

INSPECTION REPORT

Rotherham LEA

28 April 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 and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based 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
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall judgement

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

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

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

INSPECTION REPORT

Rotherham LEA

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's (RMBC's) adult and community learning provision is the responsibility of the community learning service. This service is part of the education, culture and leisure services directorate. A community learning manager is responsible for implementing the community learning strategy and is assisted by a family learning co-ordinator and an adult community learning co-ordinator. Nine other staff provide support in teaching, development and administrative roles. With the exception of family learning, RMBC is not a direct provider of adult and community learning. It has contracts with 39 learning providers, ranging from large colleges to small voluntary organisations, which provide learning across 23 venues.

2. Rotherham borough includes some areas of significant deprivation and it is the policy of the community learning service to attract new learners by supporting non-vocational, non-accredited learning provision through its subcontractors. The service works with a range of partners and is a member of the Rotherham Learning Partnership and its subcommittees.

3. RMBC funds learning through the South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the single regeneration budget (SRB). The Home Office is funding RMBC's project for refugees and asylum seekers.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Information & communications technology

4. During 2002-03, RMBC offered 52 courses in information and communications technology (ICT) to 423 learners through 15 subcontractors. RMBC offers these courses to a wide range of learners, including the unemployed, the homeless, learners with drug or alcohol problems, older learners, and learners with mobility or learning difficulties. It also provides courses specifically for workers' associations and minority ethnic groups. Most courses are 'first step' learning which includes tasters and introductory short and long courses. There are also a number of community programmes, built around the use of ICT, and RMBC offers these courses at a variety of venues within the borough, including those used by voluntary groups, community centres, churches, colleges, secondary and primary schools. The learners can access this provision during the day, afternoon or evening, and some courses are offered on Sundays. Learners have open access to some ICT facilities in some of the venues. Courses are free of charge.

Foundation programmes

5. RMBC subcontracts eight providers to plan and manage the provision of a broad range of courses for learners with a variety of learning difficulties and disabilities. There are 140 learners on non-accredited programmes across the borough, of whom 53 per cent are women, 47 per cent are men, and less than 1 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. RMBC recruits its learners through social services networks and the voluntary sector. Where initial assessment is carried out, it is with learners' carers and social services staff. RMBC provides additional support when it identifies a need. The courses run for three hours a day from one to three days a week. The providers transport many of the learners to the centres, though some individuals arrive independently. Most of the learners at the specialist centres have been attending a range of courses for several years. All of the learning programmes are free of charge.

Family learning

6. There are 113 learners in family learning, which includes family literacy and numeracy courses. Most courses last for 12 or 24 hours and are designed to fit in with learners' childcare arrangements. The main target groups are parents and other family members with children at the schools where the provision is based. Some learning sessions are linked specifically to the stages of the standard assessment tests (SATs). During the past year, RMBC has offered family learning activities in over 30 primary schools, one of which is a resource base for the use of staff and the target groups of parents and carers. The Open College Network accredits most of the activities at levels 1 and 2. Accreditation has previously been arranged through the partnership arrangements with local colleges but RMBC is seeking new arrangements for accreditation due to the changes in funding procedures. Courses are free of charge. The subcontractors provide free childcare supported by adult and community learning funding.

Community learning

7. RMBC funds 21 community learning programmes across the borough together with further education colleges and voluntary and community organisations. It uses 15 venues, including village halls, primary and secondary schools, youth and community centres, a Christian centre, and further education college campuses. Programmes are non-accredited and include craft subjects, beauty therapy, life skills, holiday Spanish and information technology (IT) drop-in centres. Classes run during the day and evenings, and the programmes last from eight to 48 weeks, with most running for 30 weeks. The community learning programme aims to attract learners from identified target groups, including asylum seekers and refugees, men, older learners, and learners from minority ethnic groups. Since September 2002, 560 learners have enrolled on community learning programmes, which are free of charge.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	37
Number of learner interviews	174
Number of staff interviews	32
Number of subcontractor interviews	8
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	53
Number of partner/external agency interviews	20

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

8. The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, RMBC's leadership and management are unsatisfactory, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The quality of learning in family learning is good, and in ICT and community learning it is satisfactory. The quality of learning in the provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities is very weak.

GRADES

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

Areas of learning	Grade
Information & communications technology	3
Foundation programmes	5
Family learning	2
Community learning	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

9. Most of the provision is 'first step' learning. Initial assessment is generally inadequate and most tutors are unaware of learners' skills and experience on entry or their individual learning needs, which makes it difficult to monitor their progress and achievement. In most areas, assessment is informal and unrecorded. In some courses, learners' diaries

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have recently been introduced, but it is too early to judge their effectiveness. Learners in subcontracted provision are not given basic skills tests and there is no clear strategy to develop literacy, numeracy and language skills. Many learners report increased confidence and self-esteem, and an increased understanding and commitment to working in and for their communities.

