

REINSPECTION REPORT

Herefordshire Council Reinspection

09 December 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based 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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Herefordshire Council Reinspection

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Herefordshire Council (the Council) has been a unitary authority since 1998. Prior to that, the main responsibility for the provision of adult and community learning in Herefordshire lay with the local college of further education. The Council's involvement with adult and community learning began in April 1999 with the appointment of a lifelong learning development officer. The lifelong learning development unit (LLDU) is now led by a senior learning officer supported by a team of officers. These are responsible for curriculum development and the management of a largely subcontracted adult and community learning provision. The senior learning officer is line managed by the policy and commissioning manager, who in turn is managed by the head of economic development who reports to the director of policy and community. The directorate falls within the portfolio of the cabinet member for community and social development.

2. Following the previous inspection in 2003 the Council has changed the nature of its provision. The provision is now targeted at particular groups in the community. The LLDU works with subcontractors or partners to involve the targeted groups. The provision is funded by the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Learning and Skills Council and by a range of funding initiatives for deprived areas. In 2003-04 there were a total of 508 learners and 619 enrolments. The largest numbers of enrolments were in information and communications technology (ICT) and foundation programmes, including family learning.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Information & communications technology

3. Currently, 115 learners are enrolled on 12 courses. Since the previous inspection, there have been 459 enrolments. Courses are primarily aimed at introducing beginners to computing and are mainly 12 weeks long. Ten of the 12 courses are accredited. Eighty-nine learners are enrolled on these at present. The two non-accredited courses are shorter and are an introduction to computing, and using a digital camera. Twenty-six learners are enrolled at present. Courses are developed by tutors from one of the three partner organisations and the learning development officer from the Council. All courses are aimed at the novice or inexperienced computer user. Most of the courses operate in community centres, schools and adult learning centres, using laptop computers and other mobile computing equipment provided by the Council.

Foundation programmes

4. The Council offers literacy, numeracy and language courses through a voluntary community group which provides small-group teaching in these skills plus basic computer skills. All of the activities supported by the Council are based in Hereford and serve the needs of residents in the four most deprived wards of the city. At the previous inspection the Council supported the voluntary organisation in the delivery of individual tuition and workplace literacy, numeracy and language projects. The voluntary community group now receives direct funding for these projects and the Council's support focuses on three learning programmes, currently with 15 learners. Four learners attend classes to improve their language skills, four learners are working on literacy, numeracy or basic computing skills. Seven learners are developing their literacy, numeracy, computer and communication skills at pre-entry level. Most learners work towards achieving entry and foundation-level qualifications. The project is centrally co-ordinated and taught in the premises of a local church. A full-time manager is responsible for the project. Learners are able to enrol at any time of the year, and receive support for as long as they need it. Classes are offered during the day and in the evening, to suit the needs of the learners.

Family learning

5. Forty-five adults are enrolled on family learning programmes. Family literacy, language and numeracy courses take place in primary schools throughout the county. The Council promotes the family learning courses through presentations to teachers and advisers. They also identify target areas for courses. Schools are responsible for recruiting learners to join the programmes. Each course is planned and delivered by a member of the school's early years staff, and a tutor provided for the Council under contract with the local further education college. Four tutors teach on family learning programmes. The family learning programme currently caters for 19 learners on three family literacy courses, 22 learners on two family numeracy courses, and four learners on a pilot course to support parents and carers to help develop children's language skills. Courses vary in length from six weeks to two terms. All courses take place in schools and are supported by early years teachers or care workers. Courses usually include a period of adult-only learning, followed by joint activities with their children. The average class size is between four and 16 learners and most learners are women. Some of the provision is accredited. The family learning programme within the LLDU is managed by two part-time co-ordinators who report to the learning development officer. One co-ordinator develops the family language, literacy and numeracy programme, the other develops wider family learning. The co-ordinators liaise with 14 contracted tutors.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	14
Number of learner interviews	66
Number of staff interviews	18
Number of subcontractor interviews	28
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	13

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

6. The ALI's inspection in January 2003 found that training in family learning programmes was good. Training in ICT, hospitality, sport, leisure and travel and foundation programmes was satisfactory. Leadership and management were unsatisfactory, as were quality assurance and equality of opportunity. At the end of the reinspection process all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory or better. Hospitality, sport, leisure and travel was not reinspected as the number of learners was low at the time of reinspection.

