

REINSPECTION REPORT

Durham Education in the Community (formerly Durham LEA) Reinspection

11 March 2005



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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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Durham County Council (the council) provides adult and community learning through its Education in the Community (EiC) service. EiC's overall remit includes youth and community learning, family learning, the youth service and skills for life, the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of languages. In 2003-04 EiC provided learning opportunities for almost 12,000 adults. This is an increase of just over one third since the previous inspection. All provision is directly delivered and classes are available in all areas of learning. Classes in foundation and family learning, visual and performing arts, hospitality, sports, leisure and travel, information and communication technology (ICT) and health and social care form 84 per cent of the provision. Classes are offered at more than 100 locations throughout the county in partnership with community organisations, skills for life centres, schools, libraries and other community groups. Twenty-four centres are designated main centres. Four of these are skills for life units. A further 70 locations are designated satellite centres. Most learning takes place on community association premises. EiC has service level agreements with 90 community associations. At the reinspection, ICT and visual and performing arts were inspected in full and other areas of learning were monitored to establish the improvements made since the previous inspection.

2. EiC's overall manager reports to the council's director of education through the deputy director. He is supported by the senior management team which consists of the area co-ordinators, business manager, youth service manager, adult education and basic skills manager and the curriculum manager, who has been appointed since the previous inspection. There are five area teams of qualified youth and community work staff, each led by an area co-ordinator, and four skills for life units. The area teams are supported by a team of central officers and an administrative group. The newly formed service monitoring and improvement group comprises members of the senior management team. The group oversees quality assurance and monitors reports from the area operation groups. EiC employs nearly 400 tutors, most of whom are part-time, hourly paid employees on short-term contracts.

3. EiC receives its funding from County Durham Learning and Skills Council. County Durham is predominantly a rural county and many towns and villages are former mining communities. Mining and other heavy industries have declined, and recent difficulties in the farming industry have left economic, social and environmental problems. The county has significant pockets of social deprivation. A significant number of people live in wards that rank in the worst 10 per cent in the country in terms of health, employment, income and education skills. However, the unemployment rate for the county has improved since the previous inspection and in February 2005 was 2.2 per cent compared with the national average of 2.3 per cent. In 2004, 46.6 per cent of pupils passed five or more general certificates of secondary education at grade C or above, compared with the national average of 53.7 per cent. According to the 2001 census only 1 per cent of the population of County Durham are from minority ethnic groups, compared with 9.1 per

cent for England as a whole.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Information & communications technology

4. During 2003-04, 878 learners enrolled on 60 ICT courses. Since September 2004, 717 learners have enrolled on 40 courses. About 5 per cent declared a disability, 40 per cent are men and less than 1 per cent are from a minority ethnic group. About one quarter of learners are over 60 years of age. At the time of the reinspection, 304 learners were enrolled on 40 courses. Courses are from beginners level to level 3. Those above beginners level are accredited mainly through examination-based courses in computer literacy and information technology (IT) or the Open College Network (OCN). Courses range in length from five to 20 weeks and run during the daytime and evening, with most offered between Monday and Wednesday. Courses are available in about 30 community venues throughout the county, including village halls and schools. Most courses have been developed to meet local requirements. There are 17 part-time tutors. All have subject-based qualifications and 10 have teaching qualifications. The area of learning has a full-time co-ordinator.

Visual & performing arts & media

5. Since September 2004, 2,142 learners have enrolled on visual and performing arts courses. Twenty-five per cent of learners are men. Virtually all learners are over 19 years of age and 67 per cent are aged over 50. Courses take place in a number of rural and urban venues throughout the county and many are offered in conjunction with local community associations. Since the previous inspection, the range of courses offered has increased from 47 to over 100. At the time of the reinspection 1,268 learners were enrolled. Most classes are scheduled to run for two hours, and most are offered over 10 weeks in each of the three academic terms. Most of the courses offered are not accredited. The visual arts and crafts courses available include painting and drawing, dressmaking, embroidery, pottery, quilting and card making. Performing arts courses include keyboard playing, ballroom and sequence dancing, singing and a small number of drama classes. Seventy-seven part-time tutors work in the area of learning. Many have subject qualifications or significant experience, and 29 of them have recognised teaching qualifications.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	34
Number of learners interviewed	63
Number of staff interviewed	174
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	28
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	23
Number of visits	4