10. There is no reliable data on which to base judgements about retention or achievement rates.

11. Learners on both accredited and non-accredited long programmes in ICT complete portfolios of evidence. They produce good work and make satisfactory progress.

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	0	3	5	1	0	0	9
Foundation programmes	0	0	1	4	2	0	0	7
Family learning	0	1	4	1	0	0	0	6
Community learning	0	1	4	4	1	0	0	10
Total	0	2	12	14	4	0	0	32
per cent	43.75%			43.75%	12.50%			

12. Of the sessions that the inspectors observed, 44 per cent were good or better, although none were outstanding, and 12.5 per cent were unsatisfactory.

13. **There is good teaching and learning in family learning courses, and 84 per cent of observations were good or better.** Tutors use an appropriate range of teaching techniques, and activities are well planned. Learners are enthusiastic and have good relationships with their tutors. There is a wide and appropriate range of teaching methods used in community learning.

14. **There is particularly good access to resources and provision** to meet a wide range of needs for ICT learners and learners on community learning programmes. RMBC works with a range of partners to offer local provision in accommodation that is suitable for older learners, learners with mobility problems, and minority ethnic groups. A course in ICT for the homeless is accommodated in a local church.

15. **There are very good resources to support family learning.** All tutors have a pack that includes all of their planning and teaching materials on a CD. There is a resource centre, which is used for teaching and staff development.

16. Staff who teach learners with learning difficulties and disabilities are qualified in their subject area, **but they have little experience of working with these learners and no related qualifications.**

17. **There is inadequate initial assessment in all subcontracted provision.** Learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills are not assessed systematically and no diagnostic tests for them are applied consistently. Learners' needs are not recorded adequately or related to their learning plans.

18. **The assessment of learners on short courses in ICT is inadequate.** They are not given clear written feedback on their work or advice about how to improve it.

19. There is a wide range of practical courses available for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. However, **there is little focus on individual learners' needs and insufficient monitoring of the curriculum by providers or through providers' reviews.** Learners do not have clear progression routes into employment or further education and training.

20. **Learners on family learning courses develop a better understanding of their children's needs and the nature of their learning.** They transfer these skills successfully and understand how to promote learning in everyday activities with their children. Learners on community education programmes acquire new skills successfully, which they use very effectively in their personal lives, their jobs, and to support their communities.

21. **ICT learners, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, receive good individual support** from enthusiastic, sensitive and patient tutors, who work hard to meet learners' individual needs. However, **some learners are not set sufficiently challenging targets** or given enough responsibility for their own learning and progress.

Leadership and management

22. **RMBC has a clearly defined strategy for adult and community learning,** which is linked to the local adult learning partnership. This strategy links local and national priorities and works to fund 'first step' learning. The recently appointed community learning team has identified many of the key weaknesses in the management of the provision and has introduced strategies to deal with these, but it is too early to judge their impact.

23. **RMBC has developed productive partnerships** with a broad range of organisations, which have enabled the provision of learning to a wide range of new learners. RMBC's partners speak highly of the support and encouragement that it provides.

24. **The collation and analysis of data are inadequate and RMBC has no system to monitor the learners' rates of achievement and retention.** There were no reliable data to help develop the self-assessment report and targets for improvement have not been set.

25. **RMBC does not manage the work of subcontractors satisfactorily.** An initial visit to monitor key aspects of the contract has recently been introduced, and members of the team will carry out termly monitoring visits. However, **there are examples of inconsistent and unsatisfactory monitoring of teaching and learning and curriculum management in all**

of the subcontracted areas. Only 37 per cent of the target enrolment in courses for adults learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has so far been achieved and there is no clear strategy to rectify this shortfall.

26. Learners in the subcontracted provision are not assessed adequately for literacy and numeracy support needs, and there is no formal procedure to ensure the provision of additional learning support. There is a lack of trained staff and few opportunities for staff to develop their skills in this area.

27. RMBC does not sufficiently monitor equality of opportunity. There are no reliable data related to areas of learning on which to base targets. Although there is good recruitment of learners from under-represented groups on community learning programmes, there is only one learner from a minority ethnic group attending a course for adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and only one male learner from a minority ethnic group on an ICT programme.

28. RMBC has developed a new quality assurance framework for its subcontracted provision, which has clearly defined procedures with time limits and allocated responsibilities. New providers are beginning to use this framework, but it is currently incomplete. **Established providers have a variety of quality assurance arrangements, which are not always applied or monitored consistently.**

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- clear strategic direction of adult and community learning
- good partnership arrangements to widen participation of learners from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- inadequate use and analysis of management information
- ineffective management of subcontractors
- incomplete arrangements for literacy and numeracy support in subcontracted provision
- insufficient strategic monitoring of equality of opportunity
- insufficiently established quality assurance arrangements

Information & communications technology

Strengths

- good standard of work on long courses

- particularly good access to good resources and provision
- good support for individual learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate initial assessment
- inadequate assessment arrangements on short courses
- insufficient promotion of learning to male learners

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- diverse range of practical courses
- good individual learning support in ICT

