

INSPECTION REPORT

Bedfordshire and Luton Education Business Partnership

21 October 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

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

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

| SEVEN-POINT SCALE | FIVE-POINT SCALE |
|-------------------|------------------|
| grade 1 | grade 1 |
| grade 2 | |
| grade 3 | grade 2 |
| grade 4 | grade 3 |
| grade 5 | grade 4 |
| grade 6 | grade 5 |
| grade 7 | |

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- work-based training for all people 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.

Overall judgement

In those cases where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Bedfordshire and Luton Education Business Partnership provides Life Skills training programmes for young people to help them return to education, training and employment. It subcontracts the Life Skills training to other training organisations. It manages the provision from its offices in Ampthill in Bedfordshire. There are currently 37 learners on Life Skills training programmes.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically the quality of training in Life Skills is satisfactory. Bedfordshire and Luton Education Business Partnership's leadership and management are unsatisfactory, as is the quality assurance of the training programme. The provision of equality of opportunity is satisfactory

GRADES

| Leadership and management | 4 |
|---------------------------|---|
| Contributory grades: | |
| Equality of opportunity | 3 |
| Quality assurance | 4 |

| Foundation programmes | 3 |
|-----------------------|---|
| Contributory grades: | |
| Life Skills | 3 |

KEY STRENGTHS

- good working relationships with subcontractors' and Connexions' staff
- effective initiatives to widen participation
- good learner support
- good range of training activities

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor management of Life Skills training programmes
- ineffective quality assurance arrangements
- inadequate literacy and numeracy support
- poor planning of training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of learners' activities

THE INSPECTION

1. Three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at the Bedfordshire and Luton Education Business Partnership (BLEBP) in October 2002. They met 24 learners and conducted interviews with five staff. Inspectors visited five subcontractors in Bedfordshire and Luton and interviewed 14 employees, trainers and workplace supervisors. They met two staff from the Connexions service. Inspectors observed and graded six learning sessions. They also observed assessments and progress reviews, examined a range of portfolios of evidence, 13 individual learning files and learners' personal records. Inspectors examined BLEBP's plans, policies and procedures, management information and minutes of meetings. They also studied the self-assessment report, which was produced in August 2002, and the development plan.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

| | Grade 1 | Grade 2 | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Total |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Foundation programmes | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Total | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. BLEBP is a company limited by guarantee, currently working with young people aged four to 19 years of age. It was founded in 1993 and acts as a brokerage for education business link activities across Bedfordshire and Luton. Its work is overseen by a board of directors. There are 17 full-time and one part-time member of staff. BLEBP regularly uses consultants to help its staff. BLEBP has a contract for Life Skills training with Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council (LSC). BLEBP has been involved in working with providers of Life Skills training since April 2001. The provision is managed from its Ampthill office. There are currently 37 learners. BLEBP employs a Life Skills co-ordinator to manage the Life Skills programme. The training is managed by five subcontractors. Learners normally stay on the training programme for 13 weeks and receive at least 16 hours of training each week. Most learners on the Life Skills training programme are aged between 16-18.

3. The population of Bedfordshire and Luton is approximately 580,000. In May 2002, the unemployment rate in Luton was 4.0 per cent and in Bedfordshire was 3.0 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.0 per cent. Employment in Luton comprises mainly construction, production, retailing and property services. The 1991 census shows that 19.8 per cent of the population in Luton are from minority ethnic groups compared with 6.2 per cent nationally, and 5.19 per cent of the population in Bedfordshire are from minority ethnic groups. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grades C or above, was 38.1 per cent in Luton and 49.2 per cent in Bedfordshire, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Life Skills

4. Life Skills training provision is satisfactory. High levels of individual support assists learners to overcome personal and social problems and progress towards their career aims. The subcontractors offer some good resources. Learners benefit from the central locations of the subcontractors. A good range of external visits supports the learners' programme. There are good retention rates. Some learners are able to achieve nationally recognised qualifications for information technology (IT) and literacy and numeracy.

5. Individual learning plans produced by subcontractors are not effectively linked to development plans prepared by Connexions personal advisers, and they do not have realistic milestones for measuring learners' progress and are not always kept up to date. There is little session planning or schemes of work and learners do not have timetables that clearly show attendance days, start and finish times and descriptions of learning sessions. There is inadequate literacy and numeracy support for those learners identified as having additional needs. Most subcontractors' staff do not have the training necessary to effectively manage literacy and numeracy support.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**Grade 4**