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

6. The previous inspection in October 2003 found EiC's leadership and management, and arrangements for quality assurance to be unsatisfactory. The provider's approach to equality of opportunity was satisfactory. Provision was unsatisfactory in visual and performing arts and media, but satisfactory in ICT. Hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, foundation programmes, family learning and community development were good. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision are satisfactory or better.

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	3
Quality assurance	4

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

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

Visual & performing arts & media	4
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	4

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Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

Family learning	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

Community development	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community 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	3
Quality assurance	3

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

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

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

7. **The retention rate in ICT is good and improving.** In 2004 the retention rate was 94 per cent and the overall pass rate was over 60 per cent. On some accredited courses the pass rate in 2004 was over 90 per cent. About 50 per cent of learners progress to higher levels of study or to related courses at the same level. The standard of work and progress made by most learners is satisfactory. Some make rapid progress and produce work above the awarding bodies' requirements. On short courses, learners show greatly

increased self-confidence in carrying out basic computer operations.

8. Learners in visual and performing arts produce a high standard of practical work. Art and craft learners have good opportunities to exhibit work. Many are experienced and produce work of a saleable standard. Learners in quilting and lacemaking classes demonstrate particularly high levels of work and expertise that they have developed over many years.

Quality of education and training

9. Teaching and learning are good in ICT. Seventy per cent of observed ICT lessons were graded good or better. ICT tutors are adequately prepared and, in the better lessons, use a good variety of teaching methods. Good use is made of volunteer tutors in a few centres to give effective individual support. There is some over-reliance on tutors making decisions for learners, and some learners do not extend their learning. Teaching in visual and performing arts is satisfactory overall. In the best visual and performing arts classes, teaching is very well planned, structured and paced. Individual learners in most classes benefit from expert coaching from their tutors. Some tutors provide good-quality handouts that support and encourage individual learning outside of the class. However, many tutors do not appreciate the value of structured planning, and lesson plans are too general. A very small minority of classes have no lesson plan.

10. Resources are now generally satisfactory in visual and performing arts, having been inadequate at the previous inspection. They continue to be satisfactory in ICT. Accommodation and resources are at least fit for purpose. New resources have been obtained and are beginning to be used to good effect in classes. Laptop computers and portable printers are used at isolated centres to make classes possible. Some tutors produce good handouts to support learning. In digital photography some handouts are of an excellent standard. Tutors have adequate vocational qualifications or experience and many have, or are working towards, teaching qualifications. Some visual and performing arts tutors are current practitioners. Some centres do not have sufficiently powerful computers for applications such as digital photography, and some do not have sufficient access to the internet.

11. Assessment of learners' work is weak in visual and performing arts, but satisfactory in ICT. ICT tutors set regular skills development exercises, and mark and record them carefully. Learners receive good feedback and are aware of their progress. However, some individual learning plans do not sufficiently detail the specific skills that learners have developed. Some visual and performing arts tutors do not understand why non-accredited courses should be assessed. Records of assessment, where they exist, are often just tick lists with achievement dates. Initial assessment does not take account of learners' previous experience or aptitude. Many tutors do not provide sufficient evaluative feedback, and the feedback given is rarely recorded.

12. The range of provision is now good, having been too narrow at the previous inspection. **A good range of introductory ICT courses throughout the county, and visual**

and performing arts classes in disadvantaged areas, have been effective in widening participation. The choice of visual and performing arts subjects and classes has doubled since the previous inspection. However, although there is a balance of accredited and non accredited courses in ICT, virtually all classes offered in visual and performing arts are non-accredited.