Weaknesses

- insufficient initial assessment of individual learning needs
- weak reviews of individual learners' progress
- inadequate monitoring of the curriculum
- inappropriately qualified and experienced staff

Family learning

Strengths

- good application of learners' skills to domestic situations
- good teaching and learning
- very good resources to support learning

Community learning

Strengths

- very effective acquisition and application of new skills
- good standards of accommodation and learning resources
- highly appropriate teaching methods in most sessions
- good recruitment of learners from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- inadequate assessment practices
- inadequate awareness of appropriate progression routes among learners
- inadequate professional development opportunities for staff in voluntary and community sector providers

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ROTHERHAM LEA:

- the courses are free
- the opportunities to learn new skills
- short taster courses without long-term commitments
- the provision is local and not in intimidating colleges
- making friends and building social contacts in a relaxed atmosphere
- learning at your own pace
- patient tutors who are supportive and helpful and value your contributions
- no pressure to achieve qualifications
- increased confidence and communication skills
- understanding what children learn at school and finding out that being with them can be educational and fun
- building skills which help contribute to the community
- some all-female groups
- good parking in many venues

WHAT LEARNERS THINK ROTHERHAM LEA COULD IMPROVE:

- shorter courses to achieve qualifications
- more recording of activities to help towards qualifications
- more information about progression routes
- more higher-level provision in some centres
- more programmes running through the summer break to maintain skills
- more learning materials to help continue work at home
- the relevance of learners' diaries
- fewer occasional attendees who delay progress
- more information about equal opportunities
- more specialist equipment for adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities programmes
- more opportunities for work experience
- more opportunities to get jobs

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ROTHERHAM LEA:

- access to reliable data to enable the monitoring of performance
- develop the means of assessing and measuring learners' achievement
- improvement of the quality of teaching and learning
- improvement of the means of sharing good practice
- improvement of the adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities provision
- make appropriate arrangements for literacy and numeracy support
- improvement of the monitoring of equality of opportunity
- the implementation of effective quality assurance arrangements

Language of the Adult and Community Learning

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 INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- clear strategic direction of adult and community learning
- good partnership arrangements to widen participation of learners from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- inadequate use and analysis of management information
- ineffective management of subcontractors
- incomplete arrangements for literacy and numeracy support in subcontracted provision
- insufficient strategic monitoring of equality of opportunity
- insufficiently established quality assurance arrangements

29. RMBC has a clearly defined strategy for adult and community learning. It focuses on local issues in the context of national strategies to ensure that adults with the greatest learning needs are given priority. There is a clear link between RMBC's community strategy and that of the local adult learning partnership. RMBC ensures that adults who take their first step into learning are able to do so as a result of its actions. Recent changes to the management structure of adult and community learning at RMBC have resulted in a candid assessment of the main problems it faces. A clear management strategy has emerged, which seeks to remedy the provision's key weaknesses and to enable RMBC to achieve its strategic aims. RMBC is making good progress in identifying these challenges and making appropriate arrangements, but it is too early to judge their likely impact. RMBC has produced an adult learning plan for 2003-04, which clearly sets out the means by which it proposes to achieve its strategic priorities.

30. RMBC has developed productive partnerships with a broad range of organisations to widen the participation in education of learners from under-represented groups. For example, there are partnerships with charities that provide for the needs of homeless people, or people with disabilities, and with voluntary organisations that prepare unemployed people for work. RMBC is seeking funding to provide training for adults who wish to volunteer for work. Other partnerships promote the participation of asylum seekers, refugees and women from minority ethnic groups. Partnerships with schools enable RMBC to make effective provision for family learning, and links with an adult residential college enable RMBC to make provision for groups with specific needs, such as women affected by domestic violence. RMBC's partners speak highly of the support and encouragement that it provides.

31. RMBC's internal and external communications are satisfactory. The community learning team has recently relocated and most of its staff are now based in one area. RMBC makes good use of e-mail. Arrangements for the appraisal and professional development of RMBC's staff are also satisfactory and a well-established performance development and review process covers all of its staff. This involves setting targets for performance, reviewing achievements and determining staff development priorities, which establishes training priorities. Staff have good access to training opportunities. Many of the staff within the community learning service are relatively recent appointments, so it is not yet possible to judge the effectiveness of the staff development and appraisal process. In its self-assessment report, RMBC identifies the need for more staff development at some of the smaller providers. In recent months, it has held three briefings for providers, covering topics such as literacy, numeracy and language skills, and the 'Common Inspection Framework', and plans to hold more.

32. RMBC makes satisfactory use of its resources. However, due to insufficient information relating to learners' retention rates, average class sizes or the proportion of adult learners who are achieving their planned learning goals, it is not possible to make a reasoned judgement in relation to value for money.

33. The collection and analysis of data to support management decisions are inadequate. RMBC has recently established more effective systems for recording providers' activities, in order to monitor compliance with the contract and to make timely payments. However, there is no system for monitoring learners' retention and achievement rates. RMBC recognises the need to improve its management of performance data and has purchased a system to meet this need. There was little reliable data available to RMBC when it carried out its self-assessment, and the absence of reliable performance data has meant that improvement targets have not been set.