6. BLEBP is a company limited by guarantee, which provides Life Skills training programmes for young people. The training programmes operate in Bedford, Luton and Dunstable. The management team comprises the executive director and three managers. Each manager is responsible for key strands of the company's business. There are 17 full-time and one part-time member of staff working across all areas of the company. A Life Skills co-ordinator manages the Life Skills programmes and is supported by a business administration advanced modern apprentice. The co-ordinator reports directly to the executive director. BLEBP holds the Investor in People award, a national standard for improving an company's performance through its people. It has also gained accreditation against other relevant quality standards. The Life Skills programmes are subcontracted to five organisations. Contracting arrangements are in place. Four out of the five subcontractors have started providing the Life Skills programme in the last 18 months. Each subcontractor has a manager, trainers and support staff. BLEBP has an equal opportunities policy and a quality assurance policy statement. The self-assessment report used was produced in August 2002, and was an update of the first self-assessment report produced by BLEBP.

STRENGTHS

- good working relationships with subcontractors' and Connexions' staff
- effective initiatives to widen participation

WEAKNESSES

- poor management of Life Skills programmes
- ineffective quality assurance arrangements
- inadequate target-setting
- insufficient analysis and use of data
- insufficiently thorough self-assessment

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better management of meetings

7. There are good working relationships with subcontractors and Connexions. Staff have regular monthly meetings with their subcontractors and make frequent contact using e-mail and telephone. Staff are able to deal effectively with relevant problems and issues. Staff work effectively with learners' personal advisers to develop effective training programmes and provide appropriate support.

8. Management of the Life Skills training programme is poor. BLEBP's core business is based on annual projects. The current annual business plan was written in December

2001. At this time, BLEBP was unsure of its future commitment to the provision of Life Skills. The Life Skills training programmes are identified in the annual business plan, but there is no reference to the learning and support requirements of the learners. There is a reference to targets which reflect the number of learners who will start on the programme. There are no plans which identify the development needs of the subcontractors. For example, there are no arrangements in place to ensure that subcontractors have appropriately qualified staff. There are no clear links between business plans and quality assurance arrangements for the Life Skills programme. This was not identified in the self-assessment report. The management style is open, internal communications are mainly informal, and staff have good working relationships with managers. Managers do not fully understand the needs of the Life Skills provision. An administrator has been employed to provide relevant support, and the Life Skills co-ordinator has recently joined an internal team to inform them about Life Skills and help them provide support. The small management team meet monthly to discuss the company's business. A summary of their meetings is published on the company's intranet. The requirements of the Life Skills programme are not identified and performance is not monitored or reviewed at these meetings.

9. There is a comprehensive staff manual, which includes terms and conditions of employment, and a staff handbook, which contains staff policies and procedures. There is an annual staff appraisal programme, and a review of progress every six months. The review and appraisal programme helps to identify training needs linked to the business objectives. The business plan emphasises the importance of training, coaching and mentoring to meet business objectives. Approximately 5 per cent of the company's budget is allocated to training. Subcontractors are regularly informed of opportunities for training. As a result, some subcontractors have made improvements to their Life Skills provision, including improvements to their health and safety arrangements. There is an inconsistent approach to how subcontractors use the training to benefit the learners.

10. Since April 2000, the company has had a system for data management. The system for collecting data to monitor progress against the local LSC contract has been developed by BLEBP. A new system has recently been purchased following requirement changes by the local LSC. It is not yet fully functional. Manual records are complete. Management information is not used regularly to guide action-planning by staff or subcontractors, or decision-making by managers. Data on retention and achievement and equality of opportunity are not routinely used for comparative purposes. This was not identified in the self-assessment report.

11. Agendas are not used at all meetings with subcontractors. Meetings generally examine the issues of the day and do not tackle the interests of learners, contract compliance or improvements to training. Notes of meetings, and any agreed actions from points raised at the meetings, are not always shared with subcontractors. A meetings book has recently been introduced for use by staff when meeting with subcontractors.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

12. All staff are committed to providing effective Life Skills training for young people with a wide range of personal and social needs. Subcontractors are chosen for their ability to work with this type of learner and for the innovative and motivating training programmes they provide. Some subcontractors have not been involved with training before and receive considerable support from BLEBP. All subcontractors have an open recruitment policy. It was identified that there was no Life Skills provision for young pregnant learners and as a result, a young mums to be (YMTB) course is running in both Luton and Dunstable. Funding has recently been made available to run a similar course in Bedford. Other gaps in provision have been identified, such as the need for practical courses in the east and west of the county. BLEBP is currently examining ways to meet these needs.

13. BLEBP has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy for its staff. This identifies the different types of discrimination and, in practical terms, states how the company is going to carry out the policy. The five subcontractors all have their own policies which relate to their own staff and learners. Many of these policies include references to confidentiality and support for learners who may have specific needs. BLEBP checks the policy when a subcontractor has a new contract. As a consequence of self-assessment, there has been equal opportunities training for subcontractors' staff. This was a series of seven half-day workshops covering a wide range of equal opportunities issues. One of the subcontractors has followed up this training by updating and extending their equal opportunities policy.

