

INSPECTION REPORT

Pre-School Learning Alliance

12 December 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

Pre-School Learning Alliance

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Pre-school Learning Alliance (the Alliance) is a national voluntary organisation established in 1991. It is registered as an educational charity and a company limited by guarantee. The organisation oversees and supports 16,000 neighbourhood-based community pre-schools. These pre-schools provide nursery education and childcare to more than 500,000 children and learning and personal development to their parents. The national charity provides vocational training for pre-school staff, adult and community learning, advice, helplines, publications and a visiting and advice service of local development workers.

2. The mission of the charity, approved by the board of trustees on 1st April 2003, is to help children to succeed, create the childcare which families need and build learning communities. The charity's programme of vocational training and adult and community learning aims to promote best practice for the learning and development of children and ensure that pre-schools are able to comply with statutory regulations and meet the requirements of the registering and inspecting body; support the government's objectives of providing good nursery education for children and expanded childcare opportunities for working parents; promote the involvement of parents in their children's education; and provide family learning and lifelong learning, including literacy and numeracy education.

3. The charity operates as a further education college specialising in the provision of early years courses. The training programme is developed and co-ordinated from its national centre in London with support from a team of regionally based training staff. With a total annual enrolment of over 25,000 learners, the element funded directly by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is quite small. Most of the organisation's provision, and all of that which is currently funded by the LSC, is health, social care and public services.

4. Since 2001, the charity has received various project-related funds from the Basic Skills Agency. It is a consortium member of the Skills for Families initiative to help develop and build family learning programmes. These additional programmes are not part of this inspection. In 2002-03, the charity was awarded £25,000 from the LSC to run a wider family learning pilot project in the charity's pre-schools. The project covered 18 pre-schools and 160 adults, although the main LSC funding is to deliver the certificate and diploma in pre-school practice. There are currently 1,510 learners on accredited courses funded by Leicestershire LSC, the co-ordinating LSC. There are a further 135 learners working towards units of accredited courses.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Health, social care & public services

5. The Alliance provides teaching for childcare courses through its adult and community

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learning programme. This is developed and co-ordinated by the training team in its national centre in London. The provision is available in all seven regions. Each region has a training and quality assurance manager responsible for the day-to-day running of the programmes. Each region has two or three regional training officers who develop courses and support and monitor the tutors. Several regions have one or more staff tutors. The teaching is provided by full- and part-time tutors. Each region has a large bank of tutors, some of whom are currently not teaching but still have access to in-service training. Many of the tutors are also development workers. The regions use trainee tutors who receive mentoring and support. Courses run in a variety of venues including schools, Sure Start premises, church halls, branch and regional premises and other community buildings. All learners on the certificate and diploma course are adults. They are working, or doing voluntary work, or on a work placement in a pre-school setting.

6. Currently, the southeast region has 61 learners on the introduction to pre-school practice, 239 on the certificate programme and 354 on the diploma course. In the northeast region, 26 learners are on the certificate programme, 82 are on the diploma course, and 33 are doing unit qualifications. In the northwest region, 36 learners are following the certificate programme, 89 are on the diploma course and 12 are working towards unit certification. In the southwest region, 50 learners are working towards the certificate programme, 46 the diploma course, 17 are on the getting started programme and 26 are working towards unit certification. The eastern region has 175 learners on the certificate programme, 97 on the diploma course, 35 on the fast monitor diploma course and 64 working on unit certification. In the Midlands, 71 learners are on the certificate programme, 38 are on the diploma course and 40 are on the getting started programme. The London region has 18 learners on certificate programmes, 10 on a diploma course and 26 following a fast monitor diploma course. Courses run in a variety of venues including schools, Sure Start premises, church halls, branch and regional premises and other community buildings. All learners on the certificate and diploma courses are adults. They are working, or doing voluntary work, or on a work placement in a pre-school setting.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	22
Number of inspection days	127
Number of learner interviews	566
Number of staff interviews	152
Number of employer interviews	14
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	91
Number of visits	14

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the quality of adult and community learning in health, social care and public services is good. The quality of leadership and management is

good and equality of opportunity and quality assurance are satisfactory.