34. The arrangements for monitoring subcontractors' work are unsatisfactory. RMBC has recently introduced a formal procedure for initial visits, which covers key areas such as equality of opportunity, health and safety, and quality assurance. RMBC has accurately identified the ways in which its management of subcontractors has to improve. These are clearly set out in a quality improvement development plan. For example, subcontractors will be required to demonstrate that they provide impartial advice and guidance for learners. However, the inspectors identified some unsatisfactory practice among some subcontractors. For example, RMBC is committed to providing adult and community education free of charge to learners but, in some of the lessons, learners were required to pay a fee.

35. In its most recent self-assessment report, RMBC identifies a weakness relating to the provision of literacy, numeracy and language support. RMBC has made a significant contribution to the production of a local strategy for this provision and has made a successful bid to the local LSC to enable it to appoint a co-ordinator, but it has little awareness of the literacy, numeracy and language needs of learners in the subcontracted provision. There are few appropriately trained staff and few opportunities for them to develop their expertise in providing literacy, numeracy and language support for learners. Inspectors found that most learners are not assessed adequately for any

literacy, numeracy and language support needs. RMBC has no formal procedure to ensure that additional learning support is provided.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

36. The manager of the community learning service is also responsible for equality of opportunity and its management. The focus of RMBC's community learning provision is on non-vocational, non-accredited learning, access provision, in order to counter disadvantage and the exclusion of learners from under-represented groups. RMBC aims to have a positive impact on equality of opportunity within the borough, but this strategy has not yet fully impacted on practice. RMBC has drafted a comprehensive policy and procedures for equality of opportunity, which provides a clear framework for direct and subcontracted provision. This meets current legislative requirements regarding equality, diversity and disability, including the 'Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001', the 'Disability Discrimination Act 1995', and the 'Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000'. It includes anti-harassment and complaints procedures, and sets out the community learning service's expectations of the providers with which it subcontracts, but RMBC has yet to approve and implement it.

37. There is insufficient collection, collation, and analysis of data and target-setting relevant to equality of opportunity. RMBC collects data for contract compliance, but these are not sufficiently detailed to support strategic decision-making. It recognises that data collection is a weakness and is introducing a system to analyse staff and learners' profiles. However, there are inconsistencies in the recruitment of learners from under-represented groups across the different areas and subcontracted learning providers. For example, in ICT and provision for those with learning difficulties or disabilities, there is insufficient recruitment of learners from under-represented groups. However, in the community learning programmes there is a range of courses specifically targeted at under-represented groups, including asylum seekers and refugees, Asian women, those with mental health problems, the unemployed, and older learners. There is no routine central monitoring of promotional material to ensure that it conveys positive images and contains statements on equality of opportunity and disability in line with current legislative requirements. Although all of the learning programmes that the community learning service funds are free, which removes one of the barriers to learning, there is insufficient monitoring to ensure that subcontractors are conforming to this requirement.

38. Procedures for the recruitment of staff to the community learning service follow RMBC's requirements for advertising and interviewing, and are satisfactory with regard to equality of opportunity. RMBC monitors the staff profile as part of its central monitoring procedure, but there is no routine monitoring of subcontractors' procedures.

39. Resources and accommodation are satisfactory. Venues are based in the community and access for learners with disabilities is appropriate. However, where specialist resources are required, they are not always available. For example, in one programme for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, two learners had been waiting five weeks for keyboards.

40. The community learning service manager has carried out an audit of directly employed staff and recognises that staff training relevant to equality of opportunity is a priority. Opportunities for the development of part-time tutors are not consistent across subcontracted providers, and learners demonstrate widely varying levels of understanding and awareness of equality of opportunity.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

41. RMBC contracts with a range of providers, some of which have established and effective quality assurance procedures. However, there is no consistent approach to monitoring the use of these procedures. Many new providers from the voluntary sector have little experience of managing learning programmes. If they have quality assurance systems these are not designed for the provision of learning programmes. RMBC's community learning service manager has recently developed a quality assurance framework for subcontracted and direct provision, which clearly defines procedures, sets time limits and allocates responsibilities. This quality assurance framework has been distributed to those providers which have contracted with RMBC since April 2003, but it is too soon to determine its impact on the learners.

42. Learners use a standard form to evaluate providers, which uses closed questions and does not encourage reflective feedback. RMBC collates this information but has no system for analysing it or developing related action plans. Staff use a different evaluation form, which provides them with limited opportunities for feedback and does not encourage a self-critical approach. However, family learning programmes use a more adaptable form, which enables more reflective feedback. The new quality assurance framework includes revised and more adaptable documents, including a complaints procedure for learners. There are no recorded complaints.

