

REINSPECTION REPORT

Reading LEA Reinspection

30 January 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

READING LEA REINSPECTION

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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- 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.

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Reading Borough Council (the council) is a unitary authority which was formed in 1998. Reading Local Education Authority (LEA) is part of the council. Courses for adults are provided directly through the Reading Adult and Community College (the college). The college is the sole provider of the council's adult and community learning programme, which is funded by Berkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). A cross-directorate lifelong learning board, chaired by the councillor for community action, advises the council on the lifelong learning policy. The head of strategy and planning in the council's education and community services directorate oversees the work of the college and reports to the director of education. An advisory group consisting of local community and business representatives supports the work of the college.

2. The college's senior management team consists of the head of the college and two senior managers whose responsibilities are for finance, college support services, marketing and learning services. Five curriculum managers report to the head of college and take responsibility for the five areas of learning. Three new management posts have been created since the previous inspection. Most of the teaching staff are on part-time contracts.

3. The areas inspected were information and communications technology (ICT), hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, visual and performing arts and media, English, languages and communications, and foundation programmes. These were the same areas as the previous inspection, although in this inspection English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision was inspected under foundation. Provision is offered at five of the college's centres, as well as outcentres and community venues.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Information & communications technology

4. In 2002-03 there were 580 enrolments on ICT courses. Since the start of the current year, there have been 435 enrolments, half of which are for accredited courses. Sixty-seven per cent of learners are women, 12 per cent are from minority ethnic groups, and 11 per cent have a disability. Twenty-two per cent of learners are aged 60 or over, compared with 38 per cent in the previous inspection. The curriculum manager for this area is on a 0.8 contract and a member of staff has responsibility for the learning resource centre. The number of part-time tutors has increased from eight to 16.

5. ICT courses are provided at two college centres and at three venues in the community: two of which are linked with special projects to widen participation. At the college's main site, a drop-in learning centre with networked computers is available to all learners. Accredited courses at level 1 include two certificated basic computing courses or modules from an internationally accredited computer course. At level 2, further

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modules from this qualification are offered as well as a more advanced computer course. Non-accredited courses are offered as one-day courses or 11 weeks of two-hour lessons. Some courses provide an introduction to word processing or e-mail and the internet, while others help learners develop skills in desktop publishing or website design. Senior citizens are offered two introductory courses to computer applications. Family courses include an internet café and a 'keeping up with the kids' course, while Saturday courses are available for using the internet or digital cameras.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

6. In the current academic year there have been 810 enrolments, compared with 566 in 2002-03. Most sport and leisure courses take place at eight sites throughout Reading, which are rented or owned by the college. Just under 50 per cent of courses are offered in the evening, many operate in the mornings, and a small number are offered in the afternoons and at weekends. The courses available include accredited qualifications, and a range of non-accredited courses. The non-accredited courses include several forms of yoga, which attracts the greatest number of learners; t'ai chi, bridge, badminton, pilates, keep fit, and music and movement for the not so young. A programme called physical and mental wellbeing, targeted at people with mental health needs, has recently been introduced in partnership with a mental health organisation. The area of learning is managed by a full-time curriculum manager, who also has responsibility for several other areas. There are 33 courses and 23 part-time tutors in this area of learning. Most tutors are employed for between two and four hours a week.

Visual & performing arts & media

7. In 2002-03 there were 1,280 enrolments, compared with 1,811 to date in 2003-04. Most courses take place at the college's centres in Reading. Accredited courses are offered in fashion and photography. The remaining 65 courses are part-time, non-accredited day and evening classes, and include drawing and painting, pottery, photography, printing, dance, drama, fashion, and stained glass. Courses are part-time and are generally taught for two hours a week over 10 weeks. There are 10 family learning classes on Saturdays throughout the term and five single Saturday classes in dance, upholstery, fashion and embroidery. A pottery class and an experimental crafts class are specifically designed for learners who have special needs. There are also initiatives by the outreach worker to reach other types of learner and establish work in the area. In 2003-04, almost 79 per cent of learners are women, around 26 per cent are over 60 years of age, and just over 11 per cent are from a minority ethnic group. The 45 part-time tutors report to their curriculum manager who is responsible for the planning and delivery of the curriculum, quality assurance and budgetary management.

English, languages & communications

8. For 2003-04, there are 1,059 enrolments to date, compared with 1,065 in 2002-03. The college offers 67 courses in 15 languages such as Arabic, British Sign Language, Chinese (Mandarin), Czech, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai and Turkish. Progression is available in eight of these. Sixty-five per cent of the courses are Open College Network accredited. Courses take place at seven venues, with 30 per cent offered during the day and the remainder on Monday to Thursday evenings. Most classes last for two hours. Accredited courses are of 30 weeks duration and other courses are of 15 or six weeks. Staff comprise 41 tutors paid on an hourly basis and one full-time salaried manager. Sixty-two per cent of learners are women, 17 per cent are from a minority ethnic group and 16 per cent have additional needs.

Foundation programmes

9. For 2003-04, there are 689 enrolments to date, compared with 715 in 2002-03. Most courses in literacy, numeracy and language take place in the college's main centre at Wilson Road. There are also a significant number of classes held at the new Hamilton Road centre. Further classes are available at a small number of venues in the community, including family literacy classes at nursery and primary schools throughout Reading. The college offers 11 ESOL classes for women only. The Berkshire basics for business is a county-wide partnership which is developing literacy, numeracy and language provision in public and private sector workplaces. In 2002-03, there were 131 learners. From September 2003 to January 2004 there were 115 learners. The level of classes ranges from entry level 1 to level 3. A newly equipped ICT learning centre is situated at the Wilson Road centre and is available for use by learners attending classes at all centres.

10. Learners can work towards nationally recognised qualifications. The provision is managed by a full-time essential skills curriculum manager, a full-time ESOL course co-ordinator and recently appointed team leaders for literacy and numeracy. The part-time tutors are supported by 50 volunteer tutors. Most of the learners across the provision are women and a few are over 60.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	15
Number of inspection days	72
Number of learner interviews	412
Number of staff interviews	65
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	26
Number of partner/external agency interviews	6

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

11. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The college has made significant improvements since the previous inspection and unsatisfactory teaching has reduced from 28 per cent to 4 per cent. Provision for modern foreign languages is good. ICT, hospitality, sports and leisure, visual, performing arts and media, and foundation are all satisfactory. Leadership and management, quality assurance and equality of opportunity have all improved significantly and are all satisfactory.

GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Leadership and management	4
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	4
Quality assurance	4
Information & communications technology	4
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Visual & performing arts & media	3
English, languages & communications	3
Foundation programmes	4
Other adult and community learning	4

Grades awarded at reinspection

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

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

Information & communications technology	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Visual & performing arts & media	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

English, languages & communications	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

12. **Pass rates on accredited courses have improved in all areas** since the previous inspection and are now good in most areas of learning. This is particularly significant in ICT and in modern foreign languages where much of the provision is accredited.

