiences through the good sharing of expertise. Learners use specialist terminology confidently and correctly. In philosophy classes, they develop the ability to analyse the meaning of complex texts critically, using appropriate language in their discussions and written work. Learners on a history course use their knowledge and presentation skills to become volunteer guides at local history sites.

Quality of provision

42. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good, as identified through self-assessment. Tutors are enthusiastic and experienced in teaching adult learners. They are well qualified and often renowned locally and/or nationally for their expertise. Most tutors develop a very good relationship with learners and encourage in-depth discussions. They use a good range of well planned learning activities, including worksheets, quizzes and group work. Tutors set challenging tasks for learners and encourage them successfully to reflect on their own experiences. They organise research activities on family history courses particularly well, with visits arranged to relevant museums, archives and public record offices. In a small number of learning sessions, tutors focus insufficiently on developing learners' individual skills and knowledge and rely too much on a narrow range of teaching methods.
43. The range of programmes and activities to meet learners' needs and interests is satisfactory. Many courses develop successfully from branch membership initiatives and have a strong focus on the needs of local communities. Enrichment opportunities for learners to develop their understanding further are good. The current provision provides good learning opportunities for older learners at times which suit them to attend learning. There is insufficient focus on targeting some particular groups of learners, including younger adults and people from a minority ethnic background. In 2007-08 to date 65% of learners were over 65 and learners from minority ethnic groups account for less than 1% of the total enrolments. The WEA has identified this area for improvement through self-assessment and has started to run cultural history courses to target under-represented groups of learners.

44. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Tutors provide good personal support to enable learners to progress and to achieve their learning targets. Staff identify learners with particular support needs early in their course and tutor organisers arrange appropriate equipment and/or additional support. Course leaflets and prospectuses provide learners with sufficient information about programmes and their content.

Leadership and management

45. Leadership and management are good, as identified through self-assessment. Curriculum area leaders in each region provide good support for part-time tutors. The arrangements to evaluate courses and the quality of teaching and learning are thorough. Managers identify actions to improve the quality of the provision and monitor the outcomes. They use data well to plan the provision.

46. Accommodation and resources are appropriate, but access to computers is insufficient at some venues. Partnerships are productive with a range of organisations, including museums, public records offices and local history clubs. The self-assessment process is accurate and provides clear judgements, which match those of the inspectors.

47. Professional development for tutors is good. Part-time staff take part in an extensive range of training opportunities, including events on course planning, using ILT and improving teaching methods. Training takes place at times to suit tutors and the attendance at all events is good. The sharing of good practice is an important feature of training and tutors are able to identify the benefits of training in the quality and variety of their teaching.

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

48. Literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses account for a significant and growing proportion of the WEA's total provision. At the time of the inspection, 2,641 learners were enrolled on 294 courses. In 2006/07, 11,191 learners studied on 1,973 programmes. ESOL courses account for 76% of the skills for life provision. Classes take place in a range of venues, such as schools, community centres and employers' premises. The WEA offers courses in preparation for life and work generally from pre-entry level to level 2, including literacy, numeracy, ESOL, study skills, return to learn and life skills. Seventy-four per cent of the learners are new and many come from particular target groups, including ex-offenders, homeless people and learners recovering from mental health conditions. Women and learners from minority ethnic groups account for 76% and 53% of the enrolments, respectively. Just over one-third of the provision is accredited.

Strengths

- High retention rates
- Good development of learners' skills
- Highly effective partnerships
- Good recent strategies for improvement

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient planning to meet individual learner needs
- Insufficient recording of learners' progress

Achievement and standards

49. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Retention rates are high for the large numbers of learners in this curriculum area. In 2006/07, the overall retention rate was 91% and the attendance rate during the week of the inspection was good. The monitoring of attendance is very effective and tutors challenge learners who do not attend or who are not punctual. Success rates are satisfactory and improving. In 2006/07, the overall success rate on accredited courses was 68% and this has improved in 2007/08 to date to 74%. The success rate on non-accredited courses was poor in 2006/07 at 55% as identified through self-assessment, but has improved to 78% in 2007/08 to date. Success rates on courses in the workplace are good.
50. Learners develop good skills and use them successfully in the workplace and in the communities where they live. They analyse their own performance and develop skills of self-correction and peer-correction in groups. Learners work hard and are extremely enthusiastic about their learning. Most learners improve their communication skills, which they find particularly useful in situations vital to their economic and social wellbeing.

