

INSPECTION REPORT

Metropole College Ltd Reinspection

08 May 2003



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. 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
- the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes 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.

SUMMARY

The provider

Metropole College Ltd is a private training company situated in the London Borough of Westminster. The college provides training for unemployed adults through a contract with Jobcentre Plus. There are 23 clients on short job-focused training programmes working towards information technology qualifications, and 114 clients on basic employability training programmes working for qualifications in literacy and English language. Metropole College Ltd has 67 clients registered for jobsearch with its programme centre. It also provides training for 36 clients through a contract with the European Social Fund and 45 clients through the Single Regeneration Budget. The college has three training centres.

Overall judgement

The ALI's original inspection in April 2002 found that information and communications technology was satisfactory but that foundation programmes were unsatisfactory. The college's leadership and management and quality assurance were also unsatisfactory. Equality of opportunity was satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, equality of opportunity was found to be good and all other aspects of the provision were satisfactory.

Grades awarded

	Original	Reinspection
Leadership and management	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity	3	2
Quality assurance	4	3

	Original	Reinspection
Information & communications technology	3	3
Contributory grades:		
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3	3

	Original	Reinspection
Foundation programmes	4	3
Contributory grades:		
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	4	3
Programme Centres	4	3

METROPOLE COLLEGE LTD REINSPECTION

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following key strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

KEY STRENGTHS

- effective management of the college's development
- good promotion of equality of opportunity
- good retention rates
- good individual support
- good induction materials

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor progression into employment
- insufficient links with employers
- inadequate progress reviews at different stages of the training programme

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- further develop performance review system
- more consistent use of improvement strategies
- further develop partnership work

THE REINSPECTION

1. Three inspectors spent a total of eight days reinspecting Metropole College Ltd (the college) in May 2003. Prior to this, two one-day visits and a planning visit were conducted which included observations of training and a progress review. A total of 10.5 inspection days were used. During the reinspection, inspectors observed and graded 14 learning sessions. They interviewed 35 clients, eight staff and two external partners, visited the three training centres and examined 28 individual learning plans. Throughout the reinspection process they examined the draft self-assessment report, post-inspection development plans and updates, and a wide range of other evidence including minutes of meetings, policies and procedures.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Information & communications technology	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	3
Foundation programmes	0	0	4	4	3	3	0	14
Total	0	2	4	4	3	4	0	17

Grades awarded to learning sessions at reinspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Information & communications technology	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	5
Foundation programmes	0	0	3	6	0	0	0	9
Total	0	0	7	7	0	0	0	14

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- effective management of the college's development
- good development of quality assurance
- good promotion of equality of opportunity

WEAKNESSES

- poor progression into employment
- insufficient links with employers

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- further develop performance review system
- better use of data to help planning
- more consistent use of improvement strategies
- further develop partnership work

2. There is effective management of the college's development. The clear strategic direction and policies noted as a strength in the original inspection have been maintained and improved. Staff now understand business planning and development plans. Business planning and development plans are central to the college's commitment to its work with socially excluded groups of adults from the local community. There is a strong supportive culture in the college. Communication has improved since the original inspection. An effective communication strategy has been introduced and includes a range of frequent and regular meetings and staff briefings. There is an open, consultative and inclusive style of management and effective co-operation between the different departments in the college. Policies and procedures are easily understood and relevant to the culture of the college. Since the original inspection, there has been considerable progress in the use of procedures to improve practice, help development and prioritise work. However, these practices are not always consistently used throughout the college.

3. The review of staff performance is satisfactory. Staff are set clear targets. These are linked to business aims and are closely monitored. There is now a clear and structured approach to performance management, which includes setting measurable targets and assigning timescales for their completion. However, some performance reviews are based entirely on course outcomes and the priorities of the business and do not include individuals' development needs. A staff appraisal system has been established but

appraisals have not been carried out for senior managers. These are still outstanding from the original inspection.

4. A range of staff development activities has been introduced and these activities are contributing to improvements. Staff have received jobsearch and material development training as well as curriculum training for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and literacy and numeracy training programmes.

5. The progression of clients into employment is poor. At the original inspection, inspectors judged that there was insufficient focus on clients securing employment. Improvements have been made in jobsearch activities but outcomes are still poor in both areas of learning. Although retention rates have fallen for the basic employability training (BET) programme in the current year, rates are still good and average 73 per cent across the training provision. The college has insufficient links with employers. A recent staff appointment has been made to develop work placements and strengthen links with local employers. It is too early to judge the impact of this work.