13. **Retention rates have improved in all areas of the curriculum** and are good in ICT, hospitality, sports and leisure and foundation programmes

14. **Standards of work are good in many aspects of visual, performing arts and media, modern foreign languages and ESOL** and learners become more confident in trying out new skills during the class and outside the class.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Information & communications technology	0	2	6	5	1	0	0	14
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	3	6	5	2	0	0	16
Visual & performing arts & media	0	5	8	6	1	0	0	20
English, languages & communications	0	7	6	6	0	0	0	19
Foundation programmes	0	1	5	8	0	0	0	14
Total	0	18	31	30	4	0	0	83

15. **Much teaching is well planned.** There has been a significant improvement since the previous inspection, with more effective use of lesson planning to indicate how the diverse needs of learners will be dealt with. There has been a significant reduction in the number of unsatisfactory lessons since the previous inspection.

16. **Teaching is stimulating and lively** in much of the modern foreign languages provision and in the better visual and performing arts lessons. In ICT lessons the use of interactive teaching equipment is very good.

17. An improvement across all programmes is the development of schemes of work for each course.

18. Where much of the teaching observed is unsatisfactory, teaching skills are often in the early stages of development. In these cases there is too often little class participation, too much demonstration by tutors or too much reliance on ready-made handouts.

19. There has been a significant number of new tutors in the past year, and many do not have the skills of their more experienced colleagues. Although the college supports tutors to gain teaching qualifications, **there are many new tutors who are not yet trained.**

20. Tutors are generally qualified in the subject area. However, **there are too few tutors with specialist qualifications in literacy and numeracy.**

21. **Resources for teaching and learning have improved.** ICT facilities are significantly improved, with better equipment and the development of a learning resources centre that is free for all learners at the main centre.

22. **Resources for visual, performing arts and media have improved,** although they are not sufficient in all classes.

23. **There have been significant improvements in accommodation**, with upgrading to all three main sites. However, this is still being completed, and in visual, performing arts and media, lessons continue to be held in unsuitable accommodation.

24. **Initial assessment has improved and is still being developed in most areas.** Significant weaknesses remain in ICT, and in hospitality, sport and leisure.

25. **The college has implemented a range of models for assessing learners' progress**, including diaries and journals. However, this is still being developed. The targets and recording are not sufficiently specific or measurable.

26. **The appointment of an outreach worker has resulted in greater community involvement** and more work with under-represented groups. However, the needs analysis is not sufficiently thorough.

27. **Initial guidance and information have significantly improved**, and course information is mostly helpful and well presented.

28. **The college does not yet produce course information or induction material in a range of community languages and alternative formats.**

29. **Learners who have a disability are mainly well supported.** Additional support arrangements are effective and are an integral part of the areas of learning.

Leadership and management

30. **The college has been very successful in implementing changes** since the previous inspection. The post-inspection action plan was a sound basis for improvement.

31. **There has been a significant improvement in the performance of the college.** Retention and achievement rates are better, enrolments have increased, and the curriculum is now satisfactory or better in all areas.

32. **Strategic planning for the council's adult learning provision is underdeveloped.**

33. **Communication is very good**, and managers and staff understand what is expected of them. Communication is effective in all curriculum areas, and that between the college and the council have improved since the previous inspection.

34. **The college manages the budget well and the council monitors the financial position of the college effectively.**

35. Curriculum management is now satisfactory in all areas, and a strength in modern foreign languages. All curriculum managers provide a clear direction for staff.

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36. **Quality assurance procedures are thorough** and have resulted in improvements in curriculum management. Teaching and learning have significantly improved since the previous inspection.
37. **Not all staff implement the policies and procedures effectively.** Weaknesses remain, particularly in target-setting, recording, and the use of individual learning plans.
38. **The self-assessment process was very effective** in helping staff to recognise strengths and weaknesses, and many of the judgements are realistic.
39. **Strategies to widen participation have been successful,** and the college has increased its enrolments from under-represented groups.
40. **While enrolments have increased from under-represented groups, there is insufficient detailed analysis of their needs** at a strategic level across the borough, and at curriculum level.
41. **The college has made significant improvements to its buildings.** There is wheelchair access to the ground floor of all the main sites and adaptations for equipment have been purchased.
42. **Provision for learners who have a disability is good,** with much of the additional training being an integral part of the areas of learning.
43. **The college has yet to implement its plans to produce more publicity and information in community languages and alternative formats.**
44. **The college has a well thought out equal opportunities policy,** but does not analyse data sufficiently.

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very effective management of change by college managers
- good communication in the college
- very good implementation of the post-inspection action plan to bring about improvement
- good strategies to widen participation from targeted groups
- very effective action to improve physical access and specialist resources

- good support and provision across the college for learners with a disability

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped strategic planning of the council's adult learning provision
- inadequate implementation of some aspects of the quality assurance procedures
- insufficient use of community languages in publicity and information
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities data

Information & communications technology

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good pass rates on accredited courses
- particularly good use of interactive teaching equipment to promote learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient checking of learning in many classes
- inadequate use of formative assessment
- insufficient needs analysis for planning of provision

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good focus in many classes on meeting the diverse needs of learners
- very effective programme planning and development
- very effective communications and support

Weaknesses

- inadequate recording of progress and attainment
- too much reliance on demonstrations in lessons
- weak initial assessment of fitness programmes

Visual & performing arts & media

Strengths

- good standard of work in clay sculpture, fashion, painting and photography
- much stimulating teaching
- good leadership

Weaknesses

- poor opportunities for debate in small classes
- inadequate resources for some aspects of the provision
- insufficient recording of progress

English, languages & communications

Strengths

- good achievement rates
- good teaching and learning in many classes
- very wide choice of courses
- very effective initial guidance and advice
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- inadequate training for inexperienced tutors

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good rates of retention
- good achievement rates in ESOL, family literacy and numeracy lessons
- good development of confidence to apply skills acquired in ESOL lessons
- consistently well-planned lessons to meet individual needs
- very good use of diaries in the literacy and numeracy workshops

Weaknesses

- inappropriate use of worksheets in literacy classes
- too few staff with specialist training in literacy and numeracy
- insufficient analysis of community needs in programme planning
- no pre-course information or induction materials in community languages
- insufficiently measurable performance targets

Language of the Adult and Community Learning Sector

Terminology varies across the range of education and training settings covered by the *Common Inspection Framework*. The table below indicates the terms appropriate to Adult and Community Learning

Single term used in the framework	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning	
Provider	Provider	Any organisation providing opportunities for adults to meet personal or collective goals through the experience of learning. Providers include local authorities, specialist designated institutions, voluntary and community sector organisations, regeneration partnerships and further education colleges
Learner	Learner	Includes those learning by participating in community projects, as well as those on courses. Learning, however, will be planned, with intended outcomes.
Teacher / trainer	Tutor	Person teaching adult learners or guiding or facilitating their learning.
	Mentor	Person providing individual, additional support, guidance and advice to learners to help them achieve their learning goals.
Learning goals	Main learning goals	Intended gains in skills, knowledge or understanding. Gains may be reflected in the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications. Or they may be reflected in the ability of learners to apply learning in contexts outside the learning situation, e.g. in the family, community, or workplace. Learners' main goal/s should be recorded on an individual or, in some cases, group learning plan. Plans should be revised as progress is made and new goals emerge.
	Secondary learning goals	These may include planned-for gains in self-confidence, and inter-personal skills. These should also be included in learning plans where appropriate.
Personal and learning skills	Personal and learning skills	These include being able to study independently, willingness to collaborate with others, and readiness to take up another opportunity for education or training.