Quality of provision

51. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, as identified through self-assessment. In the best lessons, tutors plan courses well to meet learners' individual needs and use topics which are relevant to learners' everyday experiences. Classes are lively and challenging tasks enable learners to demonstrate new skills effectively. Tutors encourage learners to practise new skills at home using a range of learning materials. Teaching accommodation is satisfactory and provides a welcoming environment for learning. Learning resources are appropriate overall, but the use of ILT to promote independent learning is insufficient. Learners do not have enough access to the internet and/or computing packages at some venues to enhance their learning. Paper-based learning resources are appropriate.
52. Planning to meet individual learner needs is insufficient, as identified in the self-assessment report. The arrangements for initial and diagnostic assessment are comprehensive and cover reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Staff negotiate individual learning plans with learners but do not use the plans routinely to plan lessons. Most tutors do not integrate learners' individual aims with course criteria when devising learning sessions. They plan for differentiation through a range of activities connected to a particular theme, but this does not identify in sufficient detail those learners who need to do certain tasks or take part in extension activities. Learners are not always aware of their individual targets and what they need to do to improve their skills. Some tutors do develop useful group profiles that summarise learners' targets, which they then use to plan lessons.

53. The recording of learners' progress is insufficient. Homework is an important part of most courses and tutors carry out assessments regularly. Assessment focuses too much on the completion of set activities and not enough on the skills that learners develop. Learners receive constructive verbal feedback about their progress in classes, but learners and staff do not record this sufficiently often.
54. The range of programmes and activities to meet learners' needs and interests is good. Partnerships are highly effective, particularly with trade unions, employers, health centres and schools. The good partnership working enables staff to identify new provision, particularly in disadvantaged communities and to find suitable accommodation and to develop progression routes. Many courses promote cultural awareness well and take account of learners' cultural and religious backgrounds. The development of programmes with employers, which have a strong focus on employability, is good. Partners provide crèches and assist in the promotion of programmes. Courses take place at times and venues that suit learners' needs.
55. Guidance and support are satisfactory. The arrangements for induction are thorough and initial advice and guidance are appropriate. Some courses have useful specialist pre-entry advice sessions. Staff have improved attendance rates through some good monitoring of learners' attendance and punctuality. Tutors have a good knowledge of learners' strengths and areas for improvement and support them accordingly.

Leadership and management

56. Leadership and management are good. Managers have implemented good recent strategies for improvement, as identified through self-assessment. The strategy for the development of the provision is clear, using local plans that implement national and local strategies effectively. The WEA has developed clear arrangements for the management of literacy, numeracy and ESOL and communication is good. Enrolments have increased and success rates have improved. A significant amount of the provision is now accredited to meet learners' needs and national targets set by the LSC. Tutors share good practice through staff meetings.
57. Staff are well qualified and take part in a staff development programme. All staff receive appropriate training on equality and diversity. Managers use data appropriately to monitor and plan the provision and tutors at all levels have a good understanding of data. Staff contribute usefully to self-assessment and the most recent report identifies many of the strengths and areas for improvement accurately. The grade given by inspectors matches that in the self-assessment report.

Community learning

Good: Grade 2

Context

58. The WEA does not identify community learning as a separate area of work, but has introduced the title 'Second Chance to Learn' in 2007/08 as one of its three educational strands to identify courses that meet the needs and interests of learners who are new to learning or who have not taken part in any formal education for a considerable period of time. The WEA manages these courses through its curriculum areas, such as health, public services and care and arts, media and publishing. Courses include short and introductory programmes in health and personal development, ICT, crafts, confidence-building, interpreting skills, family history and courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They take place in community venues, such as church halls, community centres, schools and the WEA's own learning centres. At the time of the inspection, 8,126 learners were enrolled on 731 courses identified as community learning programmes. In 2006/07, there were 3,500 courses. Most programmes run for between eight and 12 weeks, and approximately 10% of the provision is accredited.