14. Some of the subcontractors' premises have training rooms on the first and second floors with no lifts to allow access for those with restricted mobility. This has been discussed with the local LSC health and safety officer, especially for subcontractors which run the YMTB courses. Additional notices have been put up reminding people to take extra care. There are no examples of any learners being unable to attend the Life Skills programmes because of this lack of access.

15. There is not enough ongoing formal monitoring of equal opportunities at the subcontractors. There are regular visits, and discussions take place with both staff and learners, but do not always include equal opportunities. Most learners are based at the subcontractors for all of their training programme and come under the individual subcontractor's equal opportunities policy. Some subcontractors carry out their own monitoring. Data on gender and ethnicity is collected and has been analysed to identify numbers and percentages. The information has not been used to identify specific issues or good practice. No further analysis has taken place.

16. All of the subcontractors have handbooks which are used at induction and given to the learners as an ongoing reference document. The language in many of these handbooks is complex and of a high-reading age. Many of the learners have been assessed as having additional learning needs in literacy and are therefore unable to make full use of these documents.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

17. There is a staff handbook which includes a quality assurance policy. Subcontractors do not fully understand their obligations to improve their provision. BLEBP has some quality assurance arrangements in place. They have recently updated some work instructions to help subcontractors manage their provision, but these do not provide sufficient focus on quality assurance arrangements. There are audit arrangements in place to check for the completion of records. Subcontractors are re-audited if their risk is assessed as medium or high. There is some observation of training sessions, but it is not yet systematic or sufficiently detailed to provide staff with helpful feedback or development and training plans. Progress reviews have not been observed. Although BLEBP provides subcontractors with examples of good practice, this arrangement does not lead to systematic continuous improvement.

18. BLEBP staff meet with 25 per cent of learners each year to evaluate their training programme. A satisfaction questionnaire is given to some learners at the end of their training programme. The data generated from these activities are not reviewed by the learners and are not used to improve the training programmes. Some training providers use their own questionnaires. The results are not shared. Subcontractors do not provide formal feedback.

19. All subcontractors completed their own self-assessment report in December 2001. Most subcontractors found this process helpful. One subcontractor has completed a six-month update of their self-assessment report for their own purposes and uses their own targets to review progress. BLEBP prepared their first self-assessment report in January 2002. It was based on the findings of the subcontractors' reports. BLEBP produced an updated self-assessment report in August 2002, in preparation for inspection. This report contains helpful information, but does not identify a number of weaknesses, and inspectors awarded lower grades for foundation training and leadership and management. There are development plans attached to each report. There has been progress in rectifying the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report produced in January 2002. BLEBP does not set targets on retention and achievement rates or progression, to monitor the effectiveness of the services the subcontractors provide, or to improve performance.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Foundation programmes

Grade 3

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Life Skills | 37 | 3 |

20. BLEBP manages a range of subcontracted Life Skills training programmes in Bedfordshire and Luton. There are 37 learners currently on Life Skills training programmes. All learners are referred to these subcontractors by personal advisers. Subcontractors are located in Luton, Dunstable and Bedford, and provide training for young pregnant women, courses in music mixing which includes training as a disc jockey, information technology, sports and music, home insulation, basic skills, and health awareness. All subcontractors also provide training in personal development, letter writing, constructing a curriculum vitae, and jobsearch activities. All learners complete an induction at their subcontractor at the start of their training programme. Some learners are initially assessed by Connexions' staff before starting their training, and some are assessed during their induction. The training programmes last for 13 weeks and learners attend for a minimum of 16 hours each week.

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

| Work-based learning for young people | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---|---------|---|---------|----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| Life Skills | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | 2000-01 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Number of starts | 43 | | 179 | | 105 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 5 | | 85 | | 85 | 81 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 43 | | 43 | 41 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 37 | | 0 | | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

STRENGTHS

- good learner support
- good range of training activities
- good retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate literacy and numeracy support
- poor planning of training
- no systematic progress reviews

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of learners' activities
- better recording of learners' attendance at many subcontractors

21. All learners receive good individual support. Subcontractors provide effective help for learners to tackle personal and social problems. Staff help learners progress towards their career aims. At one subcontractor, a particularly successful mentoring programme is in place, and at another subcontractor, a youth worker uses the subcontractor as a base to enable him to maximise contact time with learners. Both group and individual support is provided during learning sessions. Learners acquire a range of skills to improve their employment prospects. These include jobsearch skills, writing a curriculum vitae, and completing job application forms. Learners also have time to develop their IT skills. Subcontractors' staff also offer support in situations that are not part of the Life Skills training programmes. For example, one member of staff regularly uses the subcontractor's vehicle to transport learners for interviews or go to other locations that may be difficult to reach by public transport. Some subcontractors offer learners incentives to attend regularly. One subcontractor gives learners book and record tokens to reward good timekeeping. Personal advisers are required to carry out progress reviews and they visit learners frequently to provide support. They have good working relationships with subcontractors and learners. Personal advisors fully understand learners' needs and offer full support for training programme extensions when appropriate. Visiting speakers are used by subcontractors to give presentations on a range of relevant topics, including drug awareness, sexual health and depression.