Other terms used in Adult and Community Learning

	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning
Unanticipated, or unintended learning outcome	Adults often experience unanticipated gains as a result of being involved in learning. These include improved self-esteem, greater self-confidence and a growing sense of belonging to a community. Gains of this kind should be acknowledged and recorded in any record of achievement.
Subject-based programme	A programme organised around a body of knowledge, e.g. the structure and usage of the French language or ceramic glazing techniques. Students could be expected to progress from one aspect of the subject to another, to grasp increasingly complex concepts or analyses or to develop greater levels of skill or to apply skills to a new area of work.
Issue-based programme	A programme that is based on the concerns, interests and aspirations of particular groups, for example members of a Sikh Gurdwara wanting to address inter-faith relations in their town, or parents worried about the incidence of drug abuse in their locality. Issue-based learning tends to be associated with geographically defined communities, but the increasing use of electronic means of communication means that this need no longer be the case. Progress is defined in terms of the group's increasing ability to analyse its situation, to access new information and skills which will help it resolve its difficulties and generate solutions and its growing confidence in dealing with others to implement those solutions.
Outreach provision	Provision established in a community setting in addition to provision made at an organisation's main site(s). Outreach programmes may be similar to courses at the main site(s) or be designed to meet the specific requirements of that community.
Neighbourhood-based work	The provider's staff have a long-term presence in a local community with a specific remit to understand the concerns of the local residents and develop learning activities to meet local needs and interests.
Community regeneration	The process of improving the quality of life in communities by investing in their infrastructure and facilities, creating opportunities for training and employment and tackling poor health and educational under-achievement. Community regeneration requires the active participation of local residents in decision-making. Changes and improvements are often achieved either directly or indirectly as a result of the adult learning activities which arise from this.

Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning	
Community capacity building	The process of enabling local people to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to take advantage of opportunities for employment, training and further education and to become selfmanaging, sustainable communities.
Active citizenship	The process whereby people recognise the power they have to improve the quality of life for others and make a conscious effort to do so: the process whereby people recognise the power of organisations and institutions to act in the interests of the common good and exercise their influence to ensure that they do so. Adult learning contributes to active citizenship.

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- very effective management of change by college managers
- good communication in the college
- very good implementation of the post-inspection action plan to bring about improvement
- good strategies to widen participation from targeted groups
- very effective action to improve physical access and specialist resources
- good support and provision across the college for learners with a disability

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped strategic planning of the council's adult learning provision
- inadequate implementation of some aspects of the quality assurance procedures
- insufficient use of community languages in publicity and information
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities data

45. The management of change in the college is very good, a strength which has been maintained since the previous inspection. There has been a significant improvement in the performance of the college. Retention and achievement rates are better, enrolments have increased, and the curriculum is now satisfactory or better in all areas.

46. Additional staff have been appointed, some on temporary contracts, to develop key areas such as the management information system, marketing and outreach work. The new management information system is easier for staff to access and use, and managers are making better use of data for decision-making, particularly on enrolments. There is good use of some data to monitor the college's performance against targets, notably on cancellations and retention. The college's budget is well managed and effectively monitored.

47. Communication in the college is good. Staff are clear about their roles and reporting responsibilities. Formal meeting arrangements help managers to share information and ideas, make decisions and follow them through. There are good links across curriculum and operational areas through the middle management meetings. Curriculum managers keep in regular contact with part-time teaching staff through curriculum meetings and other informal contact, including e-mail. Part-time staff value this contact and support. They have additional opportunities to keep in touch with developments through occasional full staff meetings, the staff intranet and a newsletter.

48. Changes in the responsibilities of curriculum managers have resulted in better co-ordination of the curriculum. Curriculum management was a weakness in the previous inspection, but it is now satisfactory. There have been significant improvements in curriculum quality. Inspection grades in three out of five areas of learning have gone up. The overall grade profile of lesson observations is significantly better than in the previous inspection, showing an increase in lessons graded good or better from 47 per cent to 57 per cent, and a reduction in unsatisfactory lessons from 28 per cent to 4 per cent.

49. In some curriculum areas, there is too little analysis of local need for planning purposes, and the programme does not have a clear rationale and coherence. The college has set targets to reduce the high level of course cancellations, with some success. However, the cancellation of planned courses is still too high in some areas. The lack of marketing information about local needs makes it more difficult for the college to resolve this issue.

50. Resources were identified as a weakness at the previous inspection, but they are now satisfactory. There has been good progress against the action plan from the previous inspection. The college has made improvements to the accommodation, including an effectively managed move into a new building on one site, and extensive redecoration of rooms and other buildings. Further work is planned to improve accommodation. Curriculum managers were allocated a budget to improve the quality of equipment and other learning resources and these are now mostly satisfactory.

51. Liaison between the local authority and the college has strengthened and there is now a better basis for further developments. Several changes since the previous inspection have supported this. A new head of strategy and planning was appointed in June 2003, and has been working closely with the college. The work of the lifelong learning board has encouraged dialogue between council officers, elected members and the college and some effective working partnerships have begun to develop as a result of these links. Councillors take a keen interest in the future development of lifelong learning for the Reading community. At this stage, however, there has been too little involvement of the board of other directorates.

52. Strategic planning of the council's adult learning provision remains underdeveloped. The council is beginning to see the college's provision as part of a wider programme across the borough, but it is unclear how this fits in with the council's overall strategy. The three-year development plan, drawn up in consultation with the LSC and council, has replaced the adult learning plan. This is a satisfactory basis for planning in the college, but does not sufficiently encompass adult learning outside the college's programme. The council and the college are not clear how changes in the council's charging policy and the change to formula funding will affect the plans for the delivery of the adult provision.