6. Overall there have been some significant improvements since the original inspection in both areas of learning. Jobsearch activities have improved and a strong focus on working towards employment has been introduced. There have been considerable improvements in the teaching and individual learning plans. The induction process is now good. The progression of clients into employment remains poor. Clients' progress reviews are weak.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

7. There is good promotion of equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity is central to the aims of the college. The college places a high priority on the promotion of equality of opportunity and its diversity strategies. The college's policies are comprehensive and effectively supported by a full range of procedures. The college's positive attitude towards cultural diversity is evident through its treatment of clients, staff and the wider community. Diversity is promoted in displays, notices, learning materials and in the productive relationships between staff and clients. Clients and staff come from a wide range of backgrounds. The college purposefully employs staff from a wide range of backgrounds to reflect the many minority ethnic communities represented in the client group. Between them, the staff speak 17 languages.

8. The college principal is responsible for the equal opportunities policy. The operational management of equality of opportunity rests with the information and communications technology (ICT) manager who does this work through a steering group. The group meets every three months to discuss a wide range of topics. The steering group is also responsible for updating policies and practices, analysing data, drawing up action plans and monitoring their effectiveness. Outcomes from these meetings are communicated to the senior management team. Detailed data are collected about job outcomes in the different training programmes and in relation to ethnicity and gender.

9. The improved induction process provides clients with good information about equality of opportunity. There is a very easily understood summary of the equal opportunities policy in the clients' induction material, as well as an introduction to the support that the college can provide for clients with disabilities or additional learning needs. However, clients' understanding of equality of opportunity is not formally monitored during progress reviews.

10. The college has good links with external organisations and in particular those working with under-represented groups. The college continues to use additional funding from the European Social Fund to support the training of refugees. There are strong links with housing associations and hostels and with specialist organisations linked to minority ethnic communities. A recently agreed partnership with an advice bureau will offer additional individual guidance for clients. Some of these partnership links are helping the college to focus on its commitment to the development of a coherent basic skills strategy. However, the integration of these partnership arrangements to specific objectives of the college, namely to increase job outcomes, is weak. The college's response to the needs of the 'Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000' and the 'Disability Discrimination Act 1995' is at an early stage of development.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

11. Quality assurance has been improved since the original inspection. There is now a strong focus on the learning experience. Improvements have been made to initial assessment and clients' progress reviews. However, progress reviews are still weak. Targets set at progress reviews are too general and progress cannot be effectively measured. Clients' files are regularly audited to ensure information is updated and regular progress reviews are taking place.

12. The induction process is now effective. Induction materials are good and in the most effective sessions, the good materials are well matched to the needs of the specific group of clients. Materials are well presented, colourful and easily understood. Most of the materials are suited to use with clients who understand or can read very little in English. Induction for staff is thorough and includes attending an induction session for clients. Staff receive an induction to their department as well as to the overall practices of the college. Staff development needs are also identified at induction.

13. There has been good development of the questionnaires for staff and clients which contribute to the self-assessment process and the college's continuous improvement. Feedback forms about new clients are collected every three months and responses about ethnicity and the training programmes are analysed. The use of data is much improved and is now satisfactory. Performance targets are regularly monitored and information is collected about clients' destinations and job outcomes. Data about equality of opportunity are routinely analysed but these have not been used as a basis for action-planning. The use of feedback from clients is not yet used as an integral part of the action-planning process.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	23	3

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- very good retention rates
- good individual training
- good staffing levels
- good learning materials

WEAKNESSES

- poor progression into employment
- inadequate progress reviews

14. Retention rates are very good. Currently, 98 per cent of clients starting the training programme complete it. Achievement of qualifications is also good. Over 80 per cent of clients achieve their learning goal by achieving either the planned qualification or units towards the full qualification. Clients develop competences in a range of information technology (IT) skills. They learn to use e-mail, create web pages and work with photo editing, graphics, and presentation packages. These are additional to the good IT skills they attain in word processing, spreadsheets and database programmes.

15. Practical instruction for the computer courses is good. Effective instruction is provided for individual clients. Staff provide a friendly and encouraging atmosphere. They pay close attention to individual clients' needs. Tutors demonstrate well-developed technical knowledge and expertise and they are effective teachers. Tutors are appropriately qualified and experienced. Individual units of the training programme are introduced with a well-structured overview of the course. Following the introduction to the course, there is an effective practical session where the tutor leads the clients through the appropriate steps. Individual support is good and most tutors successfully monitor clients' learning through direct observation of their work on the computer screen.