22. There is a good range of training activities which tackle learners individual needs. Learners develop teambuilding, personal and social skills by participating in structured group activities. For example, one very successful session involved virtual babies for which each learner had to take responsibility. Subcontractors provide some good resources. Learners benefit from the central locations of the subcontractors. However, access is difficult for learners with mobility difficulties, as none of the sessions are on the ground floor. Learners develop increased awareness on health and employment issues from visiting speakers and by access to gym facilities provided by two subcontractors. Another subcontractor provides driving lessons for all learners that are eligible. There is a good range of external visits. Some learners have taken part in work experience tasters. Some learners are taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and can link their activities on their Life Skills training programme to gain accreditation on the

scheme.

23. There are good retention rates. In 2001-02, 70 per cent of learners completed their time on their training programme. In the same year, 37 per cent of learners progressed into full-time education, training or employment with training, with 22 per cent of these learners still in training. Some learners are able to achieve nationally recognised qualifications for IT and literacy and numeracy. Some learners progress from their training programmes into jobs.

24. Some learners do not complete a structured formal assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. Some learners are assessed by Connexions staff while on the Learning Gateway and the outcome is recorded in the learners' individual development plan. Most subcontractors do not carry out any formal initial assessment. Where either Connexions or the subcontractor has carried out an initial assessment, the results are not recorded on the individual learning plan. There is inadequate literacy and numeracy support for those learners identified as having additional needs, and there are no details of how additional support will be given or progress reviewed. Most subcontractors' staff are not qualified to provide effective literacy and numeracy support. This was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. There are not enough suitable learning materials to cater for the wide range of abilities within the groups. Learning materials are not linked to learners' other activities. Some materials are reproduced poorly and contain spelling mistakes.

25. There is poor planning of training. Some subcontractors do not include activities specifically designed to improve learners' progression on completion of their training programme. Individual learning plans produced by subcontractors are not sufficiently detailed and are not systematically kept up to date. They are not always relevant to the learners' individual needs and do not have realistic targets set to measure progress. Action points recorded in learners' individual development plans, which are completed by personal advisers are not linked to the individual learning plans produced by subcontractors. Training plans do not include all aspects of learners' activities. There are not enough session planning or schemes of work. Subcontractors do not produce timetables for learners that clearly show attendance days, start and finish times and descriptions of learning sessions. There is some poor management of learning sessions. Learners' timekeeping is not always monitored thoroughly and times for coffee and lunch breaks are not always clearly defined.

26. There are no systematic progress reviews. Some subcontractors rely on progress reviews carried out by Connexions personal advisers. These reviews are not sufficiently detailed and focus mainly on pastoral issues. Some subcontractors only record progress in terms of the themes of their training programme. For example, one subcontractor records progress towards the completion of modules concerned with music mixing and another concentrates on the YMTB curriculum. These subcontractors do not review progress in terms of the whole Life Skills programme. Some agreed action points on progress reviews do not focus on realistic progress targets. Some action points, for example, are recorded as work towards gaining employment, and continue your Life

Skills programme. There is not enough measurement of learners' progress while on the training programme or sufficient co-ordination between progress reviews carried out by personal advisers and subcontractors' staff.

27. Currently, learners leave their Life Skills programme with in-house certificates which record their attendance and participation. Learners do not produce portfolios of evidence of the range of activities they have completed while on the training programme, or the progress they have made in developing employment, social and other skills. Some subcontractors do not have formal arrangements to record the attendance of learners and rely on learners to sign themselves in and out.

Good Practice

There is an excellent use of voluntary mentors at one subcontractor. Following an advertisement in a local paper, 22 people have taken part in training to become a mentor. All learners have been allocated a trained mentor. Timetabled sessions are organised each Friday for learners to meet with their mentor.

A learner did not successful gain admission into the army. The learner was told that he lacked leadership qualities. He was given an extension to his Life Skills programme and used this time to complete a community leader award and to organise a big event. As a result of this training and experience he was accepted into the army when he reapplied.