GRADES

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	3
Quality assurance	3

Health, social care & public services	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

8. **There are good retention and achievement rates.** Retention has remained good at over 90 per cent for the past three years. Achievement rates are good, at over 80 per cent for same period. In some regions all learners who were retained have achieved. The quality of learners' work is good and they effectively relate background knowledge to practice.

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
Health, social care & public services	0	15	34	22	1	0	0	72
Total	0	15	34	22	1	0	0	72

9. **Teaching and learning are good.** Sixty-eight per cent of the lessons observed were graded as good or better. Tutors are occupationally experienced and qualified and teaching is carefully planned. In most sessions there are clear aims and objectives and detailed lesson plans.

10. **There is a wide range of provision meeting the needs of local communities, employers and learners from pre-entry to level 3.** These courses are taught in accessible venues and at times appropriate to learners' needs. Learners successfully progress to further training within the Alliance and to external courses and employment.

11. **There is no formalised initial assessment of learners' needs,** including literacy, numeracy or language needs. There is insufficient provision for learners who have

difficulties in these areas to receive additional support.

Leadership and management

12. **Leadership is strong and there is good strategic and operational management.** There are effective partnerships made with organisations and agencies at a national and local level and good internal and external communications through national publications and newsletters. Staff have access to, and make good use of, staff training and development.

13. **The organisation has taken positive action to widen participation from under-represented groups** through specific initiatives to include men and people from minority ethnic communities. However, there is insufficient analysis of equal opportunities data collected at a local and national level to evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives. Learners apply well their understanding of equality and diversity issues learnt in their courses to their work settings.

14. **The organisation produced an accurate and self-critical self-assessment report.** However, insufficient use is made of management information to identify trends, and the quality assurance arrangements are incomplete. Some regions do not systematically follow the agreed procedures.

15. **There is slow implementation of the literacy, numeracy and language strategy and no initial assessment of learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs.** Some learners are placed on inappropriate courses and there is no formal provision for supporting individual learning needs.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- strong leadership and clear strategic management
- effective partnership working
- good internal and external communications
- good staff training and development
- good operational management
- positive action to widen participation
- good application of learners' understanding of equality and diversity
- good self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of management information
- slow implementation of literacy, numeracy and language strategy
- insufficient analysis of equal opportunities data
- incomplete quality assurance processes

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- good teaching and learning
- wide-ranging provision that meets the needs of local communities, employers and learners
- good progression to further training
- effective and productive local partnerships

Weaknesses

- no formalised initial assessment
- insufficient provision to meet the literacy, numeracy and language needs of learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT PRE-SCHOOL LEARNING ALLIANCE:

- the support provided by tutors
- meeting with other practitioners and making new friends
- sharing good practice
- increasing their own cultural awareness with activities to use in the workplace
- gaining an understanding of creative play
- improving their parenting skills and their understanding of their own children
- developing self-confidence
- gaining a recognised qualification that can lead to promotion

WHAT LEARNERS THINK PRE-SCHOOL LEARNING ALLIANCE COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of help with assignments at the beginning of the course - they would like more
- the quality of the pre-course information and guidance
- the time taken to return assessed work - it is too long
- the ESOL support by providing an ESOL tutor or translator
- the opportunities to contact tutors by e-mail
- the number of forms to complete - there are too many
- the access to computers to write assignments

KEY CHALLENGES FOR PRE-SCHOOL LEARNING ALLIANCE:

- implement and further develop the literacy, numeracy and language strategy
- improve on and use effectively the management information systems
- introduce a formal initial assessment of learners' needs and appropriately record their planned learning
- complete and formally monitor the implementation of the quality assurance arrangements

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 INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- strong leadership and clear strategic management
- effective partnership working
- good internal and external communications
- good staff training and development
- good operational management
- positive action to widen participation
- good application of learners' understanding of equality and diversity
- good self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of management information
- slow implementation of literacy, numeracy and language strategy
- insufficient analysis of equal opportunities data
- incomplete quality assurance processes