16. Learning materials are good. There is a range of good instruction manuals. Each instruction manual effectively outlines the subject matter to consolidate clients' understanding. Well-structured exercises test and reinforce understanding and evaluate learning. Staffing is good. There are 30 computer stations and an average of 20 clients in the training centre at a time. The five tutors are able to provide very good support for clients, who rarely have to wait for help or guidance.

17. The management of the ICT centre is satisfactory. Communications between the manager and tutors are good. Tutors are responsible for monitoring clients' progress, supporting clients when preparing their curriculum vitae (CV) and conducting progress reviews. Although all tutors teach the full range of subjects for the basic computer literacy qualification they also offer specialist expertise in other areas, such as web design. Tutors make good use of each other's expertise and effectively share good practice.

18. Assessment arrangements are satisfactory. Internal verification procedures meet the requirements of the awarding bodies. Initial assessment arrangements, while not comprehensive, do succeed in identifying clients requiring basic skills support. Clients with basic skills needs are referred to the main training centre where support is provided. The range of the provision, while small, meets the clients' needs and the basic requirements of local employers. The training arrangements particularly suit those clients who have been away from regular employment for some time, especially lone parents.

19. There have been improvements in all the weaknesses identified during the original inspection. There have been significant developments in the jobsearch arrangements and these are no longer a weakness. Good partnership arrangements have been established with a local recruitment organisation that provides additional assistance with jobsearch. The organisation of training was identified in the original inspection report as a weakness. It has since been reorganised. Facilities are also available for clients to make Internet enquires for employment. Staff also provide clients with advice and guidance about how to prepare comprehensive CVs.

20. The proportion of clients securing employment is still poor. In 2001-02, the proportion of clients securing employment was 8 per cent, and although there has been significant improvement since then, it is still poor. Currently, 17 per cent of clients obtain a job within three months of completing their course.

21. Individual learning plans are now satisfactory. However, clients' progress reviews are weak. Progress review forms are not well designed or used to assess clients' performance. Clients' progress is formally reviewed after three weeks and every week thereafter. Tutors carry out the progress reviews. There is insufficient target-setting or action-planning during these progress reviews. Progress reviews do not deal with clients' additional support needs or cover equal opportunities topics. Some of the questions asked are irrelevant. For example, the tutor conducting the progress review is required to assess the clients' honesty. The review paperwork is not sufficiently detailed

and does not form the basis of the individual learning plan. Other training requirements or opportunities are not identified through the progress review process.

22. The computer centre is located in the basement of a building close to the main college. It is accessed through a narrow corridor and staircase. There is no natural light other than that provided by a grill at one end of the computer centre. The workstations are located close together. This arrangement does not always allow the tutor to pass around freely to monitor clients' work. There is no provision for a separate group teaching room, although a small area close to the printer is available for this purpose. The only separate office for private discussions, including progress reviews, is the very small office occupied by the manager. There are plans for a new location for all programmes.

Foundation programmes**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	114	3
Programme Centres	81	3

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- good focus on developing clients' skills for employment
- good individual support for clients
- good induction materials
- well-organised programme centre

WEAKNESSES

- poor course planning
- inadequate target-setting and monitoring of clients' progress

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more differentiation of tasks and learning materials
- wider range of learning materials and resources
- better development of CVs for all clients

23. There has been a good focus on developing clients' skills for employment since the original inspection. All staff now understand that the purpose of the programme is to develop clients' employability. The content of the learning and induction sessions reflects this focus. Clients find jobsearch activities practical and informative. There has been some work to improve links with local employers. The college's staff have recently started to arrange work placements for clients. Not all clients on the BET programme are supported in developing a CV which is appropriate to submit to British employers or which will support their jobsearch activities. The proportion of clients securing employment on both programmes has increased significantly, from 6 per cent in 2000-01 to 16 per cent in 2002-03. For clients on the pathways to employment programme 22 per cent secured employment in 2002-03, compared with 16 per cent in 2001-02. These proportions are still unsatisfactory.

24. Retention rates are satisfactory at 64 per cent on the BET programme and 73 per cent on the pathways to employment programme. Retention rates for the BET programme have declined in the two years since the original inspection. At the original inspection, the retention rate for the BET programme was 91 per cent. The college monitors clients' reasons for leaving the programme.

25. Clients are encouraged to work towards achieving qualifications in ESOL, to improve their motivation and employability. In 2002-03, 34 per cent of clients entered for an ESOL qualification. Seventy-two per cent of these clients achieved the qualification. This is a good achievement rate.