53. The council's strategy for lifelong learning establishes the principles against which detailed operational plans will be developed. It is not yet the basis for operational planning in the authority and is not sufficiently based on an analysis of existing provision

or any informed needs analysis. The college and the council recognise the need to identify provision across the local area, identify areas of potential overlap, and carry out a needs analysis as the next stage of planning.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

54. There are very effective strategies to widen participation among community groups. The college has established good links with other organisations in the community. Community consultation processes have improved since the previous inspection, and the service has developed a wide range of partnerships to improve the learning provision. There is effective corporate commitment to equal opportunities and diversity at all levels and this is carried forward through partnerships with schools, other local authority services, community organisations and the voluntary sector. An outreach worker has recently been appointed to engage with community groups, and this has improved the college's response to meeting identified community needs. The provision now attracts a more diverse range of learners and is increasingly raising awareness of cultural diversity within the college and the wider community. Specific projects, such as an arts project for creating greeting cards made by single homeless people, have been effective in expanding the provision. Other groups which have benefited through the work of the outreach worker include Indian, African-Caribbean and Pakistani community groups. The college is responding well to the declared needs of community organisations. For example, in response to a request made by a local childcare nursery, the college offered a basic literacy and numeracy skills course at the nursery. After the course four of the learners, whose self-esteem had improved during the course, were then employed by the nursery.

55. There have been significant improvements in the access and specialist resources in the college since the previous inspection. The college has carried out a very thorough assessment of all of its premises to establish the amount of work required to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 2001. A suitably qualified and experienced project worker has been appointed to ensure that work to improve premises is carried out. Clear assessments of all buildings are now carried out and a suitable action plan is being closely followed and monitored. Many improvements, such as installing electric doors, ramps which are suitable for wheelchair users and improved signage, have already taken place. Other suitable projects have been identified and are planned for completion in the coming months. There is good access to crèche facilities in all of the main college sites. These are used well by a wide variety of learners. There are comprehensive procedures to evaluate who makes use of the facilities. Most course timetables are planned to take account of learners' childcare responsibilities and travel arrangements.

56. There is good provision and support across the college for learners who have a disability. The college has good arrangements, backed by a clear written policy and set of procedures, for identifying and meeting learners' additional needs. There are currently 41 learners receiving additional support. The additional support team has arranged extra help through individual classroom learning support, the provision of special equipment, and the use of a signer and translator. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of differentiation in most lessons. The diversity of learners is celebrated and used

positively. The college takes great care to integrate and meet the needs of all learners. There are many good examples of learners improving their learning, such as one hearing impaired learner who has learnt to lip read in Spanish. The college takes an inclusive approach to this aspect of provision and encourages varying degrees of integration, according to individual needs.

57. In 2003-04, 70 per cent of all learners are women. Many of these learners use their learning at home and in the wider community. Of the 70 full-time and part-time staff at the college, 54 are women. Staffing ethnicity and disability levels match the local demographic profiles.

58. Since the previous inspection a satisfactory equal opportunities strategy and action plan has been written and implemented, in line with the requirements under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. Effective monitoring of the action plan takes place through the recently formed inclusive learning and equality group. Policies and procedures are appropriate to the needs of learners and staff in the college. Much staff training and development has now taken place. Approximately 95 per cent of staff have received suitable training on the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act and over 50 per cent of staff have attended adequate training on other topics related to equal opportunities such as the Race Relations Act. Suitable arrangements are in hand to train the rest of the workforce. Following this training, there is a greater emphasis on the appropriate use of differentiation during lessons and in lesson planning.

59. There is insufficient use of community languages. Most documents created by the college are written in English and create a barrier to a large section of the community for whom English is not their first language. There is insufficient availability of support material written in a range of community languages, Braille, large print or on audio tape. There are too few documents written in the main community languages. For example, a questionnaire developed by the college for learners to evaluate their course is not available in a form which all learners can easily understand. The college has carried out research to identify which languages are the most widely spoken in the community and plans to create documents which will be written in the four most common languages other than English. The college has established a useful network of tutors and staff who are able to act as interpreters for learners. Marketing documents, leaflets and displays used by the college show positive images of people which promote the council's and college's social inclusion agenda.

60. Since the previous inspection the collection of data has improved. However, there is insufficient analysis of retention and achievement data for equal opportunities purposes. The college is not able to identify whether learners from any specific group are disadvantaged. For example, the college does not analyse data to see if more men leave courses early, or if any specific minority group is disadvantaged. Learner surveys are also ineffective in establishing if any particular group is disadvantaged. Suitable targets have been set for learners and are being monitored according to age, ethnicity, disability and gender. These are more representative of the local community than they were at the previous inspection.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

61. Since the previous inspection, the college's post-inspection action plan has been very successfully implemented and this is now having a positive impact on the quality of teaching in all curriculum areas. The college has developed a clear and comprehensive set of quality assurance policies and procedures which are available to part-time tutors through a professionally produced tutor handbook and accompanying CD-ROM. A website for staff is being developed. A short, focused staff induction programme now runs for all tutors, including those who have worked at the college for some time. The curriculum managers have an excellent understanding of the college's quality assurance policies. Most of the tutors view the managers as approachable and knowledgeable. A few of the tutors do not feel fully involved in the process to develop new documents. Overall, there is a very good level of involvement by tutors and other staff in self-assessment practice, with effective planning, use of consultation meetings and course review documents. The overall judgements made by the college matched those made by inspectors in four of the five areas inspected, and the college underestimated the progress made in its quality assurance arrangements.

62. An improved range of staff training events has been promoted to part-time tutors, and includes topics such as equality and diversity. These are well organised by college managers. At subject level, events are also organised by individual curriculum managers, such as in health screening for sport and fitness tutors. Although the staff development programme is well organised and well publicised, its impact on the quality of teaching is reduced as the take up of places on a number of events is poor, in spite of the variety of times and dates on offer. New tutors in particular have not all attended the training courses.

63. The system of lesson observation is satisfactory. It is well established and provides useful information on the quality of teaching and learning. New tutors are observed during their first term, and classes where retention and attendance are causing concern are also targeted. The observation of language classes at 38 per cent fell below the colleges' policy target of 50 per cent in 2002-03. In the current year, the college is exceeding its target.

64. Management of the learner satisfaction survey is satisfactory. It has a positive impact on improvements to the learners' experience. Data from the survey are collated and analysed. Information sheets which identify the improvements made as a result of the survey are displayed in public areas of the college for the benefit of learners. However, coverage is currently confined to the three main college sites, and the surveys are in a language and format that do not meet all learners' needs.

