

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Luton Borough Council**

**05 November 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
- **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 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

Luton Borough Council is a unitary local authority. Since April 2001 it has contracted directly for work-based learning provision with Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council. Currently there are one advanced modern apprentice, 11 foundation modern apprentices and one learner on other work-based learning programmes in business administration. Training is also provided in horticulture, motor vehicle, construction, information and communications technology, care, and sport, but these areas were not inspected due to the low numbers of learners. There are five learners on other work-based learning programmes. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to local training providers and through distance learning.

### Overall judgement

The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Work-based learning in business administration is outstanding. Leadership and management and equality of opportunity are outstanding and quality assurance is good.

### GRADES

<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>1</b>
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	1
Quality assurance	2

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>	<b>1</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	1

### KEY STRENGTHS

- well-planned, comprehensive training programme
- effective continuous improvement
- comprehensive equal opportunities strategy and implementation plan
- thorough and effective monitoring of subcontractors
- good retention, achievement and progression
- outstanding individual support for learners
- well-integrated on- and off-the-job training
- thorough and effective progress review process

**KEY WEAKNESSES**

- inadequate recording of quality assurance arrangements
- insufficient long-term assessment planning

**OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- more specific targets on development plan

## THE INSPECTION

1. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at Luton Borough Council (LBC) in November 2002. They visited 11 work placements and interviewed 23 learners, 11 workplace supervisors and five members of staff. They interviewed four training subcontractors. They observed four learning sessions, one assessment and four progress reviews. Inspectors examined records of assessments, learners' portfolios of evidence, individual learning plans, internal verification records, learners' and employers' agreements and files, and feedback sheets. They also studied external verifiers' reports, statistics, minutes of meetings, records of staff training and development, policies and procedures and strategic planning documents. Inspectors examined the self-assessment report, which was produced in August 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>

## THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

### Context

2. LBC is a unitary local authority and has supported youth training initiatives since 1983. Since April 2001 it has contracted directly for work-based learning provision with Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The contract is managed by the Prospects Training Scheme, which is part of the human resources division of the council's corporate and customer services department. There is a youth training co-ordinator, a liaison officer and an administration assistant. Learners are on work placements within the council's service units. There is an interview scheme where all learners are guaranteed a job interview for posts graded at levels 1 and 2 if they meet all the essential criteria for the job. There are 34 learners comprising five advanced modern apprentices, 24 foundation modern apprentices and five learners on other work-based learning programmes. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to local training providers and through distance learning. Additional training is available, and includes a five-day residential course.

3. Luton is a large industrial town experiencing a downturn in manufacturing, which has been further affected by the closure of Vauxhall Motors. Since April 1997, the local authority has grown in size from employing 1,700 people to now being the largest employer in the town, with the equivalent of over 7,000 full-time employees. The population of Luton is approximately 182,000. The proportion of the local population from minority ethnic groups is 23 per cent. In 2001 in Luton, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above, was 38 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In May 2002, the unemployment rate was 4 per cent, compared with the national average of 3 per cent.

### Work-based learning for young people

4. There is good retention, achievement and progression. Learners are provided with outstanding support in their everyday work and in their off-the-job training. Any identified additional learning and/or social needs are effectively met in consultation with the learners. The induction process is effective and includes a five-day residential course where all learners work in teams and progress in confidence. On- and off-the-job training is integrated well with the workplace. The thorough and effective progress review process ensures that learners' progress is monitored and additional support is provided if needed. There is a wide range of additional learning opportunities. There is effective short-term action-planning with learners but insufficient long-term assessment planning.



## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

## Grade 1

5. LBC has a corporate plan, which sets out its vision, values and priorities on a rolling three-year basis. Council policy states that learners on work placements within council's service units have trainee status but are otherwise treated as employees. The number of learner placements is dependent on the annual budget and availability in internal departments. Learners are encouraged to apply for employment within LBC. There is a guaranteed job interview for posts graded at levels 1 and 2 if a learner meets all the essential criteria for a vacant post. LBC has policies and procedures in place to support learners and employees. These policies are reviewed regularly to reflect changes in legislation or local agreements. The Prospects Training scheme is the responsibility of the human resources division. The training co-ordinator manages the provision, supported by a liaison officer and an administration assistant. Two specialist advisors carry out health and safety training and monitoring. Further specialist support is drawn from other service areas within LBC. Off-the-job-training and assessment in occupational areas and key skills is subcontracted to a number of training providers. Many departments within LBC hold the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. The human resources division is starting its part of the Best Value Service Delivery initiative, a government standard for local authorities.