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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	3

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3

Foundation programmes	3

Family learning	2

Grades awarded at reinspection

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

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

Information & communications technology	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

Family learning	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

7. Achievement levels are good in ICT, foundation programmes and family learning. In ICT, retention and achievement rates are approximately 80 per cent. Most of courses are accredited. All learners are acquiring good basic computing skills and achieving their personal learning goals. Most learners are gaining a level 1 certificate. All work is completed to the required standard and within the set timescales. In foundation programmes, learners continue to make good progress in achieving their personal objectives. Many have made substantial progress, having begun their programmes with very poor literacy and numeracy skills. They increase their self-confidence and regularly use their newly acquired skills in their daily lives. Most learners are encouraged to work towards accredited qualifications. So far, three learners have achieved their entry level qualification and a further two have passed level 1 national tests.

8. In family learning, learners continue to make good progress towards their individual learning goals. They can explain their learning achievements and how these influence their lives. Many learners report unexpected benefits such as improved self-confidence, an ability to manage their learning, and better parenting skills. Learners also develop greater creativity skills, have a greater understanding of the methods used by teachers and greater confidence when discussing their children's work at school.

Quality of education and training

9. Standards of teaching and learning in ICT, foundation programmes and family learning are good. Eighty-two per cent of all learning sessions observed during the reinspection were good or better, and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. The Council carries out learning session observations and its findings are similar to those of the inspection. Classes are well planned, with detailed lesson plans and schemes of work. Learners are clear about the aims and objectives of each session. Tutors use a wide variety of teaching methods and are particularly good at breaking down sessions into distinct activities to keep the learners interested. All learners receive clear advice, and feedback by tutors is constructive.

10. Good use is made of resources to support learning in ICT. Learners are able to use some good-quality laptop computers with access to the internet at all the venues. All have up-to-date software, including programmes to edit digital photographs. Digital

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cameras, scanners and colour printers are also available. Particularly good use is made of data projectors during classes. All venues are fully accessible to all learners and are in local community buildings. All tutors are fully qualified and have relevant industrial experience.

11. Family learning tutors provide good pastoral support for their learners. Tutors help learners with personal issues and these discussions are handled sensitively and in an appropriate manner. Learners interact and support each other very well. Childcare facilities are available. All courses are free and materials are provided. All learners are offered information, advice and guidance about possible progression routes. Some learners find this useful when considering future careers and education options.

12. The range of initial assessment used in ICT is too narrow. This situation was partially identified at the previous inspection. A very informal assessment of literacy and numeracy levels is carried out during enrolment. This is usually done by looking at the actual application form. Findings are not recorded. Learners are not asked to formally identify their levels of computing skills, or their preferred learning styles.

13. The Council does not have enough strategic target-setting in foundation programmes. The learning partnership has the responsibility for identifying and developing provision, but there is no strategic plan to widen participation. The literacy and numeracy needs of some parts of the county are not being met. The Council itself does not have an overall strategy for developing or integrating literacy, numeracy and language provision.

14. Some of the planning to meet learners' individual needs in family learning is ineffective. All learners have individual learning plans with short-term targets. However, these targets are not always sufficiently challenging. They do not always correlate with the objectives of the lessons if learners have progressed beyond their targets.

Leadership and management

15. Curriculum management in ICT and foundation programmes is good. The design, content and delivery of all courses receive input from partners and the learning development officer. The Council's staff make regular monitoring visits. Curriculum meetings are used to discuss and evaluate current course provision. All staff feel that they have been fully involved and consulted during changes and are very enthusiastic about the new structure. The programmes currently on offer are well planned and managed to meet learners' varying needs effectively. Teaching sessions are regularly observed and tutors are given constructive feedback, which is used to improve their teaching practice.