13. Tutors provide good support for learners. Learners speak positively about approachable tutors and appreciate the extra time that their tutors often spend in providing additional information or solving problems. The small number of ICT learners who declare a learning support need are effectively supported through specialist computer hardware or software. However, initial assessment varies in thoroughness. On beginners ICT courses, learners complete a simple questionnaire to record their existing ICT skills. However, in visual and performing arts, insufficient guidance is available on learners' suitability or aptitude for a subject.

Leadership and management

14. **Strategic direction has remained strong since the previous inspection.** EiC has further developed its well-defined strategic aims and has acted on these aims effectively. **Communication is good.** All key staff have a good understanding of EiC's strategic aims, key targets, performance indicators and developments. **Partnership working continues to be very effective.** EiC has further developed its long-standing and wide-ranging partnerships with voluntary sector organisations to promote and support learning across the county. **EiC now makes strong use of management information, performance indicators and target-setting.** It collects a wide range of management information, which it analyses regularly and uses well. Targets and performance indicators are set and regularly monitored.

15. **EiC has improved further its existing good strategies to promote learning to potential learners.** It now effectively promotes equality of opportunity and awareness about different cultures. Diversity in the widest sense is celebrated. **Tutors make flexible support arrangements** to meet learners' personal needs and remove barriers to learning. **However, the council's audit of access to adult and community learning centres is not complete.** Some premises have been improved following the audit but the council does not yet know the full extent of its liabilities in relation to adjustments that must be made to buildings.

16. Quality assurance arrangements have improved and are now satisfactory overall. Strategic and operational management cycles are working well and systems for planning, performance management and quality assurance are well integrated. **However, some aspects of quality assurance are not completely established.** Considerable inconsistencies exist in tutors' use of forms and paperwork. Tutors have varying degrees of understanding of, and commitment to, the paperwork processes that affect their learners. A working group with tutor and learner representation is reviewing and simplifying the current processes.

17. **Curriculum leadership is now very effective in ICT.** EiC has recently appointed an

ICT co-ordinator and has made improvements in communications and partnerships at different levels to develop the curriculum. Tutors and centres increasingly share good-quality learning material. Improvements have been made to internal verification.

18. EiC has made improvements across all of its areas of learning. Tutors are observed each year and have good staff development opportunities. The process of annual course evaluation and review has begun. Tutor forums have begun to be effective in sharing good practice. Curriculum development is now carried out according to strategic priorities.

19. Curriculum management in visual and performing arts is now satisfactory, having been ineffective at the previous inspection. Local managers support tutors by ensuring that specialist resources are available at different venues during the week. Learners' work is exhibited across the county to celebrate their achievements. However, some tutors are reluctant to complete key documents fully to support teaching practice. This is one of the largest areas of learning but there is no subject specialist leader.

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

Leadership and management

Strengths

- strong strategic direction
- good communications
- very effective partnership working
- good use of management information
- particularly effective range of initiatives to widen participation
- good strategies to support individual learners
- active commitment to continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- incomplete access audit of buildings
- insufficiently established aspects of quality assurance

Information & communications technology

Strengths

- good retention rate in 2004
- good teaching and learning
- good range of introductory courses which widen participation
- very effective curriculum development

Weaknesses

- insufficient internet access in some centres
- inadequate recording of individual learning

Visual & performing arts & media

Strengths

- high standard of learners' work
- extensive and inclusive range of provision
- good coaching of individual learners

Weaknesses

- much weak lesson planning
- weak assessment

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.