16. The Alliance has strong leadership and a clear strategic framework. It provides the values and priorities of the charity for improving provision for children and families. There is strong leadership from trustees and senior managers who have extensive knowledge of pre-school practice. The organisation has a high profile as a lead organisation in promoting pre-school learning as a central part of a national childcare strategy. Staff and partners of the organisation have a good understanding of the work the charity is doing to widen participation. There has been effective management of change since the charity was incorporated in April 2003 to ensure greater accountability in the Alliance's activities. During this change the morale of regional staff has remained high. Directors and managers have taken a strong lead in supporting staff through the implementation of a new structure. Modernisation of the charity has been well managed. There has been efficient use of scarce resources. Despite the loss of training officer posts nationally, there has been considerable expansion in provision. Teaching and learning have remained at a good standard.

17. The Alliance works effectively in partnership with other organisations to develop effective and innovative initiatives to widen the participation in learning of under-represented groups. Significant work to develop the Alliance has occurred despite low levels of funding, such as the establishment of neighbourhood nurseries. At a strategic level the Alliance has increased its profile by working collaboratively with other charities and the private sector to influence national childcare policy. Joint conferences have

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taken place with key partners from the five largest national childcare organisations. The Alliance joins with these charitable childcare organisations to prepare responses to government consultations. Staff attend meetings held by a number of government departments to influence policy makers and lobby for resources for the pre-school sector. The Alliance is a member of a bimonthly voluntary sector forum and shares the commitment to the social development of communities.

18. The Alliance has good internal and external communications. There is a well-structured system of communication encompassing all branches and staff. This is supported by an open and consultative style of management. The Alliance has kept all staff and volunteers informed of progress in modernising the organisation. Senior managers with responsibility for training and quality assurance meet regularly and frequently. From the national centre, managers visit each region to attend meetings, provide training and support staff. Team working is effective. Minutes of meetings are clear. Action points, with the name of the person responsible and a date for action attached, are followed up at subsequent meetings. There is in-depth discussion on all aspects of provision and learner progress. Staff in the regions share information efficiently, discuss issues and solve problems jointly. Communications are good with external organisations and members. The Alliance has recently developed a website and appointed a dedicated member of staff to evaluate its usage and update it. There are regular, well-produced publications and newsletters with a wide readership.

19. There is good staff training and development and a strong commitment to continuous professional development throughout the organisation. A recently developed appraisal system has been introduced. Currently, all head office staff, regional managers and training and quality assurance managers have been appraised. Training for appraisers and appraisees is provided. All head office and regional staff have completed the training. This is being extended to all sessional tutors in 2004 before their first appraisal under the new system. The previous appraisal system did not include sessional tutors. There is effective induction for staff. Individual development needs are assessed as part of induction and at subsequent appraisals. The Alliance has a wide range of programmes to train its own staff, assessors and internal verifiers. Management training has been provided for those staff whose roles have changed in the recent restructure to include supervision of staff. There is a five-hour equal opportunities training course free to all staff and volunteers. Staff frequently attend local training courses. Some staff are supported in achieving qualifications provided externally.

20. Operational management is good. The Alliance has developed highly effective procedures to manage the day-to-day running of its learning programmes. The recruitment and selection process is well developed. Staff are well qualified for their roles. There is good retention of experienced staff. All staff have up-to-date job descriptions and are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The training and quality assurance department provides good training that is well planned and appropriate. Attendance, retention and achievement rates are very good. Pre-course meetings are provided for advice and guidance. There is widespread learner understanding and knowledge of the requirements of the qualifications. A course review and evaluations are used to improve provision. New monitoring systems are in place including

observation of sessions, peer observations across regions and frequent moderation of standards in schemes of work, lesson plans and assessment. Tutors are well supported by area staff, although home-based tutors and regional training officers in some locations are not provided with laptop computers or mobile telephones. If tutors cannot attend meetings, training officers frequently arrange individual sessions at mutually convenient times.