### STRENGTHS

- well-planned, comprehensive training programme
- effective continuous improvement
- comprehensive equal opportunities strategy and implementation plan
- well-structured equal opportunities training for staff and learners
- thorough and effective monitoring of subcontractors
- good self-assessment process

### WEAKNESSES

- inadequate recording of quality assurance arrangements

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more specific targets on development plan

6. The training programme is well planned and comprehensive. There is good corporate commitment to the role of learners in the workplace. Workplace supervisors and mentors who are allocated to learners are given good training and guidance. This helps to improve their self-confidence and teamworking skills. Learners are fully involved in the work of the council. Staff help learners collect evidence during their everyday work. Comprehensive service level agreements for work placements specify

the responsibilities of the workplace supervisors and of the training team. An audit identified that there were not enough resources to manage the programme. This was rectified by the provision of additional staff. Learners are given responsibility for their own development. There are thorough progress reviews during which targets and actions are set. Extensive learner data are used to provide comprehensive statistical information for strategic planning and reporting purposes. Learners recruited in 2002 are being monitored by a new database system.

7. All staff and learners are part of the comprehensive performance appraisal process. The line manager and the staff member or learner both prepare in advance for the appraisal. Objectives from the previous appraisal are monitored and new ones agreed for the next year. There are corporate and departmental budgets for training and staff and learners have detailed training plans. There are good internal and external communications. All workplace supervisors who have responsibility for learners have an induction into the training programme. There are regular meetings with the training co-ordinator as well as progress reviews. There are regular meetings with the LSC contract manager to review the training programme and the quality of provision. There are regular visits to the subcontractors. The training co-ordinator meets regularly with other local training providers to discuss issues and share good practice.

**Equality of opportunity****Contributory grade 1**

8. There is a good strategic plan for equal opportunities, which is managed by the equal opportunities unit within LBC. The council is actively working towards a government standard for equal opportunities. There are several internal groups and external equality forums, linked to the decision-making process. The equal opportunities policy and strategy is wide ranging, clear and well written, with good guidance and examples of how it should be implemented. It was revised in 1999 and a further policy objective was adopted. The policy will be further revised in 2003. There is a separate policy on disability.

9. Equality of opportunity is implemented effectively. All employees involved in the recruitment and interview process receive appropriate training. There is a three-day fair selection training programme which covers equality of opportunity and the council's procedures and paperwork. There is a one-day update for those employees who have not been involved in the process for two years or more. There are support workers who give support and guidance on areas of equality. There is good promotion of equal opportunities. This scheme and the names of the workers are advertised on posters around the offices. All staff are aware of their rights and responsibilities. There is good provision of specialised equipment for learners with additional learning needs.

10. Learners have a good and broad understanding of equality of opportunity. Many learners are able to transfer this understanding to their activities outside work. Equal opportunities topics are covered effectively during the recruitment process and induction. Learners spoke enthusiastically about the one-day equal opportunities workshop they have during their induction. All learners have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities as well as how they treat other people. Emphasis is placed on the language used when working with people with disabilities. Equality of opportunity is reinforced during progress reviews and incorporated in all workplace activities.

11. There is good equal opportunities training for staff and learners. A new training programme for equal opportunities has been developed and is mandatory for all staff. There are stand-alone courses but equality of opportunity has also been fully integrated with many of the existing training programmes, particularly within the management training programme.

12. There is comprehensive analysis of equal opportunities data for the LSC, the council and for use within the training scheme. There is ongoing monitoring of equal opportunities data. A target of 40 per cent recruitment of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds has been set by the council. This relates to the percentage within the school leaving age. The percentage of starters on the training programme this year is 50 per cent.