DURHAM EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY (FORMERLY DURHAM LEA) REINSPECTION

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 strategic direction
- good communications
- very effective partnership working
- good use of management information
- particularly effective range of initiatives to widen participation
- good strategies to support individual learners
- active commitment to continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- incomplete access audit of buildings
- insufficiently established aspects of quality assurance

20. Strategic direction is strong. The well-defined strategic aims, identified as a strength at the previous inspection, have been further developed and have been acted on effectively. Clear plans establish a co-ordinated approach to lifelong learning in County Durham and place a high value on promoting the importance of adult and community learning. The concept of the lifelong learner has been redefined in terms of planned learning, regional priorities and targets for regeneration. Elected council members and senior staff provide good support for adult and community learning. They are very knowledgeable about key challenges faced by EiC, and actively support its development. For example, some have been instrumental in establishing improved internet connectivity for e-learning across the county. Developments have been carried out after full community consultation to balance local needs with strategic priorities. Detailed service level agreements, with community associations, set clear targets for widening participation. Management committee training and development has greatly improved consistency and target-setting in area plans. Programme development is based firmly against explicit performance indicators and the service level agreements. Informal and formal learning through adult and community learning is seen as central to capacity building, removing barriers and establishing a co-ordinated approach to learning in disadvantaged and isolated rural communities.

21. Communication has significantly improved since the previous inspection. All key staff have a good understanding of EiC's strategic aims, key targets, performance indicators and developments. Regular meetings, for different groups, are clearly recorded and actions are promptly followed up. Senior management team meetings

clearly differentiate discussion and action for youth and adult provision. Proposed restructure plans further clarify the different roles and responsibilities in each context. Part-time staff are paid to attend meetings. Every effort is made to ensure that they have relevant information if they are unable to attend. Staff comment very favourably on many improvements in tutor support and the information they receive. At curriculum level, focus groups have led to some good curriculum development, particularly in ICT. The staff conference is entering its third year and proving a useful forum for sharing good practice. EiC's communication with external organisations, community associations and networks is good. Written communications for new and existing learners is now centrally produced. Marketing and publicity have improved.

22. The previous inspection identified EiC's very effective partnership working as a strength. Long-standing and wide-ranging partnerships with voluntary sector organisations have continued to develop. Staff are active in many key networks and strategic partnerships that promote and support learning across the county. Local learning providers have begun some good work to avoid duplication of provision and to identify progression routes. EiC's particularly effective partnerships with voluntary and community sector providers enable it to reach particularly isolated and marginalised groups and individuals. Partnerships are mutually beneficial. Learners and learning are supported well by the shared input of staffing, premises and resources by different partners. Referrals between agencies enable learners to receive the most appropriate form of support. For example, a woman with agrophobia who had not left her home for many years was supported into learning and is now in employment. Special partnership projects meet multiple learning needs. Young people can enhance their preparation for work by using a learning centre based at a local employer's premises. Learners develop good workplace attitudes in addition to improving their literacy and numeracy skills.

23. The previous inspection found that EiC's use of management information was ineffective, and its target-setting and use of performance indicators was poor. This has changed significantly and all aspects are now strong. EiC now collects a wide range of management information, analyses it regularly and uses it well. Targets and performance indicators are set and monitored. The flexible management information system produces a wide range of reports that are very effectively used in decision-making, target-setting, monitoring and the self-assessment process. The system is well designed and effectively supported. It is easy to access by managers and co-ordinators at different levels, who make regular and effective use of the information to monitor progress in daily work. Motivation is raised when staff see that they are meeting, and sometimes exceeding, targets.

24. Curriculum management is now satisfactory, having been identified as poor at the previous inspection. EiC succeeded in a recent growth bid and this has enhanced its capacity to manage the provision. The recently appointed curriculum manager has quickly made an impact. The curriculum plan is now approved and in place, and EiC has improved curriculum co-ordination in the areas of learning. Most areas now have a specialist co-ordinator. Clear procedures are now in place for the approval of new courses and for course review and evaluation. A new tutor handbook details all key processes and documents. EiC has taken effective actions to resolve all the key

weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. It has made good progress against each key weakness, and very significant progress against some. Areas of learning that were graded as good at the previous inspection show improvement against each of the weaknesses identified. These areas of learning were not re-graded.