21. There is insufficient use of management information. Data are collected and recorded on a recently acquired computer database, but this has frequent technical problems. Staff are unable to analyse data and only a narrow range of reports are produced. Information is routinely collected for contract compliance and satisfies external auditors. Insufficient use of data is made for the overall management and monitoring of provision and individual learner progress, and for the targeting of resources. Although data are analysed in terms of gender, ethnicity and age, there is insufficient analysis of how these factors impact on attendance, retention and achievement. Data are not used effectively to aid self-assessment and target-setting in development plans.

22. There is slow implementation of the literacy, numeracy and language strategy. This is identified as a weakness in self-assessment. There is a shortage of staff nationally despite improved recruitment campaigns. Staff are undergoing training in literacy and numeracy, but not in sufficient numbers or at a level of expertise to fully impact on the current learners' development. Where the organisation has bid for project funding there have been positive outcomes. For example, learners who may have been unwilling to return to learning have progressed from a short course into further accredited training. However, some learners have clear literacy needs. There is no formalised initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and language needs. Some learners are placed on inappropriate courses. There is no formal provision for supporting individual learning needs. Many learners rely on their peers to assist them with written work. Some tutors assess the needs of learners informally and keep good records of progress. They use tutorials to support learners with their assignments.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

23. The Alliance has taken positive action to widen participation of under-represented groups through the development of successful funding and partnership initiatives with external agencies. These include the introduction of programmes to develop the parenting skills of fathers, and programmes to meet the needs of women from specific minority ethnic groups and refugees in several regions. In one group, learners who speak English as an additional language received additional support for two hours each week and achieved passes in all their units.

24. Learners develop a good understanding of concepts related to equality of opportunity and diversity. They apply this new knowledge to make changes of practice in their workplaces. In one pre-school setting learners successfully persuaded the leader to amend the admissions policy which excluded children in nappies. In another setting learners encouraged the leaders of the playgroup to change the timing of meetings to

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enable parents to attend. Learners have designed games to extend learning for children with a wide range of abilities.

25. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of the equality of opportunity policy and procedures. They are made aware of their rights and responsibilities at the beginning of their course. The learner handbook contains a statement on equality of opportunity, a learners' charter and complaints procedure. Learners understand the processes by which to make a complaint or appeal against an assessment decision. The Alliance has identified the gap in provision for learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs. A recently appointed research team is monitoring the role of special educational needs co-ordinators to provide a good base from which to develop an effective strategy.

26. The Alliance has recently updated its equality of opportunity policy and procedures to incorporate new legislation and its implications. Staff have a clear understanding of the policy and procedures. Equality of opportunity is represented satisfactorily in its promotional literature. However, the Alliance does not assess the extent to which this strategy is successful in recruiting learners and staff from under-represented groups. All tutors are aware of equality of opportunity as an essential element of provision. Some are able to incorporate this well into their teaching. Training for tutors is widely available but its effectiveness is not monitored systematically. Several tutors plan activities to meet learners' different learning styles. In some lessons, tutors do not effectively reinforce and extend learners' understanding of diversity.

27. Analysis of equality of opportunity data is insufficient to monitor the success of initiatives. The Alliance has data on the number of learners from minority ethnic groups, but it does not analyse these to assess whether the range of learners reflects the community where training takes place. It does not routinely monitor the retention and achievements of these learners. In most regions the proportion of training staff from minority ethnic groups does not reflect that of the local populations.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

28. The self-assessment process is good. The Alliance has created clear procedures to quality assure its provision covering the design, delivery and review of its courses. There is a genuine commitment among staff to the continuous improvement of the learners' experience. All stakeholders contribute to the self-assessment process. Learners and tutors evaluate each individual course through comprehensive end-of-course reviews. Regional training officers carefully monitor these reviews. They produce a self-assessment report on the counties they cover, which contributes to the regional self-assessment report produced by the training and quality assurance manager. The regional self-assessment reports, overall, accurately identify key strengths and weaknesses. The Alliance's self-assessment report accurately reflects the quality of its provision across the country and clearly identifies key strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement.