65. The monitoring of the college's quality assurance procedures by the council is satisfactory. Regular minuted meetings take place between the college head and the head of strategy and planning. Additional funding for accommodation has been found to address weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

66. Although significant progress has been made, some inadequacies in implementation

remain. For example, there is some unsatisfactory practice in course evaluation, and insufficient initial and formative assessment in some programme areas. The systems are not being completed satisfactorily by all staff. The college is still trialing new approaches to recording learners' achievement and progress and it is too early fully to evaluate the impact on all learners.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	435	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good pass rates on accredited courses
- particularly good use of interactive teaching equipment to promote learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient checking of learning in many classes
- inadequate use of formative assessment
- insufficient needs analysis for planning of provision

Achievement and standards

67. There are good rates of retention on accredited and non-accredited courses. During 2002-03, the completion rate was 96 per cent for non-accredited courses and 91 per cent for accredited courses, with an overall retention rate of 93 per cent. The figures for the current year are 93 per cent and 91 per cent, respectively, with an overall retention rate of 92 per cent. This strength was identified at the previous inspection.

68. Achievement on accredited courses is good. In 2002-03, pass rates for completers on the internationally accredited course and the basic information technology (IT) course were good at 88 per cent and 85 per cent respectively. For the start IT and introduction to computer courses, all those who were retained achieved their qualification.

69. Significant numbers of learners progress from introductory courses to courses at level 1. Attainment on non-accredited courses has improved since the previous inspection. The skills developed by learners are now at least satisfactory and many demonstrate very good skills. Most learners use the computers and industry-standard software with confidence. Learners on one course had quickly overcome their fear of computers to produce simple publications that mixed text and pictures. On another course, learners working towards the creation of their own website were able to use their learning to analyse the features that make commercial websites successful.

70. Attendance and class sizes are satisfactory. During the inspection, the average

attendance was 82 per cent and average class size was eight learners.

Quality of education and training

71. In many classes, particularly good use is made of interactive teaching equipment. Two-thirds of the venues used for teaching ICT courses have interactive whiteboards and software. Tutors make good use of the equipment to demonstrate the use of software applications. The boards are used to help learners reinforce their learning in effective and enjoyable ways. One method involved two teams of learners competing in a pub quiz. Each team chose a question where the difficulty increased with the number of points they wished to gain. Answers to questions had to be demonstrated to the rest of the class on the whiteboard.

72. Standards of teaching and learning are satisfactory. Fifty-seven per cent of lessons observed during inspection were good or better. Only one lesson was unsatisfactory. Most classes are carefully planned and skilfully delivered and involve learners in a variety of practical computer-based activities. However, some tutors did not identify the learning objectives clearly. The best lesson plans clearly indicate how the teaching will cater for different learners' needs. In one lesson, internet research material had been tailored to match each individual's particular business interests, but in another lesson a class demonstration was clearly unsuitable for most of the learners. In one class of eight learners who had severe hearing impairments, there was very good tuition through sign language, lip reading and voice, given by the tutor and support tutor. However, in a class of 11 learners who had learning disabilities, the tutor and volunteer were unable to provide the level of support needed.

73. ICT resources are satisfactory and have improved since the previous inspection. The college now has three well-equipped computer rooms containing modern networked computers with industry-standard software, one of which functions as the learning resource centre. Use of the centre is free to all learners on a drop-in basis and a full-time tutor provides effective assistance. Good and increasing use is made of the centre by learners and by tutors from different parts of the college. The centre has a range of equipment suitable for desktop publishing. A weakness identified in the previous inspection report has been resolved through the purchase of adaptive equipment and software to assist learners with physical impairments. However, these resources are not always available in the learning centre. Part-time tutors deliver most computer classes. Few tutors have advanced computing qualifications but most have, or are working towards, a teaching certificate. Technical support is available during week days.

74. Many learners make good progress and achieve their goals. However, whole groups of learners take external assessments at the same time and there is little flexibility for learners to work at a pace to suit their own needs. Learners' work is accurately marked. Some tutors provide useful and constructive comments, but there is little written feedback for most of the work. One group submits their work by e-mail, and the tutor provides effective feedback by the same route. Tutors effectively monitor learners' progress on accredited courses.

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75. Course information and advice has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. However, the descriptors of course levels in the prospectus differ from those in the national qualifications framework. Induction is satisfactory and includes appropriate advice about health and safety when using computers.

76. In many classes there is insufficient checking of learning during the lesson. Tutors respond effectively to learners' requests for help, but they do not ask questions to encourage them to demonstrate their learning and talk about their attainment. During whole-class lessons, responses are provided by the more able learners and there is insufficient activity to check all learning.

77. There is inadequate use of formative assessment. On some courses initial assessment is poorly designed and does not produce useful information either for assessing learners' support needs or for assessing their IT skills. Information from initial assessment is rarely recorded in learners' individual learning plans. The plans identify the main objectives of a course, but are used as a record rather than a plan that is monitored and reviewed. They are often left uncompleted and unsigned. A small minority of plans have a good record of learner and tutor comments about the learner's attainment, but many have no evaluation of progress. These weaknesses were identified in the previous inspection.

78. Since the previous inspection, steps have been taken to improve the range of provision for ICT learners. The college responds well to requests from learners and community groups. Classes have been developed for learners who have a disability, partnerships have been developed to increase community participation, and links are being made with employers through the Berkshire basics for business project. However, there has been insufficient analysis of the needs of adult communities and the business sector across Reading. There has been insufficient checking of other ICT provision in the area. There is still no opportunity for learners to progress beyond level 2. There are too many classes at level 1, few at level 2 and no classes at level 3 or above. Learners are not always referred to level 3 provision that is available elsewhere. There is insufficient clarity in the differences between basic courses. Of the 31 courses advertised in the prospectus as starting in January, 50 per cent were cancelled due to insufficient enrolments, compared with 22 per cent the previous term. Seventy-four per cent of classes take place between Monday and Wednesday. There are occasional Saturday classes. There are few innovative courses to excite and encourage adults back into learning.

Leadership and management

79. The operational management of the curriculum area is now satisfactory. Staff meet regularly. Quality assurance has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. There are procedures to internally verify the quality of all courses and for the observation of teaching and learning. The college's observation scheme shows grades similar to those identified by inspectors. Members of staff were involved in the

self-assessment process, and identified many of the weaknesses, although not all were considered key weaknesses. The grade given by the college is the same as that given by inspectors. Tutors have received training in equal opportunities, including the Disability Discrimination Act. All members of staff are encouraged to attend staff development activities, such as improved teaching techniques and requirements for new accredited courses.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	810	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good focus in many classes on meeting the diverse needs of learners
- very effective programme planning and development
- very effective communications and support

Weaknesses

- inadequate recording of progress and attainment
- too much reliance on demonstrations in lessons
- weak initial assessment of fitness programmes

Achievement and standards

80. Retention rates are good. The retention rate on the four accredited courses has improved from 71 per cent in 2002-03 to 100 per cent in 2003-04. On non-accredited courses it has improved from 74 per cent to 90 per cent.