25. Resources are satisfactory. The detailed resources plan for 2004-06 has been approved and supported by additional funding. A wide range of new resources are beginning to arrive in centres and improve the quality of the learners' experience. Much staff development has taken place and a new continuing professional development handbook details a wealth of learning opportunities for full- and part-time staff for the next year. EiC gives advice and support to community associations to help them write bids to improve their own community resources.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

26. EiC has improved further its existing good strategies to promote learning to non-participants. It now additionally promotes equality of opportunity and awareness of different cultures. EiC uses numerous effective internal and external partnerships widely to work with groups that are sometimes hard to reach. For example, it has co-operated with a minority ethnic women's group to increase participation from that community. The women contribute well to the learning of others at cultural diversity events, and attend courses for their own learning. A development worker uses networks and partnerships to recruit tutors, specialist instructors and learners from minority ethnic groups. Diversity in the widest sense is celebrated. EiC understands the needs of many types of potential learner well. It has standardised its previously diverse range of course marketing brochures and improved the material following feedback from learners. For instance, marketing materials are now signposted in several languages following review by English for speakers of other languages learners and the paper used is to be changed from glossy to matt to make the text easier to read. Corporate support for widening participation is strong. Staff and tutors are committed to widening participation. All but a very few full- and part-time staff have attended training in equality and diversity. EiC is now running more specific courses in race equality, cultural awareness and legislation. Centres use their good knowledge of the learning and social needs of local people to develop ways to attract them into learning. Close involvement in the training and support of local management committees has established centres as a valuable resource that community members want to use.

27. EiC's monitoring of equality of opportunity is no longer weak. It produces and monitors detailed reports of participation, retention and achievement rates by subgroups. Targets for increasing the participation of under-represented groups are set and monitored. These have been met or exceeded in the case of men, learners aged over 60 and minority ethnic groups. Many more men are now participating in learning. They are attracted by new courses in football for parents and children, plumbing and do-it-yourself. Women learners are also recruited to these courses. Retention and success rates in 2003-04 for targets groups of minority ethnic learners and those with physical or mental disabilities were close to 100 per cent.

28. Tutors make flexible arrangements to support learners' personal circumstances and remove barriers to learning. Courses are offered at different times of the day, and some at weekends, to suit learners. Special equipment such as portable hearing induction loops and portable ramps is available to support learners. Crèches are provided in some centres. Learners who miss parts of a course are helped to catch up. Much individual tuition is given freely, above expectations. Tutors are very helpful and deal sensitively and discreetly with individual learners. Some take care to identify any health problems at the start of some courses. For example, a learner with arthritic hands found it very helpful to have this information requested at the start of a craft course. Support workers accompany some learners throughout each class. The comprehensive professional development programme for staff includes training in awareness of additional learning needs. Part-time tutors value these courses and are paid to attend. Tutors discuss each learner's needs but rely on self-disclosure to identify less noticeable needs. A pilot for initial assessment for literacy and numeracy skills support needs has recently begun, but no formal initial assessment takes place for most courses.

29. EiC has put into place effective policies and procedures for complaints that are understood and used appropriately by learners, tutors and centre staff. Most complaints are dealt with within centres. More significant complaints are referred to area managers or the head of EiC. The few complaints at higher level are taken very seriously and are investigated and resolved effectively.

30. The council's audit of access to adult and community learning centres is not complete. Programmes of major and minor works over the past two years have covered very few of the premises used for adult and community learning courses. Some premises have been improved as a result of the audit. EiC plans to improve all main adult and community learning centres owned by the council but no specific programmes are in place to cover other premises used. Some equipment has been bought, including portable ramps for wheelchair access, and portable hearing loops are available to all centres. Reading magnifiers with lights and Braille and tactile door signs have been supplied to some centres. EiC is working with charitable trusts to help them to obtain external funding to adapt the community centres used. Centre staff are aware of the council's responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and other statutes, and they make whatever provision they can to comply. However, the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act came into full effect in 2004 and the council does not yet know the full extent of its financial and other liabilities in relation to adjustments that must be made to buildings.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

31. EiC's quality assurance arrangements were weak at the previous inspection. These have improved and are now satisfactory overall. Strategic and operational management cycles are now working well. Systems for planning, performance management and quality assurance are well integrated. Area and centre managers understand, value and benefit from quality assurance systems and business planning processes. Policies for quality assurance are clear and comprehensive. EiC has recently made many changes to improve aspects of learning. Good practice is shared widely by tutors and other staff.