29. The training provider systems manual is comprehensive, although content on quality assurance is not organised well. The tutor handbook is relatively new and contains helpful and well-presented information and guidance. Monitoring of schemes of work by

regional training officers is effective. Forms used to assess the teaching and learning and the grading system are too complicated. In some regions tutors meet regularly to standardise and share good practice. In other regions peer assessment has been introduced as another way of raising standards and providing support for tutors. During the first nine months of 2003, the Alliance introduced cross-regional monitoring of observation of tutors to try to add greater objectivity to assessment and to ensure common standards across regions. The number of visits conducted by regions varied. Some features contributing to effective practice emerged from this exercise, but a further more extensive project was found to be necessary to take this initiative forward. Internal moderation is thorough and feedback to tutors is generally constructive. External moderator reports are positive and actions to deal with issues raised in the reports are initiated promptly and effectively.

30. Quality assurance processes are incomplete. The Alliance has identified that using the outcomes from monitoring and evaluation to plan provision is incomplete and that retention and achievement rates vary between regions and between types of courses. Regions do not uniformly analyse learner achievement data. The organisation does not formally analyse the grades learners achieve or collate a profile of lesson observations to form the basis of judgements on the quality of teaching and learning. Observations of some tutors by regional training officers are not carried out in the timescales set out in the training manual and grades awarded are often too high. The Alliance has established working groups to tackle these issues with clear terms of reference and demanding dates for completion. Lesson plans and tutorial records are not always completed according to these guidelines. Some of the pre-course advice and guidance is inadequate. An action plan has been produced for a project on supporting the learners. This is to tackle the other weaknesses in the area of learning.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, social care & public services

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	1645	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- good teaching and learning
- wide-ranging provision that meets the needs of local communities, employers and learners
- good progression to further training
- effective and productive local partnerships

Weaknesses

- no formalised initial assessment
- insufficient provision to meet the literacy, numeracy and language needs of learners

Achievement and standards

31. Retention and achievement rates are good. Retention rates in 2001-02 and 2002-03 were 91.2 per cent and 92.4 per cent respectively. The retention rate for 2003-2004 is currently 94.5 per cent. Nationally in 2001-02 the achievement rate was 86.7 per cent. For 2002-03 the rate was 82.5 per cent. In some regions all learners who were retained, achieved. Learners' files and assignments show a good standard of work. Learners increase their knowledge of childcare issues and transfer this knowledge into good childcare practice. Learners who speak English as an additional language acquire a greater understanding of relevant language and share various cultural practices. Learners gain increased self-confidence and self-esteem.

Quality of education and training

32. Teaching and learning are good. Sixty-eight per cent of the lessons observed were graded as good or better. All tutors are occupationally experienced and qualified. Teaching is carefully planned. There are weekly training sessions for those enrolled on the entry level course, the certificate programme and the diploma in pre-school practice. Attendance is good. Lessons start promptly. In most sessions there are detailed lesson plans with appropriate timings and with clear aims and objectives. In some regions the learners have copies of the aims and objectives for sessions. There is particular emphasis on the development of learners' practical skills. Learners become more confident in their

own skills and are able to make suggestions to bring about changes in their workplaces. Tutors are skilled at drawing out learners' experience and knowledge to benefit the whole group. A good variety of teaching methods used to promote and extend learning effectively. In most sessions good use of teaching and learning aids promotes learning. Key learning points are reinforced. Checks are made to ensure learning has taken place. Staff have good working relationships with learners. Evaluations of training and teaching observations are mostly good but vary across each region.

33. The Alliance provides a wide range of courses and programmes to meet the needs of learners, employers and local communities. Learners and employers are made aware of the programmes available through good marketing materials and a calendar of promotional events. The making choices course provides good information of employment opportunities. The entry level programme allows learners to gain a good insight into the role of the pre-school worker. All learners have access to a very wide range of short courses. These increase personal development and provide knowledge evidence to support accredited courses. Courses are arranged at flexible times during the day and evening. Most venues are easy to access for people who have restricted mobility. Most are in locations appropriate to the needs and requirements of adult learners. Courses are provided at a range of levels from pre-entry to level 3. The diploma in pre-school practice is available through a variety of routes.