Strengths

- High retention rates
- Good development of learners' confidence and practical skills
- Much good teaching and learning
- Highly responsive and flexible provision
- Very good individual support for learners

Areas for improvement

- Insufficiently rigorous recording of progress on non-accredited courses
- Insufficiently developed aspects of the strategy for community learning

Achievement and standards

59. Achievement and standards are good, as are retention rates. In 2006/07, the retention rates on accredited and non-accredited courses were 91% and 94%, respectively.
60. Learners develop good levels of confidence and practical skills, which have a positive effect on their lives. They acquire good ICT skills. Older learners become less isolated as they use email to keep in touch with their families and friends, or shop and pay bills online. Asian women become confident enough to design and make their own clothes. They enjoy meeting other local women to talk about Asian fashions and culture. Women on confidence-building courses become more assertive in dealing with domestic violence issues. Many learners adopt healthier lifestyles through health and fitness programmes. There are many examples of learners who progress to further training, or to become volunteers or tutors.

Quality of provision

61. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. For most learners, their time with the WEA provides them with their first positive experience of learning. Much of the teaching is lively and reflects Learners' diverse individual needs. The range of activities is very stimulating in many classes. Learners participate actively in lessons and learn from each other. Some tutors speak a number of minority languages, which helps many learners to develop their language skills. Tutors reinforce health and safety continually in practical sessions. A few classes lack challenge for some learners and the use of ILT is insufficient. A small number of venues do not have access to the internet, but staff use laptops effectively to supplement ICT equipment in outreach centres.
62. The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support are satisfactory, as is initial assessment. Staff refer many learners to appropriate skills for life tutors before enrolling them on community learning courses or provide the support themselves in classes.
63. The recording of learners' progress and achievement on non-accredited courses is insufficiently rigorous. Staff do not always record the outcomes of initial assessment thoroughly. Learners keep diaries to record the activities they have completed, but tutors do not record the skills that learners gain. Some records are blank or tutors do not complete them until the final learning session. Where tutors do demonstrate good practice in monitoring learners' progress and achievements, arrangements to share it with other staff are under-developed.

64. The focus on meeting the needs and interests of learners is particularly strong. The provision is highly flexible and responsive. The WEA targets specific disadvantaged and marginalised priority groups successfully, such as lone parents, travellers, people from a minority ethnic background, women's groups and adults with a disability or mental health condition. It works very effectively with a wide range of partners and agencies to provide an extensive range of courses. Course timings and attendance patterns are very flexible to suit learners' personal lifestyles and many centres offer drop-in facilities. Most community venues have good accessibility for people with restricted mobility, but some accommodation is cramped and poorly maintained.

65. Support for individual learners is very good. Learners respond well to the empathy which tutors show. Many of the staff have progressed into their current role from WEA courses and act as inspirational role models to learners. The very good support extends beyond lessons, as staff have excellent contacts with external agencies. In many lessons, tutors make good use of adaptive technology, volunteer helpers, signers and learning support workers to assist learners. Learners receive financial assistance with fees, transport and childcare. The provision of appropriate information and advice before and near to the end of courses helps most learners to make well informed choices about progression.

Leadership and management

66. Leadership and management are good. Curriculum management is good and courses are organised well through very effective teamwork. Tutors are highly experienced and well qualified in their subject. Part-time tutors take part in a wide range of good staff development activities, which focus on teaching and learning. Communication is good through team meetings and the wide range of information available on the WEA's intranet. The observation of teaching and learning process is well established and reliable. Staff seek learners' views actively and use them to improve the provision. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The arrangements to recruit under-represented groups of learners are very good. Staff celebrate learners' success well, but do not always identify good attendance and achievements formally on non-accredited courses.

67. Some aspects of the community learning strategy are insufficiently developed. Managers do not yet understand fully the breadth of the community learning provision or the links between different types of progress. The WEA has been slow to identify formally the effect of the introduction of the 'Second Chance to Learn' strand. Performance data is imprecise and managers have insufficient knowledge of important aspects of the provision, such as progression rates. Some staff do not have a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. They do not share good practice in teaching and the recording of progress routinely.

© Crown copyright 2012

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

68. The WEA does not write a separate self-assessment report for this area of its work, but inspectors identified many of the strengths and areas for improvement from the relevant sections of the sector subject area reports. Managers understand the self-assessment process well, but many part-time tutors are not involved and are not clear about action plans in their particular subject area.

© Crown copyright 2012

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.