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Processes for the observation of teaching and learning have been improved and all tutors are observed annually. The system for observations is being improved further. EiC's monitoring and improvement group is active in analysing information and data from many sources, including feedback from learners and tutors. This information is used to plan and implement changes to EiC that affect the learning process. Targets and performance indicators are used effectively to monitor and drive forward changes. Staff at all levels are strongly committed to initiating and implementing quality improvements. The County Durham kite-mark quality standard has been adopted throughout EiC. Staff, including tutors, are being trained to understand and use new paperwork for tutors and learners.

32. Internal verification is satisfactory in the very few areas where it is applicable. The internal verification process has been standardised for all accredited courses. EiC plans to extend this process to non-accredited courses to improve the consistency of learning and assessment.

33. The self-assessment report was developed using information from area and centre managers. The report identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses found during reinspection. However, the report is insufficiently self-critical in some areas, and some of the self-assessment grades are higher than those given at reinspection.

34. Considerable inconsistencies exist between classes and individual tutors in the use of forms and paperwork. Some course registers are incomplete or absent and a few classes have no lesson plans. Some individual learning plans are incomplete. Others contain information on skills gained that is insufficiently specific. Learners do not always understand the degree of progress they have made. Tutors have varying degrees of understanding of, and commitment to, the paperwork processes that affect their learners. Tutors who have been trained in the new systems show a better appreciation of the benefits to them and their learners from proper completion of the forms. A working group is reviewing and simplifying the current processes. The group includes a learner and a tutor. However, quality assurance processes are well established in some areas of learning.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	304	2

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

Strengths

- good retention rate in 2004
- good teaching and learning
- good range of introductory courses which widen participation
- very effective curriculum development

Weaknesses

- insufficient internet access in some centres
- inadequate recording of individual learning

Achievement and standards

35. Retention is good and improving. In 2004 the overall retention rate was 94 per cent. The retention rate on longer courses such as the OCN-accredited and examination-based courses in computer literacy and IT varies from 70 per cent to 86 per cent. The overall pass rate was over 60 per cent. On some accredited courses the pass rate in 2004 was over 90 per cent. Success on non-accredited courses is measured by tutors' observations that learners meet their learning goals during practical work, and through consolidation tasks which test all of a learner's new skills.

36. Learners are provided with effective end-of-course advice to promote their progression. About half of them progress to higher levels of study or to related courses at the same level. Learners are punctual and attendance is generally over 90 per cent. During inspection the attendance was 87 per cent.

37. The standard of most learners' work is satisfactory and they make satisfactory progress. Some make rapid progress and produce work above the standard required by the awarding bodies. Learners on the short courses show greatly increased self-confidence with basic computer operations.

Quality of education and training

38. Teaching and learning are good. The proportion of good teaching has increased

since the previous inspection, and 70 per cent of lessons observed during the inspection were graded good or better. No observed lessons were unsatisfactory. In all lessons, tutors are adequately prepared and schemes of work and lesson plans are appropriately detailed. Working relationships between tutors and learners are effective in promoting learning. In the better lessons, tutors use a good variety of teaching methods. Interactive whiteboards are used for group demonstrations, enabling learners to see detailed software operations. Learners' understanding is checked by questions arising from the demonstration. Learners are able to work at their own pace and take assessments when they are ready. In a few centres, volunteers give effective support by helping individual learners. Learners ask searching questions, are clear about what they are expected to do and support each other. All learners value the social aspects of their courses and many carry on their learning outside of lesson times through working at home, using local libraries or attending drop-in sessions at other times. In weaker lessons tutors do not always check learners' understanding before they start practical work. Learners sometimes rely too much on the tutor to make decisions for them. A few learners experiment with their software applications packages but many follow the tutor's instructions only and do not extend their learning.