43. RMBC has a new observation procedure with a clear protocol and comprehensive supporting documents. RMBC has trained staff to carry out observations and intends to use an external organisation to verify the process. No observations have yet taken place using this new system, but some providers have their own observation procedures. The observation profile from the inspection judged a significant proportion of teaching as satisfactory or less than satisfactory, and this new process is designed to improve this.

44. RMBC's community learning service manager wrote the organisation's most recent self-assessment report, which was produced in February 2003. The inspectors identified many of its strengths and weaknesses, but were unable to validate the judgements based on data. In 2002, RMBC offered self-assessment training to some of its subcontracted providers, eight of which participated and one produced its own self-assessment report.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good standard of work on long courses
- particularly good access to good resources and provision
- good support for individual learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate initial assessment
- inadequate assessment arrangements on short courses
- insufficient promotion of learning to male learners

Achievement and standards

45. Most learners on long, non-accredited and accredited courses produce a good standard of work. Learners demonstrate their skill and confidence in using information technology by carrying out a range of tasks. These are carefully designed to improve their ICT skills and are based on their experience, so they have opportunities to apply these practical skills. For example, learners produce good sample letters by making full use of the features of word-processing packages. Some learners construct their own work history efficiently or design advertising leaflets with a range complex features. One learner uses her knowledge of spreadsheets to monitor the attendance of pupils in the school in which she works. Another learner uses her proficiency in using the Internet to gain a better understanding of learning disabilities. Tutors comment on learners' work and suggest opportunities for further improvements. There are insufficient data to assess the achievement and retention rates of the learners on ICT programmes. Learners on accredited and non-accredited courses follow the same learning plan. Most learners make satisfactory progress. Those on accredited courses have largely completed their portfolios of evidence, and those on non-accredited courses have completed most of their work.

Quality of education and training

46. Learners have particularly good access to good, up-to-date ICT resources through a number of effective partnership arrangements. Courses are provided in comfortable and familiar environments at a variety of times to suit the learners' lifestyles and commitments. For example, RMBC has good partnership arrangements with one

provider that offers 'first step' ICT courses to the over 50s, some of whom have mobility difficulties. Arrangements with secondary schools enable unemployed and other learners to access a number of ICT courses in their communities. Women learners have access to good ICT facilities and training in a primary school. Through a project for the homeless, some of whom misuse drugs or alcohol, learners have access to laptop computers and ICT courses in a church on Sunday evenings, together with a meal.

47. Learners receive good individual support, which RMBC identifies as a strength in its self-assessment report. Tutors have developed good working relationships with learners, and help them to gain confidence and overcome their anxieties about using information technology. Tutors are accessible, helpful and approachable, and are aware of the learners' diverse needs. Learners comment on their patience, enthusiasm and sensitive support. Most tutors tailor their teaching effectively to meet learners' individual needs and requirements and they value this highly. Learners who want to achieve a qualification are given good support to prepare for formal assessment. However, discussions relating to assessment are not always recorded and do not form part of the learners' individual learning plans. Learners who simply value the social aspects of their training and do not want to achieve a qualification or to be formally assessed are also well supported. However, some tutors do not sufficiently promote learning or help the learners to take responsibility for their own progress.

48. Most of the observed learning sessions were satisfactory or good, but one was unsatisfactory. In the better sessions, the learners are motivated, enthusiastic and fully engaged in activities to develop their ICT competence. In the poorer sessions, planning is inadequate and the learners are not purposefully engaged in learning. On most short courses the tutors do not have sufficiently high expectations of the learners and do not set them challenging targets.

49. The ICT programme is adequately planned to meet the requirements of a wide range of learners. RMBC provides learners with opportunities to give formal and informal feedback, which it uses to implement changes and developments. For example, it offers one long non-accredited course on two different days, in order to satisfy the learners' increased demand. ICT provision is offered at a wide range of times and venues. The learners can also access some short courses on Sundays.

50. The initial assessment of ICT learners is inadequate. Learners' personal development needs and previous learning experience are not assessed thoroughly. Some tutors are aware of their learners' needs, but this information is not recorded adequately and does not help develop learners' individual learning plans. Learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills are not assessed systematically. However, learners do receive additional support when RMBC identifies a need.

51. The arrangements for the assessment of learners on short courses are inadequate. Learners' progress is not regularly assessed and is rarely recorded. They do not receive clear written feedback on their work, or advice about how to improve it. Some learners receive verbal feedback, but learners on short courses do not maintain portfolios of evidence to indicate progress. Some learners who have completed these courses do not

have an adequate level of competence in ICT, and RMBC has offered them the opportunity to repeat these courses.

Leadership and management

52. Tutors are clear about their roles and responsibilities and provide good support for learners and satisfactory operational management of the programme. However, there is inadequate monitoring of subcontracting arrangements. For example, subcontractors do not systematically report on learners' progress. Quality assurance of accredited courses and long non-accredited provision is satisfactory. These courses have adequate arrangements for internal verification, which are supported by a verification plan for learners' portfolios. However, the quality assurance arrangement for short courses is incomplete. There is an insufficient range of quality assurance indicators for these courses and their effectiveness is not reviewed adequately. Learners on these courses do not have clear objectives and their work is not monitored systematically.