16. In family learning the programme has not been developed to fully meet the community's needs. The Council does not offer a full range of relevant provision. The Council and the learning partnership have identified some of the shortfall. The planning and development of some initiatives have been delayed. Family literacy and numeracy courses are targeted at specific communities within Herefordshire. The funding

limitations identified at the previous inspection still apply, and many of the courses continue to be offered only once. Currently, there is insufficient targeting of, or provision for, learners at entry level. Many of these learners have the greatest need for support in developing their own and their children's literacy, numeracy and language skills.

17. The Council's strong partnership work is a key feature of its provision. This was a strength at the previous inspection and has since been further improved. **The family learning development group manages partnerships well to develop the family literacy programmes.** All partners share aims for developing the provision throughout the county. Top-level partnerships have been rationalised to avoid any duplication of effort. Providers' partnership arrangements are used to make learning programmes complement each other. The Council exerts considerable influence in the various levels of partnership, through its chairing of a number of groups and by providing secretariat support and professional advice.

18. Following the previous inspection the Council reviewed its objectives and entire adult and community learning provision. The Council has renewed its commitment to the provision, but has revised and focused its strategic objectives. It is making good progress towards them.

19. Staff development and training were identified as strengths at the previous inspection. They continue to be good and are now better recorded. Training needs are analysed and staff receive appropriate training, either in-house or through external courses. Staff have also attended generic training in areas such as equality of opportunity and disability awareness. Individual staff responsibilities are now clearly defined with regularly revised job descriptions and clearer line management and reporting routes.

20. The Council has taken positive actions to resolve all the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. It has identified and obtained alternative, additional funding. It has improved the management of its subcontractors. A new computer-based management information system enables the Council to analyse and make better use of data. Management decisions in equality of opportunity and quality assurance are based on better information. The provider has improved the promotion of equality of opportunity and introduced a new quality assurance manual and quality assurance procedures. Some of these measures have been introduced very recently and it is too soon to judge their effects on the provision.

21. The Council is restricted in its ability to respond to local circumstances. Core funding is still low. Alternative funding streams have enabled some progression for learners within the Council's own provision and an increase in the number of courses. This funding, however, is for a limited period. Long-term planning is restricted.

22. The Council does not have sufficient data to allow trend analysis. The new management information system carries data from 2002-03 and 2003-04, but the former is incomplete, which leaves only one year of reliable data. Earlier data is even less reliable and will not be used. The council is not able to identify or analyse trends until

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more new data is obtained. The system currently produces the required information for contract-compliance reporting.

23. The post-inspection action plan included consultation with partners and subcontractors. Actions to resolve weaknesses identified by the previous inspection were implemented and carried out effectively. The most recent self-assessment report, produced in final draft form, is self-critical and identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors.

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

Leadership and management

Strengths

- strong partnership work
- good progress towards clear strategic objectives
- good staff development and training
- productive actions to resolve weaknesses identified by previous inspection

Weaknesses

- restricted ability to respond to local circumstances
- insufficient data for trend analysis

Information & communications technology

Strengths

- good achievement rates
- good standards of teaching and learning
- good use of resources to support learning
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- narrow range of initial assessment

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good achievement of learners' personal objectives
- good standards of teaching and learning
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- insufficient strategic target-setting

Family learning

Strengths

- good achievement of learning goals
- good standards of teaching and learning
- good pastoral support for learners
- effective strategic partnerships

Weaknesses

- some ineffective planning for learners' individual needs
- failure to fully meet community's needs

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.

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	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 2

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

Strengths

- strong partnership work
- good progress towards clear strategic objectives
- good staff development and training
- productive actions to resolve weaknesses identified by previous inspection

Weaknesses

- restricted ability to respond to local circumstances
- insufficient data for trend analysis

24. Strong partnership work is a key feature of the Council's work. This was a strength at the previous inspection and has been further improved. Top-level partnerships have been rationalised to avoid duplication of effort. Providers' partnership arrangements are used to make learning programmes complement each other. The Council exerts considerable influence at the various levels of partnership, through its chairing of a number of groups and by providing secretariat support and professional advice. Staff from the LLDU chair, or are members of, a number of regional and national groups and associations. These staff share the ideas and good practice gained from further afield with the partnership groups in the county. The recent location of the LLDU with the other elements of its parent directorate in Hereford has enabled more effective working with other council departments.