81. Learners' attainment on non-accredited provision cannot be measured effectively. This was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. The college has introduced a useful diary that is completed by learners. However, the starting point for learners is not sufficiently clear, so tangible progress cannot be measured. Diary entries, although valuable as a record of learners' impressions and feelings, are often not sufficiently specific, and sometimes not completed at all. Personal objectives are rarely agreed or discussed at the start of the course, and tutors do not comment on them.

Quality of education and training

82. Most teaching is satisfactory or better, and only one lesson was unsatisfactory overall. The most effective teaching meets the needs of learners with diverse needs. Learners have a wide variety of needs, through increasing age, medical conditions, muscular-skeletal injuries, physical or sensory impairments and mental health needs. The most effective tutors have a good awareness of, and are sensitive to, these individual needs. Learning activities are very well matched to the wide range of learners' abilities in groups, so that learners can contribute and complete tasks at their own level.

83. There is very effective programme planning and development, so that provision meets the needs of learners. This aspect of the provision has significantly improved since the previous inspection, when it was a weakness. Gathering and analysis of local information is used to plan the programme. This is supported by effective market testing of courses through the use of taster programmes. The manager has cultivated partnerships, through outreach work, to extend the scope of provision. For example, work with a mental health charity has led to the introduction of new courses targeted specifically at the needs of people with mental health needs. The proportion of cancelled programmes has reduced from 40 per cent in 2002-03, to just over 15 per cent in the current year. This is well below the college's target of 20 per cent. Recruitment of people from minority ethnic groups has risen from 5 per cent to 9 per cent, and of people with a recognised disability from 9 per cent to 15 per cent.

84. Resources are adequate. There have been significant improvements since the previous inspection. Mats, blocks and belts are available for all learners on yoga programmes, and mats, balls, poles and scarves are available for learners on fitness programmes.

85. Accommodation is adequate and risk assessments are carried out. Some classes have been moved to venues which are more suitable, although one venue is often too cold. There are now storage facilities for equipment at all venues. Recently developed contacts with professional bodies have helped in the recruitment of appropriately qualified staff.

86. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Course information is clear, and learners receive sufficient information before starting a course. Learners have an induction to the programme, and additional support is available. Non-attendance is followed up, but the system varies between lessons. The curriculum manager has a record of the different systems used.

87. In the less-successful lessons, tutors rely too much on demonstrations. In many of these lessons, there is insufficient variety in the teaching methods. Tutors spend too long performing the exercises themselves, and learners are required only to listen. The demonstrations are often unnecessary, and at times, cannot be seen by the learners. Tutors do not observe and correct individual performance sufficiently and do not encourage interaction between learners. They are not questioned or asked to contribute their ideas or experiences.

88. Although a successful health and medical information screening questionnaire has been introduced, the initial assessment of learners' specific fitness needs is weak. This was identified on the previous inspection, and while there has been significant development work carried out, it remains a weakness. There is no assessment of body fat, cardio-respiratory fitness, joint mobility, balance capability, or stress levels, in the courses that are designed to help learners improve in these areas.

Leadership and management

89. Communication and support has improved and is now very effective. This was a weakness at the previous inspection. At regular meetings between the manager and the tutors, programme delivery concerns are considered, improvement actions are evaluated, and action to deal with under-performance is agreed. Tutors from specific disciplines such as health, fitness and yoga also meet to review and share good practice. These are well attended. Tutors receive routine communications on a regular basis by e-mail, are contacted by telephone to alert them to important problems, and are consulted about proposed changes to documents. Most tutors take the opportunity to contribute to their development. The college provides a contribution to the costs of updating for tutors.

90. Quality assurance has improved. Teaching observations have now been carried out. The self-assessment report identifies the improvements made, but does not accurately reflect the key weaknesses that remain. It overestimates the extent to which planned improvements have been fully implemented and gives a higher grade than inspectors. Equal opportunities is satisfactory in this area of learning. All tutors have attended recent training. In lessons, tutors are sensitive to equality and diversity and provide the necessary support and modifications for learners who have a disability. However, the section on equality of opportunity in course documents is not always completed.

Visual & performing arts & media**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	1811	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good standard of work in clay sculpture, fashion, painting and photography
- much stimulating teaching
- good leadership

Weaknesses

- poor opportunities for debate in small classes
- inadequate resources for some aspects of the provision
- insufficient recording of progress

Achievement and standards

91. The learners' work is good in fashion, clay sculpture, dance, watercolour painting and photography. In a flower painting lesson, learners were producing work of a professional standard and one learner had been awarded a silver award by a horticultural society. The achievement rate is satisfactory, although the monitoring and recording of achievements is not always sufficient. This area of learning has a very small amount of accredited work, with only five learners taking examinations in 2003. Learners who enter for external examinations in fashion and photography do very well.

92. Retention rates have improved. During the week of inspection, punctuality was poor and there was poor attendance in many lessons. Overall attendance during the week of the inspection was 72 per cent and in a few lessons around 50 per cent. However, the registers show higher levels of attendance during the previous weeks.

Quality of education and training

93. Most teaching is satisfactory or good, and only one lesson was unsatisfactory. In the best lessons teaching is stimulating, learners are highly motivated and work with enthusiasm. Lesson planning is mostly effective, with good schemes of work and some good handouts. Where appropriate, tutors make particularly good use of demonstrations to help learners understand and develop their skills. In the best lessons tutors inspire and stimulate learners, give them challenging tasks and are particularly supportive of learners with different abilities. Learners enjoy sharing their skills and knowledge and clearly learn from each other. In a very good lesson on the fashion

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course, learners were encouraged by the tutor to discuss their work. They were clearly attaining high standards in their work and were confident in explaining what they were doing and why. However, low numbers in a significant minority of classes limited discussion, debate and sharing of ideas and greatly reduced opportunities for learning and attainment. While most planning is good and has improved since the previous inspection, there is insufficient consistency in the thoroughness of lesson planning, and in several classes learners are insufficiently challenged. In some lessons there is insufficient focus on learning outcomes.

94. The range of courses is satisfactory. It includes a wide choice of courses, and the area is developing a range of courses for learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These courses provide good opportunities for learners to experiment with and explore a wide range of media. Concerns raised in the previous inspection report, on the needs analysis and planning of the programme, have not yet been fully resolved. There are still many courses in the prospectus that subsequently are cancelled due to insufficient recruitment. In the current term, 20 of the 65 courses advertised in the prospectus were cancelled. Progression for learners is improving and the college is developing a range of different levels for its courses. These levels are on a scale of 1 to 5. Level 1 is described as absolute beginners and level 5 identifies learners who are very competent in the specialist area. Enrichment activities are used to enhance learners' understanding. Teaching and learning is supported by organised trips and attendance at lectures. Recent activities include a study trip to Paris and attendance at an evening with a top designer for learners on fashion courses.