53. The management information system does not provide information about learners' progress, and there are no reliable achievement and retention data for ICT learners. The promotion of ICT provision to male learners is insufficient, and their participation on ICT courses is low. For example, RMBC supports provision in a primary school in an area of high unemployment where a significant number of the school's pupils are from the families of asylum seekers and minority ethnic groups. However, no male learner has accessed this ICT provision, and the related publicity material does not adequately promote the course to them. Of the 54 learners observed during the inspection, there was only one male learner from a minority ethnic group. RMBC recognises this weakness and has recently initiated some activities to engage these learners, but it is too early to judge the impact of these new strategies.

Foundation programmes**Grade 5**

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- diverse range of practical courses
- good individual learning support in ICT

Weaknesses

- insufficient initial assessment of individual learning needs
- weak reviews of individual learners' progress
- inadequate monitoring of the curriculum
- inappropriately qualified and experienced staff

Achievement and standards

54. The initial assessment of learners' individual learning needs is insufficient and provides no starting point against which to measure their achievement and progress. Learners' progress and achievements are not monitored or recorded effectively. There are no structured assessments of learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills, and no arrangements to identify their additional support needs. Only one class maintains learners' files and these are very disorganised and do not record any progress or achievements. Attendance and retention rates are satisfactory. Most learners are transported to the centres and the courses provide a good social focus for them.

Quality of education and training

55. The curriculum for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities consists of a wide range of practical courses, including tapestry, ICT, painting and decorating, and animal care. There are also relaxation classes and sessions that focus on sport. RMBC ensures that its programmes have a socially inclusive content.

56. In most ICT sessions, learners have good individual learning support from skilled ICT tutors. They have a clear understanding of learners' learning and physical support needs and make the work accessible to them. In other sessions, tutors give learners equipment and materials that they value. For example, in an animal care group, the tutor presented learners with cleaning fluid, grooming equipment, and health and safety accessories. However, in many classes tutors have a limited understanding of how to plan effectively to meet individual learning needs, and do not know what specialist support is needed to enable learners to develop transferable skills adequately.

57. In ICT sessions, the resources are appropriate and learners have access to learning aids to meet their physical and learning needs. In most classes, accommodation is adequate. However, in one session there was continual disruption from learners in the adjacent class.

58. Of the sessions observed, 14 per cent were judged to be good, 57 per cent satisfactory, and 29 per cent unsatisfactory. In the better sessions, tutors provide clear instructions for learners to follow, learners are enthusiastic and complete the tasks successfully. In the satisfactory sessions, some learners remember what they have learned. There is good mutual support in classes and many learners have the confidence to answer the tutors' questions. However, the planning of these sessions is weak. In unsatisfactory sessions, schemes of work and lesson plans are poor and individual learning plans are not used effectively. In practical courses, learners have opportunities to widen their learning experiences, but curriculum planning at provider level is insufficient and there are no clear progression routes for learners. RMBC has developed an induction pack and most providers have this, but learners on the current provision have received no induction.

59. Strategies to meet individual learning needs are incomplete. There is insufficient use of initial assessment and the information is not recorded on individual learning plans, which are not used at some centres or are incomplete at others. In some classes, tutors do not recognise the purpose of formative and summative reviews. There is little monitoring of learners' progress and achievements. Most tutors plan and focus on whole group learning outcomes and fail to identify individual learning needs. For example, in a class designed to increase confidence and finger manipulation skills, learners work individually to produce a piece of tapestry under the direction and instruction of a teacher. Once the pieces are completed, they are stitched together and displayed as a whole group's work. Learners' individual contributions are not fully identified and the tutor fails to record learners' individual progress and learning needs.

60. Courses are not matched to the national curriculum and there is poor integration of literacy, numeracy and language skills, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). For example, in one session the tutor had insufficient experience of the subject or literacy, numeracy and language skills, which were poorly integrated. In this session, the tutor did not identify or meet any of the learners' needs.

61. Most of RMBC's marketing is through the learning disability network and there is limited activity to widen participation from under-represented groups. In many instances, promotion activities are internal and RMBC recruits only current learners.

Leadership and management

62. Some of the arrangements with subcontractors are inadequate. Although new providers are using the recently introduced systems for record-keeping and quality assurance management, most of the established partners are continuing to follow previous practices. Many of them do not have any appropriate arrangements to quality assure learning funded by RMBC. Where there are new systems they are managed and

monitored ineffectively. Arrangements to monitor the planning and provision of teaching and learning are also inadequate. RMBC's and the providers' monitoring of the development and the provision of learning is weak, and there are insufficient providers' reviews. Although there is an understanding of the learners' social needs, there is a lack of focus on learning and individual learning needs. The recruitment target for 2002-03 is 376 learners but the recruitment figure is just 37 per cent of this, and there are no clear plans to further promote the provision to meet the target before July 2003. Only one of the learners is from a minority ethnic group.