39. The range of provision at many centres was restricted at the previous inspection. This has improved, and ICT centres throughout the county now offer a good range of introductory courses. Courses range from beginners level to level 3 but learners need to travel to another centre for some of these. Some learners believe that centre activities could be better advertised to ensure that there are sufficient learners to run courses locally.

40. The small number of learners who each year declare a learning support need are supported through the provision of specialist hardware or software. Initial assessment varies in depth. On beginners courses, learners are asked to complete a simple questionnaire in which they record their existing ICT skills. Tutors then negotiate broad learning goals with the learners and record these in the individual learning plans, which are regularly reviewed. Support for learners at tutor level is generally good.

41. Resources for teaching and learning are generally satisfactory. Much of the computer hardware and software is sufficiently up to date and is being replaced as computers wear out. Laptop computers with printers are available to allow classes to take place in community venues that do not have dedicated computer suites. Furniture in most learning centres is adequate and where it is not, such as in centres using laptops, tutors ensure that learners take sufficient breaks. The quality of paper-based learning material varies, although centres are sharing much of the better material. Tutors are adequately qualified vocationally and most have, or are working towards, teaching qualifications. A good range of relevant continuing professional development opportunities is available for tutors. Some centres do not have sufficiently powerful computers for applications such as digital photography.

42. There is insufficient access to the internet in some centres. Only a few centres have high-speed internet connections and a few have no internet access at all.

43. Assessment of learners' work is satisfactory. Tutors provide clear supportive feedback. They set regular exercises to develop learners' ICT skills and these are marked and recorded carefully. Most learners are aware of their own progress and what they need to do to improve. However, although tutors record learners' progress in individual learning plans, these vary in their value. Some record only broad skills attainment while the better ones detail the specific skills which learners have developed.

Leadership and management

44. The previous inspection found that curriculum development was unco-ordinated, and the ICT strategy was not sufficiently developed. Leadership is now very effective. An ICT strategy and three e-learning guides are in place. Communications between EiC and the individual centres and tutors have improved. Relationships between senior managers and tutors are good and tutors take an active part, through focus groups, in suggesting improvements. EiC has good relationships with a number of organisations which are effective in helping it to widen participation and provide higher-level progression courses. Good-quality learning material is increasingly shared between centres and one centre is accepting responsibility for internal verification of some courses that lead to nationally recognised qualifications. EiC is seeking accreditation, wherever possible, for level 1 courses and is making good use of appropriate awarding bodies to support this. EiC has carried out some monitoring of recruitment by gender, age and ethnicity, and more men are now taking courses.

45. Tutors are observed annually and are given feedback to help them to improve their teaching. Good continual professional development opportunities are identified through observations or from the continual professional development handbook which is sent to all tutors. Tutors review their courses at the end of each lesson and these, together with the observation grades, are used to prepare the annual self-assessment. However, tutors do not make sufficient use of course reviews to provide critical judgements in the self-assessment or action plans for improvement.

Visual & performing arts & media

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	1268	3

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

Strengths

- high standard of learners’ work
- extensive and inclusive range of provision
- good coaching of individual learners

Weaknesses

- much weak lesson planning
- weak assessment

Achievement and standards

46. The previous inspection recognised good standards of craft work, and the standard of practical work in all disciplines is now high. Across all art and craft subject disciplines learners have good opportunities to exhibit work. Work produced by a group of adult learners with learning difficulties and disabilities was in an exhibition during the final reinspection week. Many learners are experienced practitioners and regularly exhibit. In some cases, work is of a saleable standard. ‘ECO’ card class learners produce intricate and innovative card designs and digitally record their work as evidence of progress. Beginners in ceramics classes use elementary techniques and simple designs to produce good standards of work. During the reinspection an attractive exhibition of work at County Hall represented work from different disciplines produced in the classes across all five geographical areas. Learners in quilting and lacemaking classes demonstrate particularly high standards of work and expertise that they have developed over many years.