95. Initial guidance and support for learners are effective. There is a wide range of well-designed information for learners. A new learners' handbook provides them with very useful information on key staff, what they can expect from the college and what is expected of them. The handbook also contains useful information on support services, about the learning centre, study tips and essential skills. The induction for learners is also effective. Learners speak highly of their tutors and the individual support they receive during their time in the college.

96. There is an appropriate number of tutors who are well qualified. Most are practicing artists and designers. Tutors and learners are assisted by two technical support staff.

97. Since the previous inspection, the college has made some improvement to its specialist resources and equipment, and a number of new tutors have been appointed. These improvements are impacting positively on the learners' experience in areas such as fashion, photography and general drawing and painting. Resource boxes have also been provided in each centre to support learners' work.

98. Despite improvements in accommodation, concerns identified at the previous inspection have not been fully rectified, and some rooms are not an appropriate environment for teaching and learning. For example, in one drawing class the lighting was inadequate for the type of work and made it difficult for learners to fully express their ideas and observe shape, tone and form. There are also outstanding concerns around equipment. In one music lesson there was only one piano for seven learners,

which allowed each learner very little keyboard practice or tuition.

99. Assessments on certificated courses are generally fair and are supported by the external verifier. On leisure classes this is generally informal and on an individual basis. Many tutors use learning journals to set targets and evaluate progress. This is relatively new and is not sufficiently monitored and recorded. While some tutors are very effective in completing these records, others write comments that are too general and descriptive, with insufficient evaluation.

Leadership and management

100. There is clear leadership of the curriculum area with effective communication between the curriculum manager and tutors. Since the previous inspection, college managers have further established the quality assurance systems and common procedures for monitoring the learners' performance. There is a clear commitment to improve the quality of the provision. The most recent self-assessment report and position statement provide evidence of thorough and critical debate about concerns affecting the programme of courses offered, recording of achievement, the quality of teaching and learning, resources, assessment and support for learners. Managers recognise that there is still much to be done if these developments are to secure further improvements across the area of learning. For example, the system of lesson observations is not yet having sufficient impact on the quality of teaching and learning, and inconsistencies remain in the quality of lesson planning, and records of progress are variable in quality. Managers and tutors strive to ensure equality of opportunity. The environment in which visual and performing arts is provided is sensitive to the diverse needs of the community. Particularly good use is made of visual imagery to ensure representation of many different minority ethnic groups.

English, languages & communications

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	1059	2

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good achievement rates
- good teaching and learning in many classes
- very wide choice of courses
- very effective initial guidance and advice
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- inadequate training for inexperienced tutors

Achievement and standards

101. The achievement rates are good. The pass rate on accredited courses in 2002-03 was 81 per cent. Many learners achieve their personal goals. At beginner level, one learner was pleased to be able to understand the instructions on a packet of soup. Another learner, on a visit to the country where he was learning the language, was able to understand the signs he saw in his hotel, the street and in shops. Another learner, at a more advanced level, managed to read a novel in the foreign language. One learner who has considerable hearing loss is now able to lip-read in Spanish. In many lessons where the emphasis is on communication, most learners have gained sufficient confidence to speak to the tutor and to each other in the new language. They also report that they are able to cope in real situations which they encounter on visits abroad.

102. Retention rates, which were highlighted as a weakness at the previous inspection, are improving. The rate for 2002-03 was 10 per cent above that of the previous year. Learners now inform tutors in advance of intended absences. Tutors take this into account when planning their lessons and are sending on any missed work to encourage the learner to return.

103. Attendance during inspection week was satisfactory at 77 per cent. These figures include attendance on an evening when there was snow and ice.

Quality of education and training

104. The teaching and learning are good in most classes. Most lessons are well planned and consideration is given in the lesson plans to the needs of learners of different abilities or with specific difficulties. Tutors use a good variety of activities to enable learners to practise and improve all four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The planning of lessons shows a good awareness of equal opportunities, and differentiation needs are recorded on the plans, as well as ways of promoting diversity. For example, a tutor noted a learner who had short-term memory loss who would need extra help and provided it. In lessons observed, details such as the way a Chinese speaker would describe a location, the Thai house numbering system and the different vocabulary and accent in Brazilian Portuguese were highlighted.

105. In the best lessons, tutors and learners use only the target language, so that learners ask questions about vocabulary, and receive the answer or explanation, in that language. Oral competence improves in these classes. The best tutors use active and lively teaching methods. For example, a class studying British Sign Language visited a large country house in order to learn signs for furniture and household items, and in a Portuguese class, a tutor used a tape recording of different sounds in order to elicit answers to questions. However, in less-effective lessons there is an over-reliance on English as the medium for instruction and explanation. Some new tutors are not performing as well as their more experienced colleagues.

106. Programme planning has improved. The number of classes cancelled has fallen from 48 per cent in the autumn term of 2002-03, to 23 per cent in the same period in 2003-04. The range of provision is wide, with 15 languages offered, most at different levels. Accredited and non-accredited courses are provided, with non-accredited found more usually in the daytime to suit the needs of older learners. All courses have progression routes planned. If there are too few enrolments for the more advanced courses, learners are directed to classes in another establishment, where there is a partnership agreement to combine classes.

107. Initial advice and guidance is very effective. The college has its own system of language levels which are clearly described in the prospectus. Each level states what knowledge or experience a learner should have in order to join, what they can expect to cover on the course, and where they could progress to on completion. Every course has a detailed information sheet which is sent out to learners on request. Any new learners from outside the college, who wish to join classes above beginners level, have a telephone interview with the curriculum manager to assess their knowledge and ability. They are then invited to join the class as a taster before full enrolment.

108. Many tutors are native speakers. However, there is a high turnover of staff, which means that some new tutors do not have time to complete a teaching qualification before they leave the college. A third of the teachers are new this year and just under half do not have a teaching qualification. Adequate use is made of audiovisual equipment, but there is no use of IT. A small resource base has been set up at the three

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main centres with dictionaries, grammar books, tapes and language magazines and the college provides cassettes, CD and video players, televisions and overhead projectors. The accommodation is satisfactory, with clean, warm rooms which are carpeted. One centre has had alterations to the high ceiling, which has considerably improved the acoustics. However, the rooms have very little display material to create an authentic atmosphere.

109. Assessment is satisfactory. Initial assessment using observation, listening and self-assessment takes place, but is not standardised and is not always recorded. Tutors use question and answer sessions and monitor group and pair work activities to assess progress. There is also a skills checklist which is used on non-accredited courses. Most tutors regularly set homework which is marked in detail and returned promptly to learners. In most instances, learners are aware of the progress they are making.

Leadership and management

110. Management of the curriculum is good with a clear sense of direction and a desire to improve standards. There is effective communication between the curriculum manager and tutors by personal contact, e-mail and a new curriculum newsletter which has good-practice tips, as well as general information and details of training opportunities. Tutors feel well supported by their manager and confident that they can approach her with requests and queries.