63. While tutors understand their role in providing learning opportunities in a community context, and staff are enthusiastic and committed to meeting the needs of the wider communities, many of them do not have the appropriate experience or qualifications to support the needs of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Family learning

Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good application of learners' skills to domestic situations
- good teaching and learning
- very good resources to support learning

Achievement and standards

64. Learners apply the skills they develop to domestic situations. Family learning activities are designed to support parents/carers to help their children with numeracy and literacy skills. Learners have a better understanding of their children's needs and how to support their schoolwork. Learners also gain insights into how children learn, along with the requirements of the national curriculum. They understand how to promote learning in everyday activities and how to make learning fun. For example, several learners said that they now understand how activities such as shopping, cooking and visits provide opportunities for learning with their children. Personally, they gained unexpected benefits, such as increased self-confidence and self-esteem. Several learners have progressed to becoming helpers at the school and there is evidence that their own literacy and numeracy skills have increased. Learners report that other children in the family benefit from their attendance on courses. Schools benefit, since parents feel more comfortable in the school and the barriers between different communities break down. Children of parents who have attended learning programmes demonstrate increased test scores. Learners make good progress towards their learning goals. At the end of each session, learners reflect on the learning achieved and keep a diary of their progress. At the completion of the course, achievements are celebrated at special events where presentations are made to learners and their children. At 94 per cent, the retention rate in the spring term was good.

Quality of education and training

65. There is good teaching and learning, with 84 per cent of observations rated good or better. Tutors make good use of learners' prior knowledge and experience. Constant reference is made to how activities from the learning sessions can be applied to the learners' homes and to their children, so that learning becomes fun and a part of everyday activities. Learners are enthusiastic and well motivated. There is very effective interaction between the learners and tutors, who use a good range of appropriate teaching techniques and learning activities. These are well planned with clear aims and objectives, which are explained to the learners at the start of each session. At the end of

the course, learners are given information about other possible activities. Learners work individually or in groups and share their experiences. Learners develop creative skills through practical activities, such as games to play at home and imaginative ways to develop children's reading skills.

66. Staff are appropriately qualified and staff development is considered important to the success of the programmes. All staff have a teaching qualification and have completed the core curriculum training and the national pilot of family learning. There are staff development activities, such as ICT training. The core team works alongside teachers in the schools and staff from the local further education college. Team members work well together and regularly share ideas. The courses are based in primary schools and this accommodation provides a satisfactory setting for the learners and their children. Adult learners are sometimes cramped in these classrooms but they are working close to their children. The children can be brought to their parents for joint activities before returning to the crèche or classroom to resume their individual activities. Many parents could not attend without the support of the crèche. Very good learning resources are used effectively to support learning. All the family learning resources are good and have been developed to ensure a consistent approach, yet remain adaptable to suit the needs of the different groups. The resource base in one of the schools includes schemes of work, lesson plans, aims and objectives for each session, handouts, materials needed and learners' assessments and evaluations. Each tutor is provided with all of the paperwork in a course file and on CD format. The resource base is also used for the provision of family learning activities and for staff development sessions. Tutors have intranet access.

67. The provision is designed to be a 'first step' into learning for family members. Courses meet the needs and interests of new adult learners. Tutors are responsive to the needs of all family members and plan many of the activities for parents and children to work together. Parents appreciate the time this gives them to be with their children in the school environment.

68. The assessment and monitoring of learners' progress is satisfactory and meets the learners' needs. Tutors use individual learner's plans to monitor progress and encourage learners to consider the impact the work has on their confidence. All learners completing the course, and their children, receive a certificate of completion and most learners also achieve an externally accredited award. For some of the learners this is the first certificate they have ever received.

69. Learners receive satisfactory support and guidance. Taster sessions are offered to assess their needs and to guide learners to appropriate courses. Progression opportunities are suggested whenever possible, depending on the availability of programmes and learners' aspirations. Many learners go on to further study or progress to work with children in the classroom. Learners' attendance and retention is sometimes affected by shift-working or difficulties at home and there is a follow-up procedure for absence.

70. Learners complete a standard self-assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills at

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the beginning of their course. On longer courses, RMBC uses the basic skills agency family programmes initial assessment. These initial assessments help to develop each learners' individual learning plan. The programmes improve learners' literacy and numeracy skills and some learners are offered additional support. Basic skills tutors from the three partner colleges teach on the programmes.

Leadership and management

71. A full-time family learning co-ordinator effectively manages the programmes and the teaching partnership. A clear direction is set for the staff team and the management of the curriculum is satisfactory. Networking with schools and the local community and liaising with partners enables the team to identify needs and develop future programmes. Changes in funding arrangements are impacting on the provision and the family learning co-ordinator is taking appropriate action to ensure that partnership arrangements continue.