25. Good progress by the Council in meeting some of its clear strategic goals was a strength at the previous inspection. This is still the case. Following the previous inspection the Council reviewed its objectives and entire adult and community learning provision. Stakeholders, elected members and senior council officers as well as the LLDU itself were involved. The Council has renewed its commitment to the provision, but has revised and focused its strategic objectives. Some strategic plans are yet to be revised in detail pending the publication of a strategic area review. There is no formal strategy for the provision of literacy, numeracy and language support. The Council relies on dealing with each learner's support needs as they are identified.

26. Good staff development and training was a strength at the previous inspection, although better recording of training was suggested as an improvement. The development and training continues to be good. Training needs are analysed and staff receive appropriate training, either in-house or through external courses. The training is

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now well recorded in individual training logs. Staff have also attended generic training in areas such as equality of opportunity and disability awareness. Individual staff responsibilities are now clearly defined, with regularly revised job descriptions and clearer line management and reporting routes. Some training has been extended to include tutors and other staff employed by subcontractors in the Council's adult and community learning provision.

27. The Council has taken effective actions to resolve weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. It has identified and obtained additional funding sources. It has improved the management of its subcontractors, and acquired a computer-based management information system. This enables the Council to analyse and make better use of data in management decisions about equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The management information system now enables the Council's officers to monitor retention and achievement rates, which are both good. The Council has adopted measures to improve the promotion of equal opportunities and has introduced a new quality assurance manual and quality assurance procedures. Some of the measures have only been introduced very recently and it is too soon to judge their effect on the provision.

28. The Council is restricted in its ability to respond to local circumstances. Core funding is still low, although alternative funding streams have enabled some progression for learners within the Council's own provision and an increase in the number of courses. This funding, however, is for a limited period. Long-term planning is restricted.

29. The provider has insufficient data for trend analysis. Although the new management information system has data from 2002-03 and 2003-04, the former is incomplete, which leaves only one year of reliable data. Earlier data is even less reliable and will not be used. The Council is not able to identify or analyse trends until new data is obtained. The system currently produces the required information for contract compliance reporting.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

30. The Council is committed to equality of opportunity. It has recently instigated ongoing equal opportunities awareness training for elected members and for its employees, including targeted key managers. Awareness of equal opportunities among LLDU staff has increased significantly following the unit's successful conclusion of its equality and diversity impact assessment. Newly introduced management competences include equality and diversity awareness. The competences will be used in the next round of management appraisals in February 2005.

31. The widening of participation and social inclusion are two more of the Council's declared commitments. The adult learning plan sets strategic objectives which effectively target under-represented or deprived groups. Travellers form the largest minority ethnic group in the county and the Council continues to target them successfully for inclusion in the provision. The Council is monitoring the growing number of residents with language support needs and has introduced some training

courses in English for speakers of other languages.

32. Since the previous inspection, the LLDU has produced and issued handbooks for providers, tutors and learners, which clearly explain the Council's equal opportunities policy and the complaints procedures. The information is also available on audio tape and, on request, in a variety of languages. Complaints are logged appropriately and follow-up actions and outcomes are recorded. Tutors discuss equality of opportunity issues with learners at the beginning of each new course. Learners demonstrate a good awareness of these issues. The report form, introduced for use on monitoring visits to courses, guides LLDU officers effectively in commenting on equality of opportunity matters. Equality of opportunity is a prominent agenda item in the Council's various learning-related partnerships.

33. The management information system acquired by the LLDU since the previous inspection enables it to monitor its success in reaching targeted groups. The system enables them to compare learners' retention, achievement and progression rates by categories such as gender, ethnicity and disability. So far, reliable data is available only for one complete year, 2003-04.

34. LLDU staff have attended an away day to increase their awareness of disability issues. The unit has a supply of resources for providers to assist learners with disabilities, or those unable to afford essential equipment. The unit has also helped training providers to obtain funding for the installation of stair lifts in two training centres used for adult learning provision, and provided relevant training in lifting techniques.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

35. The Council is committed to continuous improvement and has a framework for quality assurance which applies to the whole of its provision. The LLDU has produced a comprehensive quality assurance manual covering all aspects of the quality cycle as applied to adult and community learning provision. Partners and subcontractors were consulted about the content of the standardised forms used for recording actions and reports, and the feasibility of the procedures. The new procedures have only been fully applied in the current term and it is too soon to judge their effect. They have, however, been well received by subcontractors and have begun to provide the data required by the unit to be able to evaluate the quality of the provision and plan further improvements.