## Quality assurance

## Contributory grade 2

13. Subcontractors are thoroughly and effectively monitored. There is a clear and specific contract for the provision of training. There are frequent and well-recorded meetings. Staff also visit subcontractors regularly and communicate by e-mail. Visits include observations of learning sessions. Staff are able to identify problems with subcontractors, such as poor key skills training and assessment, unsatisfactory assessment practices, poorly organised timetables and crowded or under-resourced off-the-job learning sessions. LBC takes prompt, effective action to rectify problems with subcontractors. For example, LBC has placed learners with alternative providers.

14. Self-assessment is good. However, the process is in many cases too critical. Inspectors gave higher grades than those given in the self-assessment report and many strengths were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Self-assessment is seen as part of continuous improvement and three reports have now been produced. Staff prepared themselves well to carry out the self-assessment process by attending workshops provided by the LSC. Administration staff within the section have been actively involved and a workshop away day was used effectively to focus on strengths and weaknesses of the scheme and allowed staff to plan the way forward. There was broad participation from learners, workplace supervisors, and subcontractors. A wide range of other sources was also used, including progress reviews, feedback and external reports. The process is well organised and systematic. Approval of the self-assessment report followed internal verification to ensure accuracy and corporate approval. The report is clear and well set out. A comprehensive development plan has been produced including objectives, responsibilities and actions. Prompt action has been taken on all issues identified during the process. There are effective measures to ensure continuous improvements. All identified actions are planned well and dealt with promptly. The results are evaluated to ensure that they have been effective. Many of the actions identified in the development plan were completed by the time of inspection. As issues, suggestions and information from good practice elsewhere are identified, actions are implemented and the results evaluated.

15. Standards and arrangements for quality assurance are in place and are used by all staff. However, they are recorded in an informal way, and in different formats and styles. The training co-ordinator carries out most of the quality assurance. A process of flowcharting is under way, with a target end date of December. The results will be reviewed and issued as a manual for all staff.

16. Many of the target dates on the actions identified in the development plan are marked as ongoing. It is not always clear to staff when specific actions need to be completed. At the time of the inspection, action had been taken for many of the issues.

### **Good Practice**

*There is a one-day equal opportunities workshop during induction. It includes easy to understand summaries of case studies based on actual events that have gone to tribunal. Learners use summaries of legislation and discussion to make decisions on what the outcome of the tribunal should be.*

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Business administration, management & professional

Grade 1

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	13	1

17. There are 13 learners on work-based learning programmes in business administration, management and professional. Of these, one is an advanced modern apprentice, 11 are foundation modern apprentices and one learner is on another work-based learning programme. Learners are recruited through Connexions, advertisements in the local press, the council website and through connection with council employees. All applicants are recorded on a database and application forms are sent out in April each year. All applicants are offered an interview and an initial assessment. Short-listed applicants are offered a second interview, and if successful, a work placement within one of the service units of the council. All learners are allocated mentors to assist them with all aspects of their training. There is a three-day induction and all learners are able to attend a five-day residential course. Most training programmes last an average of 15 months. Learners attend local training subcontractors or have distance learning packages for their off-the-job training. Learners also take part in the staff training programme. Progress reviews are carried out at least every 12 weeks.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																	
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	1															
Retained*	0																
Successfully completed	0																
Still in learning	1																

\*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

Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																	
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	10		9		10		9										
Retained*	0		7		8	80	6	67									
Successfully completed	0		5		8	80	6	67									
Still in learning	10		1		0	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

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training																	
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	1						1										
Retained*	0						1	100									
Successfully completed	0						1	100									
Still in learning	1						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 retention, achievement and progression
- outstanding individual learner support
- very effective well-planned induction process
- well-integrated on- and off-the-job training
- thorough and effective review process
- good range of additional qualifications

## WEAKNESSES

- insufficient long-term assessment planning

## **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- better communication within some subcontractors

18. Achievement and retention rates are good. Although the number of learners on each programme is low, there is consistently high achievement. Of those learners who started training programmes in 2001-02, the one learner still in training has completed the portfolio of evidence, which is being externally verified. The retention rate is good. In the past three years, retention has been between 67 per cent and 100 per cent. Two learners who left the programme early, did so because of family commitments. In the past three years, between 67 per cent and 100 per cent of learners have progressed into employment or higher education. Those in employment are taking further training and professional qualifications. All learners have completed additional courses and received certificates of attendance or achievement. All learners have made progress in self-confidence and communication skills particularly when discussing their progress during a review.