Community learning**Grade 3**

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very effective acquisition and application of new skills
- good standards of accommodation and learning resources
- highly appropriate teaching methods in most sessions
- good recruitment of learners from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- inadequate assessment practices
- inadequate awareness of appropriate progression routes among learners
- inadequate professional development opportunities for staff in voluntary and community sector providers

Achievement and standards

72. Most learners are on non-accredited programmes. Achievement on practical programmes is measured by the production of finished pieces of work. For example, garments in sewing classes, paintings in painting and drawing classes, and curriculum vitae (CV) in programmes focusing on employability skills. Tutors on academic programmes monitor achievement in the classroom through the completion of exercises and question and answer sessions. Learners on accredited programmes compile portfolios of evidence, which are submitted to awarding bodies.

73. Learners acquire and apply their new skills very effectively. For example, learners in sewing classes produce garments for themselves over the course of the programme, and learners in patchwork/quilting sessions make quilts and cushion covers. Forty per cent of learners on a pre-employability programme have gained employment. Some learners on an interpretation and translation programme are using their new skills to offer these services within their communities. The work observed was very good and learners are proud of their achievements. Learners receive good verbal feedback on their progress.

74. There is no formal assessment of achievement on most non-accredited programmes. Learning diaries have recently been introduced for some learners but these are not completed routinely. Learners' achievement is not documented on many programmes. While some tutors keep personal records, they do not use these to inform the learners.

Quality of education and training

75. The standard of accommodation in most community venues is good. Venues are appropriately located in community settings. Many learners said they would not attend sessions if they were located in alternative venues. Most of the centres visited have access to the Internet and information technology equipment.

76. The standard of learning resources available to learners is good. Most worksheets are clear and well produced, and instructions are appropriate to the learners and their learning. A variety of resources are available for learners, including handouts, overhead transparencies and relevant texts. The standard of ICT equipment is good and appropriate for the learners. For example, they have access to the Internet to search for jobs. Laptops are available to learners in some community venues and these are used appropriately to support learning, for example, by producing CVs.

77. In most sessions, tutors use highly appropriate teaching methods. On the interpretation and translation programme the tutor uses a variety of methods, including worksheets, learners' presentations, small and large group work and discussions. There is also good impartial coverage of sensitive issues, such as racism, and good use of learners' practical experiences to support learning. For example, learners on a pre-employability programme used their recent experience of attending interviews to discuss good interview technique. In a health and fitness class, where most learners did not have English as their first language, the tutor used verbal prompts and practical demonstration of exercise techniques. There is good use of the target language in a Spanish language taster programme, with verbal and written instructions for exercises given in both Spanish and English.

78. The negotiation of individual learning programmes is good, with learners' aspirations taken into account in the planning of future sessions. For example, in the introductory session of a gardening programme, learners were asked to identify the problems they encounter in their own gardens and possible solutions will be incorporated into future sessions.

79. Tutors support individual learners well during sessions and encourage learners to support each other in most sessions. For example, in a life skills session for asylum seekers and refugees, a new learner was paired with an existing learner for support, as they shared a common language.

80. Planning of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Most programmes have schemes of work and most sessions have lesson plans, which identify group learning aims and objectives, but these are not individualised. Staff are appropriately qualified and have good relationships with learners.

81. Assessment practices are inadequate. On most programmes there is no formal initial assessment of learners. In some practical sessions learners identify their ability when enrolling, but this is not recorded. Some learners complete learning diaries, where they assess their own literacy and numeracy skills, but this is not routinely followed up by

the provider. In health and fitness, there is no formal initial assessment of learners' readiness for exercise, which poses a health and safety risk.

82. The need for learning support is not routinely assessed in sessions. Where it is identified, such as the need for literacy, numeracy and language support, this is not always provided and some tutors are unaware of how to access it.

83. Most learners do not receive written feedback on progress and achievement. Learners do not have individual learning plans. Learners on two accredited programmes observed have portfolios with marked work.

84. On many programmes, learners are unaware of appropriate progression routes. Some learners are made aware of opportunities to progress into accredited provision within the same institution. Sometimes, this is away from the community venue they attend and some learners are reluctant to attend other venues for a variety of reasons, such as transport arrangements. Many learners on practical programmes have been attending for several years. For example, one learner on a health and fitness programme has attended for 10 years. Access to information, advice and guidance forms part of the new contracting process, but monitoring of this has only just begun.

Leadership and management

85. There is good recruitment of learners from under-represented groups. Some community-based provision targets women, including learners with mental health issues who need to build their confidence. Recruitment to these programmes is through project workers working with community groups. The Sewing for Asian Women programme is clearly targeted, with recruitment carried out by a community development worker. There is good language support for this programme and the single-sex environment is culturally important.

86. Some programmes are successfully aimed at attracting older learners. For example, holiday Spanish, painting and drawing, garden design and craft. A programme in pre-employability skills has been successful in helping learners into jobs. All learners enrolled on the programme are male, and four out of 10 learners have left the programme because they have found employment.

87. Most of the teaching staff work part time and there are no plans to support their development. Most of those who attend staff development activities have to do so in their own time. Some of the staff working for larger providers occasionally have access to internal staff development opportunities.