36. The new procedures include effective measures to manage subcontractors and to monitor the quality of their provision. The subcontractors and unit staff use standardised procedures to collect and input the data required for analysis and decision-making. Subcontractors' staff have received relevant training. LLDU staff conduct monitoring visits to subcontractors and also carry out observations of learning sessions, which are then graded. Tutors are given constructive feedback. Providers are also given relevant feedback. Some tutors have attended LLDU lead training in areas such as disability awareness.

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37. Much of the provision is now accredited. Achievement rates on these courses provide further evidence of the quality of teaching and learning. Some individual learning plans now reflect learners' individual objectives. Achievement of these objectives is still not used as a measure of achievement. Completion of the course is the only criterion used to measure achievement for non-accredited courses.

38. A primary aim of the provision is to engage learners so that they continue in other educational activities when their courses end. More efficient collection of learners' details enables the unit to accurately identify those who have subsequently enrolled on courses at the local college of further education. Further evidence is obtained through questionnaires sent to former learners. The return rate for the questionnaires is very good, but they have only been introduced during the current term and data is limited. In addition to course appraisal questionnaires, learners' feedback is also obtained by a telephone survey of 10 per cent of the learners who have recently completed a course. Tutors provide feedback through their course appraisal forms.

39. The post-inspection action plan was produced following internal debate and consultation with stakeholders, including partners and subcontractors. Effective actions were identified and carried out to resolve the weaknesses found at inspection. The latest self-assessment report, produced in final draft form, is based on further consultation with stakeholders, as well as internal reviews. The report is self-critical and identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses found by the reinspection.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	115	2

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

Strengths

- good achievement rates
- good standards of teaching and learning
- good use of resources to support learning
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- narrow range of initial assessment

Achievement and standards

40. It was recognised at the previous inspection that learners were making good progress. This is still the case. All learners are achieving good basic computing skills and their personal learning goals, and most are gaining a level 1 certificate. Many new learners have no previous computing experience, have low levels of self-confidence and this is their first step back into learning. Most courses are accredited and the standard of work in the portfolios is good. All work is completed to the required standard and within set timescales. Learners are justifiably proud of their work. All show good levels of confidence and many are progressing to other courses, some for personal interest, but many for business or employment reasons. All achievements are now recognised at an award ceremony. Retention and achievement rates are at similar levels to the previous inspection, at approximately 80 per cent.

Quality of education and training

41. Standards of teaching and learning are good. The Council carries out observations of learning sessions and its findings are similar to those of the inspection. Classes are well planned, with detailed lesson plans and schemes of work. Learners are clear about the aims and objectives for each session, and invariably attain them. Tutors use a wide variety of teaching methods and are particularly good at breaking down sessions into distinct activities to keep the learners interested. All learners receive clear advice, and feedback is constructive. Learners recognise the help and support they receive from teaching staff, which was recognised as a strength at the previous inspection.

42. The Council makes good use of resources to support learning. Learners are able to use some good-quality laptop computers, with access to the internet at all venues. All have up-to-date software, including programmes to edit digital photographs. Digital cameras, scanners and colour printers are also available. Particularly good use is made of data projectors during classes. All venues are fully accessible to all learners and are in local community buildings. Some of the seating is not adjustable and is uncomfortable for learners. All tutors are fully qualified and have relevant industrial experience.

43. The monitoring of learners is now satisfactory. All aspects of learners' progress are monitored. The previous weakness of insufficient monitoring of learners' progress on non-accredited courses no longer applies. On the accredited courses, monitoring covers the completion of each specific task, which is recorded in progress logs and assessment logs. All requirements of the awarding bodies are covered fully during assessment and in the observation logs. Learners agree the course objectives on the non-accredited provision and these are recorded in their learning plans. In most cases, each objective is signed off when completed.