111. Quality assurance has improved. Successful action has been taken to resolve weaknesses from the previous inspection and concerns identified from tutor and learner surveys. For example, as a result of feedback from these sources, the accreditation system has been changed to one that is simpler and easier to understand. The curriculum manager is able to use the new management information system effectively to extract information and is more aware of what is going on in the department. Observations of teaching are carried out satisfactorily by two managers who are linguists. In 2002-03, 38 per cent of staff were observed. Under the new scheme for providing mentors and coaches, three modern foreign languages staff have been trained. New staff have a standard induction and are prioritised for observations. Training has been offered to deal with some of the weaker aspects of teaching, but take up has been disappointing. Staff have equal opportunities training as part of their induction and use opportunities in their teaching to encourage the recognition of diversity.

Foundation programmes**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	689	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good rates of retention
- good achievement rates in ESOL, family literacy and numeracy lessons
- good development of confidence to apply skills acquired in ESOL lessons
- consistently well-planned lessons to meet individual needs
- very good use of diaries in the literacy and numeracy workshops

Weaknesses

- inappropriate use of worksheets in literacy classes
- too few staff with specialist training in literacy and numeracy
- insufficient analysis of community needs in programme planning
- no pre-course information or induction materials in community languages
- insufficiently measurable performance targets

Achievement and standards

112. Rates of retention have improved and are now good across all programmes. In 2002-03, the retention rate was 77 per cent and for the first term of 2003-04 it was 90 per cent.

113. Achievement rates are good in ESOL and family literacy lessons. Learners confidently try out language structures and apply them to new situations in lessons. A learner gave a positive comment after practising in pair work. Learners were given a pair work activity which developed confidence and fluency in the use of complex language. In another class, learners were clearly challenged by a grammar exercise. In a family numeracy class, parents prepared materials to help their own children with numeracy, and demonstrated good understanding of the concepts.

114. The focus on the development of spoken skills in ESOL has improved since the previous inspection. Learners develop the confidence to apply language they have learned to new situations, in and outside the classroom. For example, one learner stated that as a direct result of the English she was learning, she is now able to carry out complex tasks at the post office without the help of her husband. Another learner said she was confident enough to be involved with her children's parent/teacher association. A further learner is no longer frightened to answer the telephone.

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115. Accreditation is satisfactory and improving. It is available at all levels of the literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes, but no suitable accreditation for speaking skills in ESOL has been identified. Of those taking tests in ESOL in 2002-03, 78 per cent passed. The proportion for the first term of 2003-04 was 88 per cent. In literacy and numeracy provision, pass rates range from 75 per cent on numeracy classes, 83 per cent on literacy classes.

Quality of education and training

116. All of the teaching is satisfactory or better. Across all aspects of the provision, lesson planning has improved and tutors plan activities which are designed to meet individual needs. In the ESOL classes, the plans reflect the schemes of work, and tutors are flexible in making adaptations where particular needs or interests are identified in the group. ESOL lesson plans include the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

117. Since the previous inspection, the college has developed drop-in literacy and numeracy workshops, so that learners can attend at different times in the week. To make sure that there is consistency in a learner's programme, a learning diary has been developed and this is completed by learners and used by tutors to plan the next lesson. This is well used by most learners and most tutors, although the recording is sometimes descriptive rather than evaluative.

118. Real situations are used effectively in many classes, and in Berkshire basics for business classes form the basis of the individually devised teaching programme. For example, a learner was using real memos as the basis for editing and report writing. However, there is little that is imaginative in most of the literacy and numeracy teaching. There is too little use of project work or of composition to develop and consolidate writing skills. Too many staff rely heavily on worksheets or other published materials in lessons and these are not always appropriate. This reliance on worksheets is particularly the case where tutors are new or not adequately trained. For example, in a class with beginner readers there was insufficient emphasis on the learners' experience as the basis for developing skills in phonics. The phonics in the worksheets contained vocabulary that was not used by, or meaningful for the learner. Published worksheets are not always examined to see how effectively they introduce a topic. They are sometimes too difficult for the learners.

119. The use of initial assessment has improved and is now satisfactory. Tests are not diagnostic, but they help to determine the learner's general ability on entering the provision. Classes are sufficiently small for tutors to identify learners' needs during the first few weeks and make a more accurate assessment. Individual learning plans were identified as poor at the previous inspection, but are now satisfactory. Targets overall are more specific. Individual learning plans are reviewed regularly by most tutors, and are used to set individual targets and measure achievement of personal learning goals. However, a minority of tutors, particularly new or unqualified tutors, have insufficient

guidance.

120. Resources are satisfactory overall and have improved since the previous inspection. Accommodation is satisfactory. Teaching rooms are an appropriate size, well lit and comfortable. There is insufficient IT equipment available for tutors or learners in classrooms. However, learners have access to the learning centre at the Wilson Road site, which offers good open learning facilities, and has recently become a learndirect centre. Since the previous inspection, learners have access to independent study facilities in the learning centre.

121. Most of the staff who teach are appropriately skilled and qualified, although not all literacy and numeracy staff have appropriate qualifications or experience. This was identified at the previous inspection. Volunteers are well trained.

122. Provision has expanded, and more is now offered in the community to meet specific needs. Classes have been introduced to focus on either listening and speaking, or reading and writing. These supplement the main provision and extend the range and quantity of ESOL tuition available. Drop-in workshops have been developed for literacy and numeracy. Learners are able to change classes if they want to work at a different level or want to develop a specific skill. However, research into the needs of the whole community is not sufficient for planning across Reading. Analysis of need is not sufficiently strong in programme planning. The curriculum is developed mainly in response to existing learners' needs or in response to the needs of existing community contacts.

123. Pre-course information and induction materials are not available in community languages. The information and support needed for an adequate induction are only available in English. This remains a weakness from the previous inspection. A specialist in dyslexia has been appointed since the previous inspection and sees learners on an individual basis. The work is thorough and developmental.

Leadership and management

124. The management of the foundation area has greatly improved since the previous inspection. Staff meet regularly and there has been greater involvement with the national strategy and the curriculum. They have received equal opportunities training which is included in the induction programme. Staff are encouraged to differentiate activities to meet individual needs and have edited materials which reinforce stereotypes.

125. The arrangements for quality assurance have improved, and there are now systems to cover much of the teaching and learning activity. New ESOL tutors are well supported and assisted in the use of unfamiliar systems. However, some of the literacy and numeracy tutors have not received sufficient support. Learners' surveys are not adapted to meet their language or other needs.

126. Targets for improvement are too general to bring about improvement. They are

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not measurable and do not have timescales for improvement. Some of the new tutors have not been observed as yet, although this is planned.