34. The Alliance's courses provide good progression to further training. These include courses for parents through to the diploma in pre-school practice at level 3. Parents, mainly mothers with young children, are encouraged to return to learning through good training in parenting skills. Some of these include an element of informal educational outcomes such as interacting with others and keeping a diary of what they achieve in each lesson. They carry out some of the activities they have learnt in the classroom with their own children in the crèche. Some gain the confidence to work as volunteers in their local pre-school. Others progress to the getting started entry level course, which is good preparation for other accredited courses. Tutors throughout the course encourage learners to consider further learning. Towards the end of all courses, time is taken to discuss the routes of progression.

35. Resources are satisfactory. Tutors are appropriately qualified and experienced, although in some regions there are insufficient numbers of staff to meet the needs of learners on accredited courses. Although some accommodation is particularly good, in other community venues access to equipment such as flip charts, whiteboards and videos is not adequate. Some venues are not served by public transport. At one site, tables and chairs are inappropriate for adults. Tutors are generally good at providing resources. The regional offices have lists of books and videos available on loan to the tutors, although some of these are inadequate. Some have reference books for learners' use. There is insufficient access to information technology. Learners on the supported distance learning programme rely on sending assignments by post and make telephone calls rather than using the internet.

36. Support for learners is satisfactory. All learners receive tutorial support. This is effective in helping learners to progress and to achieve their qualifications. Tutorials are

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not always recorded adequately. There are good course guides that give learners appropriate pre-course information. Pre-course meetings are planned to give learners appropriate information on which course will meet effectively their training needs. Some of these meetings do not give sufficient information regarding the requirements of the programme. In one region, a small number of learners left because they were unable to keep up with the standard of work on the diploma course. Throughout their training learners receive good pastoral support from staff. Tutors supply learners with contact telephone numbers and respond promptly to requests. Peer support is often particularly good.

37. There is no formalised initial assessment of learners' needs. This was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. There is no literacy and numeracy assessment. Some tutors ask learners to write a piece of work at the pre-course meeting and use this to identify any literacy needs. Tutors rely on learners to report any additional needs. Other tutors identify learners' difficulties when drafts of the first assignment are checked.

38. There is insufficient provision to meet learners' literacy, numeracy and language support needs. This was identified in the self-assessment report as a weakness. Tutors rely on their own perceptions and offer individual support. Some tutors have received training in providing support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs, but it is not used effectively. Reviews of learners' classwork contain grammatical and spelling errors. Some learners have identified their need for study skills and essay-writing techniques at the start of the programme. Learners often rely on the tutor and their peers to check their written work. Some learners seek help from family members. A number of learners expressed concern over their own literacy skills. They do not feel well prepared for their academic qualification. Tutors are not always available to provide extra support. Many tutors support learners in their own time on an individual basis. The complex language used in documents and handouts does not provide ease of understanding for all learners.

Leadership and management

39. There are well-established and effective local partnerships. The Alliance works closely with local external agencies and employers to identify gaps in provision for training in childcare. It is subcontracted by external agencies to provide a range of short courses and one-day workshops in early years childcare and education. Courses and workshops are well planned to meet the needs of learners and local initiatives. All of these programmes are approved by the external agency involved. Venues are arranged by the external agencies. The Alliance carries out risk assessments in these venues to ensure adequate arrangements for health and safety. A wide range of other short courses is provided for childcare practitioners already qualified and working in the early years field, to update their skills and expertise.

40. The operational management of the accredited courses is effective. The regional training teams are dedicated to meeting learners' individual needs and the needs of the charity. The internal moderation process is good. Most regional training officers moderate learners' work promptly. Some of the feedback to tutors is insufficiently detailed to meet their developmental needs. Quality assurance arrangements are

incomplete. Many initiatives, including tutor observations and monitoring, have been implemented but follow-up evidence has not been recorded formally. The self-assessment process in the regions was good and accurately identified the main strengths and weaknesses.