44. The Council's provision consists primarily of level 1 courses and courses for specific groups of learners, such as adults who live in rural areas, those with health problems and some of the residents in less affluent areas. All learners are able to access higher-level courses through some of the college partners that provide training for the Council.

45. All learners now receive one session of individual information, advice and guidance concerning progress routes, employment opportunities and job-specific qualifications. Learners receive information about other types of courses, including additional help with literacy and numeracy skills. They feel well supported by tutors and find that their specific interests are usually covered during learning sessions. All receive clear information about equality of opportunity and additional support arrangements during induction. Tutors discuss the main points of the information sheets with learners.

46. The Council does not have a wide enough range of initial assessment. This was partially identified by the previous inspection. A very informal assessment of literacy and numeracy levels is carried out during enrolment. This is usually done by looking at the application forms. Findings are not recorded. Learners are not asked to formally identify their levels of computing skills or their preferred learning styles. It is difficult to measure levels of progress, the most appropriate teaching methods or to discuss the availability of additional learning support. Tutors do have a good knowledge of referral routes for those learners requiring additional help with literacy, numeracy or language.

Leadership and management

47. Curriculum management was inadequate at the previous inspection. It is now good. The previous strength of very effective partnerships leading to widening participation has been extended to cover all aspects of partnership working. The design, content and delivery of all courses receive input from partners and the learning

development officer. Quality assurance arrangements, which were previously inadequate, are now satisfactory. Regardless of the group delivering the training, the same course structure is used.

48. The Council's staff conduct regular monitoring visits. During these, a check is made of the effectiveness of teaching and the completion of course paperwork. Curriculum meetings discuss and evaluate the current courses. Groups and individuals in most need of training are identified. Any promotional literature is checked for compliance with council standards. All staff have received training in using the redesigned course paperwork, and have given feedback about its effectiveness. Some changes have been made.

49. All staff feel that they have been fully involved and consulted during the changes and are very enthusiastic about the new structure. Many members of the partnership training team are particularly impressed by the good and responsive levels of communication displayed by the Council's staff, and the levels of consultation. Equality of opportunity is promoted and learners are given clear guidance about equal opportunities.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	15	2

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

Strengths

- good achievement of learners' personal objectives
- good standards of teaching and learning
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- insufficient strategic target-setting

Achievement and standards

50. Learners continue to make good progress in achieving their personal objectives. Courses are planned to allow them to achieve realistic learning goals. Many have made substantial progress, having begun courses possessing very poor literacy and numeracy skills. They increase their self-confidence and regularly use their new skills in their daily lives. Some learners have gained better jobs and others have progressed to higher-level further education and university courses. Many of them act as role models to encourage further members of the local community into learning. One of the learners has appeared in a government-sponsored video film to promote adult learning. Most learners are encouraged to work towards accredited qualifications. So far, three learners have achieved their entry level qualification and a further two have passed level 1 national tests.

Quality of education and training

51. Standards of teaching and learning are good. This was recognised by the previous inspection. Teaching and learning were good in most of the sessions observed by inspectors. Sessions are well planned with clear aims and objectives. Learners' individual needs and preferences are clearly identified and tutors use this knowledge to incorporate different activities to meet learners' needs. Learners can discuss the learning that has taken place in previous sessions. The more experienced tutors use a good range of teaching and learning techniques to reinforce learning. In the poorer sessions, individual learning was not assessed sufficiently.

52. Since the previous inspection, the accommodation and resources for the programmes have improved. They are now satisfactory. Classes take place in a

dedicated, attractive new training room with good-quality furniture. The office is available for confidential interviews. Sufficient good-quality laptop computers are made available and learners make good use of them. All can be connected to the internet. New photocopying facilities allow tutors to enlarge worksheets for learners with visual impairments. A television and a video machine are used effectively to vary teaching and learning activities. Tutors are well qualified and experienced. Several of them have an intermediate or higher-level award in teaching literacy and numeracy.

53. The initial assessment of learners' needs is satisfactory. It is carried out at times appropriate to learners beginning their training. A checklist is used to establish learners' levels of ability. This is followed up with a further diagnostic assessment once they are placed on the correct level of the course. Initial and ongoing assessments are interpreted using the literacy, numeracy and language core curriculum. All learners have an individual learning plan with short-term targets. However, these targets are not always sufficiently challenging and do not always match the objectives of the learning sessions.