26. The college continues to provide particularly good support to individual clients. There is a lot of trust between clients and staff. In lessons, clients' language acquisition is regularly monitored and there is good individual support from tutors and volunteer classroom assistants. A client-centred approach to jobsearch is promoted throughout the programme centre. Clients can make informed choices and build on their prior experience, including that gained outside the United Kingdom. Staff at the college speak many of the clients' first languages and can effectively use these languages to provide personal support for the clients. Staff work with clients to overcome barriers to their progression. For example, staff use their local knowledge to help clients who are often faced with the difficulty of reconciling the need to obtain work for which wages are low and the high rents which are commonplace in London.

27. A new induction pack is appropriate for clients and generally well used in this area of learning. However, clients' understanding of the induction materials is insufficiently monitored by some tutors. Changes to the initial assessment and induction arrangements have resulted in clients being inducted onto a specific training programme. The induction process has been customised for them. The induction to the BET programme lasts for a full week and includes a range of tasks which allow staff to assess the clients' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, and to place them on an appropriate course. This has been introduced recently. The tasks are not matched to the core curricula which limits their usefulness. The classroom environment for the BET induction programme is poor.

28. The programme centre has recently moved into pleasant, light and well-furnished accommodation. It continues to be well organised and provides a good range of facilities to support jobsearch. These include telephone, fax and broadband Internet access, a range of newspapers and periodicals, and a rolling programme of option modules targeted at particular aspects of job seeking, such as developing effective interview skills or taking part in an employer's assessment centre. Clients can now request specialist journals, as required. The centre manager has further developed the database and an additional member of staff has been appointed to work with clients. The jobsearch facilities and expertise available in the programme centre are not sufficiently widespread throughout the foundation programme.

29. There has been considerable improvement in the planning and delivery of lessons since the original inspection. Lesson plans have clear learning outcomes and these are frequently shared with clients. Plans are detailed and include activities both for the teacher and the clients, and the anticipated timing of tasks. Learning is reviewed at the end of each learning session. Observed learning sessions were satisfactory or, in a few cases, good. The learning materials are now improved. They are appropriate and clearly presented. Some tutors are using materials from the local context, such as maps of the London underground or current magazine articles. Most learning materials are worksheets, dictionaries and paper-based handouts. Although the selection of materials available to staff is satisfactory, the range is narrow and does not include much tape, video, software, and visual material, flashcards or other basic literacy materials. There is improved access to IT. Tutors can now book sessions in the IT suite, but this is still insufficiently used and clients are keen for greater access. In a few learning sessions, planning included the support of individual clients. However, in most learning sessions, there was no tailoring of tasks or materials for the different abilities and interests of clients, to challenge the stronger or support the weaker clients. For example in one lesson, a qualified accountant was working on the same ESOL language and numeracy activity as clients who had difficulty in calculating a simple percentage.

30. While there has been good progress in the planning of lessons, the overall course planning is weak. Class tutors are responsible for developing a scheme of work every three months. The format that the college requires the tutors to use when producing the scheme of work provides no guidance about how to structure the document or the detail to include. It is not clear from the schemes of work what skills, language features, functions, topics and materials are covered during lessons or where jobsearch is established, how frequently assessments are carried out, when examinations are taken, or projects, visits and assignments are planned. However, the schemes of work do include cross-referencing to the ESOL or literacy national standards. ESOL literacy classes have been inappropriately referenced to the milestones in the pre-entry level curriculum which is designed for clients with learning difficulties and disabilities rather than to selected reading and/or writing standards in the ESOL curriculum at entry level 1.

31. New individual learning plans and review documents have been introduced to remedy the weaknesses identified in the original inspection. For clients on the BET programme, staff review their progress every six weeks. Staff have received training on how to carry out these progress reviews. Goals for groups of clients are listed on the record of assessment which is kept in clients' portfolios. These goals have been directly copied from the core curriculum standards and have not been rephrased to ensure clients' understanding or to encourage them to take responsibility for their own progress towards these goals. Jobsearch has been incorporated into the review process. However, target-setting continues to be weak. Individual targets are specific to the client but are too general to effectively measure progress at subsequent reviews. Progress towards achieving group goals does not form part of the review process. Although new progress review paperwork now provides space to record agreed actions and target dates for completion, there is still insufficient detail about progress.

Good Practice

The programme centre effectively supported a refugee who had pharmacy qualifications from another European country, to gain suitable employment in London. Staff from the programme centre contacted the professional body, downloaded procedures from the website, wrote a letter to an organisation on her behalf and set up an appointment with the organisation for her. She was able to provide documentary evidence of her pharmacy qualifications, which are now recognised in the United Kingdom. Following successful completion of a work placement in a London hospital, she has taken a post with the hospital.