19. Individual learner support is outstanding. Learners have access to the training team at any time. Workplace supervisors are trained to work with learners and provide them with both professional and personal support. They help learners work towards their qualifications and set tasks for the week ahead. They also help identify where these qualifications and tasks can be cross-referenced to the business administration national vocational qualification (NVQ) and key skills. Interim reviews are carried out where it has been identified that additional support is necessary. There is effective additional support for learners with additional learning and/or social needs. Specialist equipment is provided and, if appropriate, learners are linked to a member of staff who has personal experience of the specialist support needed. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Numeracy and literacy support can either be provided by the off-the-job training provider or within LBC. This decision is left to the individual learner. Where learners are not progressing well with their off-the-job training, the training co-ordinator works with the learners and the subcontractor to plan a way forward. If necessary, a new subcontractor is found.

20. The induction process is well planned and very effective. Effective and innovative training techniques are used. For example, learners are asked to write a song advertising LBC which helps them to better understand non-verbal communication techniques as well as requiring research into LBC. Learners are given a comprehensive induction pack to reinforce their training. This is reviewed at the end of their first 12 weeks. There is a five-day residential course at an outdoor activity centre attended by most learners. This helps learners to develop teamworking skills and improves their self-confidence. Learners complete a file which details all the activities linked to key skills. This helps learners understand key skills and encourages them to continue collecting evidence for key skills when they return to work. All learners acknowledge their own personal development during the residential course.



21. LBC is very effective in ensuring that off-the-job training is integrated well with the workplace. Learners complete an action plan which is copied to their workplace supervisor. The workplace supervisor discusses the action plan each week with the learner and identifies areas where they can help the learner achieve the plan. In addition to the action plan, learners complete a detailed, weekly diary, which includes what they have done both on and off the job. Workplace supervisors go through this diary with learners every week to ensure that their off-the-job training can be integrated effectively with their activities in the workplace. Learners' progress is monitored well through progress reviews. Learners discuss what additional skills they need for their work. Discussions take place with the off-the-job training subcontractor to see if these can be included in the training. If the subcontractor is unable to provide these skills, arrangements are made for alternative provision. Off-the-job training is satisfactory and learners cover all background skills and knowledge.

22. The review process is thorough and effective. The training unit carries out progress reviews. Detailed records are received from the off-the-job training subcontractor and the workplace supervisor before the review takes place. Prior to the review, learners complete a form which comments on their work in the previous 12 weeks. Separate interviews are held with the learner and the workplace supervisor, who then both meet with the liaison officer for the full progress review. There is a detailed examination of the learner's training file to monitor progress and ensure that off-the-job training is fully integrated with the workplace. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning by explaining their own work, particularly any areas they are finding difficult. The review is effective in checking the learners' understanding of the induction process and reinforces the equal opportunities training. Health and safety issues are also discussed. Copies of notes and actions agreed at the progress review are given to the learners and the workplace supervisor.

23. Learners are able to achieve a wide range of additional qualifications. The review process is effective in identifying the learners' additional training and support needs. Courses are available in a wide variety of subjects, including information technology (IT), writing in plain English, and additional professional qualifications. Learners are encouraged to attend any courses that are open to LBC staff. Learners are able to attend courses during their normal working hours. One learner accompanied a liaison officer on a visit to a travellers' site, in order to gain experience of one of the local communities.

24. LBC carries out effective short-term action-planning, which is detailed and sets clear targets for the learners. However, there is insufficient long-term assessment planning. Learners know the completion date of their qualification but there is no outline timetable for medium- and long-term targets. Learners find it difficult to measure their overall progress within the NVQ.

25. Learners have only recently started working with a new off-the-job training subcontractor and measures are in place to improve this area. There is regular, detailed communication between LBC and the subcontractors. In some of the subcontractors,

this information is not always passed onto the staff who work directly with the learners.

#### **Good Practice**

*Learners work in groups to create a suitable outfit to go clubbing. They identify the skills required, and once the outfit has been made, assess the work carried out using the criteria they have set. This is then linked to the NVQ they are working towards.*