54. Since the previous inspection, the frequency of formal progress reviews has increased. Reviews are now carried out every three months. Thorough assessment arrangements exist for accredited courses, but in some classes, learners are unclear about their qualification aims. These learners do not understand sufficiently how assessment is carried out, or how their portfolio work contributes to the qualification. In one observed session, the tutor recapitulated the activities learners had previously completed, but did not assess the level of learning achieved by individuals during the class.

55. The level of support, information, advice and guidance to learners is satisfactory. Learners enjoy their courses and value the support given by friendly and helpful staff. They feel that they are treated appropriately and that staff are sensitive to their needs. The voluntary community group has appropriate links with external agencies to provide learners with specialist information advice and guidance.

Leadership and management

56. The previously good curriculum management by the voluntary community group has been developed further. The programmes currently on offer are well planned and managed to meet the different needs of learners effectively. The manager and other staff have active roles within the learning partnership and with other organisations concerned with the national skills for life strategy. The voluntary community group has developed a comprehensive quality assurance framework, which is monitored by the Council for consistency with its own. A monthly monitoring system is used effectively to record learners' progress and achievement. Learning sessions are observed regularly and tutors are given constructive feedback. Tutors feel well supported by their manager. With help and support from the Council, the organisation has successfully attracted core funding to continue to provide and extend its successful literacy and numeracy work in the wider community and with employers.

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57. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The courses currently offered are effective in reducing barriers to learning. Within the city, the Council and the foundation course provider have responded well to the increase in the number of learners in the city who speak English as an additional language. Twenty-five per cent of learners on these courses in 2003-04 were from a minority ethnic group. Fifty per cent of the learners had a disability or learning difficulty and the voluntary community group provides appropriate resources such as magnifiers and large-text learning materials.

58. The Council has restricted funding for foundation programmes and it has rationalised its support for such provision. The Council's support is currently limited to the city. The provider does not have enough strategic target-setting. The learning partnership has responsibility for identifying and developing provision, but there is no strategic plan to guide this provision in widening participation. The literacy and numeracy needs of some parts of the county are not being met. As an active partner, the Council has been involved in research into these needs and an audit of existing provision has now been carried out. This has generated a lot of ideas, but these have not yet resulted in a framework and targets for the number of courses needed, or resources to meet the needs. The Council itself does not have an overall strategy for developing or integrating literacy, numeracy and language learning. One initiative, to provide for traveller communities, is being developed with a specialist partner organisation, but there are no operational plans or targets for delivering the programme.

Family learning**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	45	2

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

Strengths

- good achievement of learning goals
- good standards of teaching and learning
- good pastoral support for learners
- effective strategic partnerships

Weaknesses

- some ineffective planning for learners' individual needs
- failure to fully meet community's needs

Achievement and standards

59. Learners continue to make good progress towards their individual learning goals. They can describe clearly what they have learnt and how it influences their lives. Many learners report unexpected outcomes, such as improved self-confidence, an ability to manage their learning, and better parenting skills. Learners also develop greater creativity skills, have a better understanding of the methods teachers use with their children and more confidence to visit the school and discuss their children's work. Head teachers report that learners gain in confidence and become more involved in their children's school activities. The previous inspection found that there were not enough opportunities for learners to gain nationally recognised accreditations. The college now offers literacy, numeracy and communication accreditation at level 1 and 2. However, no accreditation is available at entry level. On some family learning courses most learners take up the offer of qualifications, on others they are not sufficiently encouraged and show little interest. No opportunities exist to recognise the wider skills achieved by learners.

Quality of education and training

60. Good standards of teaching and learning have been maintained since the previous inspection. Family literacy and numeracy courses are well planned jointly by school staff and literacy and numeracy tutors. Courses and session plans have clear aims and proposed learning outcomes. Most of the learning sessions observed by inspectors were good or better. One was satisfactory and one was excellent. In the better sessions, teaching styles are adapted to suit the needs and characteristics of the groups. Learners

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are enthusiastic and well motivated. Individual learning goals are set at appropriate levels for some learners and incorporate the literacy and numeracy core curricula. Lesson plans and learning objectives also usually incorporate the basic literacy, numeracy and language skills core curricula, where appropriate. In the poorer sessions, the objectives of some of the activities were not made sufficiently clear. Learners were passive and not involved sufficiently in the activities.