Quality of education and training

47. The range of provision is good. The choice of subjects and classes offered has doubled since the previous inspection. EiC does much to widen participation and attract new learners by offering classes in disadvantaged areas. Learners see these classes as therapeutic and as a relief from daily stress. Where access is limited through restricted space or equipment, additional classes are arranged. However, virtually all classes offered are non-accredited. There are restricted opportunities for recognising achievement and progression in some classes while, in others, tutors have devised successful strategies for learners to progress to more complicated topics and skill

application.

48. Resources are now satisfactory, having been inadequate at the previous inspection. Accommodation is clean and appropriate for most activities and new equipment has been purchased to develop courses in sewing and digital photography. In some art classes, storage space can cause problems. Most venues are appropriately signposted, although a few are difficult to locate. Many tutors have subject or teaching qualifications and several have experience as practitioners. Some of the handouts in digital photography are of an excellent standard.

49. Tutors provide good support for individual learners. Learners speak positively about approachable tutors and appreciate the extra time that their tutors often spend in providing additional information or solving problems relating to specialist techniques. Many tutors recognise the importance of social interaction to learners and support this as a key priority in the adult learning environment. However, although the initial advice and guidance process is set out in the tutors' handbook, it is seldom completed effectively. Learners often first attend a class having heard about the class by word of mouth, and are not often given guidance about suitability or aptitude for a subject. EiC has made some progress to rectify the weakness of poor pre-course information and guidance found at the previous inspection, and this is no longer a key weakness. Flyers are produced giving brief information about the nature of the course and what equipment is required, but not all tutors and learners appear to be familiar with these. Some learners have left their class because they were unaware of the cost implications of materials.

50. Teaching is satisfactory overall. In the best classes, teaching is very well planned and structured with a wide range of teaching and learning activities. Learning is well paced and learners make good progress. In most classes, learners benefit from the individual coaching and often expert guidance they receive from their tutors. In one sewing class for Bangladeshi women, learners were able to make their own garments through the initiative and resourcefulness of their tutor. In a digital photography class, learners improved their own photographs from previous images through the good individual advice they received. Some tutors provide good-quality handouts that support and encourage individual learning that continues outside of the class. However, although most learners work on individually selected projects, many copy images from secondary sources instead of creating their own. In many classes tutors do not appreciate the value of structured planning and rarely share the objectives of the class with learners. Some lesson plans use general phrases such as 'continue from last week' as the basis for the class without any checking on prior knowledge and understanding. A very small minority of classes have no lesson plan. Learners work independently without guidance or tuition from the tutor.

51. Assessment is weak. Some tutors do not understand why non-accredited courses should be assessed and records, where they exist, consist of mainly tick lists and achievement dates. Initial assessment is informal and does not take account of learners' previous experience or aptitude. Many tutors do not provide sufficient evaluative feedback for learners and the feedback learners do receive is rarely recorded. Some classes provide insufficient progression opportunities. Learners often re-enrol for these

classes annually and tutors have little awareness or advice as to how learners might develop their skills.

Leadership and management

52. Curriculum planning was ineffective at the previous inspection, but has improved. The generic curriculum improvements for the whole of EiC have been equally successful in this area. The range of provision has doubled since the previous inspection. Classes are held in many communities not traditionally involved in learning. EiC has launched successful initiatives to establish forums at which tutors have begun to share good practice. Tutors are paid to attend meetings that are arranged regularly at weekends and at the beginning of each term. Most tutors know about these, but not all staff yet choose to attend. Local managers support tutors by ensuring that specialist resources are available at different venues during the week. Exhibitions of learners' work have been arranged across the county to celebrate learners' achievements. The arts are often used as the vehicle for raising awareness about different cultures through dance, music, dress and body decoration. Procedures for the observation of teaching and learning have been initiated but have not yet had an affect on all tutors, some of whom are reluctant to recognise fundamental practice. The self-assessment report is mainly accurate although over-generous in some parts. Although this is one of the largest areas of learning it has no subject specialist to lead it.