61. The tutors provide good pastoral support for learners. Tutors discuss learners' personal issues sensitively and in an appropriate manner for adult learners. The learners support each other very well. Childcare facilities are available. All courses are free and materials are provided for learners. All learners are offered information, advice and guidance about possible progression routes. Some learners find this useful when considering careers and education options.

62. Learners' abilities and circumstances are identified using a range of initial assessment procedures. This initial assessment is satisfactory and sensitive to the fact that many learners are not very confident at the beginning of their courses. Methods used include formal written assessments, self-assessment and informal questioning. All learners have a learning plan. On some courses, learning plans are detailed, with good individual objectives. However, in literacy and Fun 2 Talk courses, learning plans are not detailed and do not have specific individual targets. The plans do not meet the individual needs of learners with different experiences of parenting. Learning plans are not used as working documents to extend learning into the home. The Council's standard learning plans are considered by some learners to be unnecessary paperwork. The poorer learning plans do not contain sufficient assessment of individual learning outcomes after each session.

63. Progress reviews during learning sessions focus effectively on the outcomes of work carried out by parents and their children at home, and consider how the children have benefited. They do not, however, consider or record the adult's own literacy, numeracy or other learning sufficiently.

64. Resources are satisfactory. Tutors are well qualified and have appropriate experience. Most tutors have attended literacy and numeracy awareness sessions. A good range of materials and games are used in craft and play activities. Although the previous inspection found that computers were widely used on wider family learning programmes, information technology facilities are not widely used on most of the current courses. All of the programmes take place on school premises, and sometimes the classrooms allocated for family learning courses contain seating that is inappropriate for adult learners. Learners and tutors have complained, but insufficient action has been taken to resolve the situation.

Leadership and management

65. The Council has effective strategic partnerships to develop the family literacy programmes. This was identified as a strength at the previous inspection. These

partnerships are well managed by the family learning development group. All partners share clear aims for the development of the provision throughout the county. The Council works well in partnership with the local college of further education. Roles and responsibilities are now more clearly defined, although there is still some confusion over the contractual arrangements for the provision of accreditation.

66. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. All learners receive clear details of the Council's policies and procedures in a handbook. Some learning sessions promote very good awareness and implementation of equal opportunities principles. For example, on one family learning course, parents were evaluating the suitability of learning games for children with a variety of disabilities such as colour blindness or other sight impairment.

67. Although the Council's quality monitoring systems are satisfactory, they do not play a significant part in determining course content or in sharing best practice. Tutors vary widely in the quality of their teaching, the literacy and numeracy content of their courses, teaching and learning styles, and in the degree of importance given to planning, assessment and accreditation of individual learning objectives.

68. Some learners wish to continue to learn how to support their children, but have insufficient information about progression routes to wider family learning opportunities. Except on the pilot language course, tutors do not have sufficient time to fully meet learners' individual guidance needs.

69. The previous inspection identified that data was not used and analysed sufficiently to contribute to the planning of learning provision. Data collection is now satisfactory, but the installation of the information system is too recent for it to have been of significant use in the development of the programmes.

70. Shortfalls exist in the range and types of provision offered, some of which have been identified by the Council and the partnership. The planning and development of some initiatives have been delayed. Family literacy and numeracy courses are targeted at specific communities within Herefordshire. However, funding for these courses is limited. Many of the courses provided are only offered once. This is a continuing situation from the previous inspection. There are few opportunities to repeat a course, even if there is a demand for it. Currently, the Council does not target or provide sufficiently for learners at entry level. Many of these learners have the greatest need for support in developing their own and their children's literacy, numeracy and language skills. The Council has identified the need to encourage more men to participate, but has not taken sufficient action to design relevant programmes. Publicity and promotional information for family learning programmes is often inaccurate and course titles are not attractive to some learners.