REINSPECTION REPORT

Essex LEA Reinspection

22 September 2005

ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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.*

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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DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Essex County Council is one of the largest local authority providers of adult and community learning in the country. Services are provided by Adult Community Learning, part of the council's recently formed community services directorate of Essex local authority. Adult Community Learning's priorities are to increase demand for learning from non-traditional learners, to develop learning skills in the workplace and to help meet local skills for life and level 2 targets. Adult Community Learning is funded by Essex Learning and Skills Council and by Essex County Council itself.

2. The management structure of Adult Community Learning is being reviewed. A new senior management group was established in August 2005. This is made up of two new directors, one for quality and curriculum and the other for planning and resources, and four area principals. Services at the adult community colleges are now managed by four area teams. The restructuring was designed to produce better strategic planning and greater consistency and coherence, while ensuring that local needs continued to be met.

3. Essex is a diverse county. It includes both affluent areas and some of the most deprived areas in the country. Although the unemployment rate is low at 1.9 per cent, people in some areas of the county have poor literacy and numeracy skills. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is 3.29 per cent, compared with 7.9 per cent nationally. However, this proportion varies greatly across the county and is higher in towns and districts nearer London.

4. In 2004-05 there were 47,904 learners and 74,076 enrolments on 6,703 courses, with 19,958 learners and 27,946 enrolments on accredited provision. Seventy-three per cent of the learners were women and 4 per cent were from minority ethnic groups.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

5. All the adult community colleges offer business and professional courses. These range from one day to 30 weeks. They run during the day, at twilight and in the evening, generally for two or three hours each week. Level 4 teacher/trainer courses are often run on Saturdays. Some lessons are held at purpose-built college sites and some at local schools. At the time of the final reinspection visit, about 250 learners were on 25 courses. These included 140 learners on 14 teacher/trainer courses. In 2004-05 overall, 1,884 learners attended 304 courses at 51 venues. About 60 per cent of courses are accredited and 70 per cent of the learners are on courses leading to qualifications. The largest type of provision in terms of hours taught is teacher/trainer courses, which lead to awards ranging from level 1 to level 4. In 2004-05, 696 learners attended accredited teacher/trainer courses and 618 learners attended accredited business administration courses, including word processing. One hundred and eighty-four learners attended

accredited accounts and bookkeeping courses from level 1 to level 3, including computerised accounts and manual bookkeeping. Two-thirds of learners are women and 19 per cent are over 60. There are 75 teachers, who are either permanent part-time teachers, or managers who teach as part of their role.

Information & communications technology

6. A wide range of information and communications technology (ICT) courses are available at all the adult community colleges. Courses range from one-session tasters to others lasting two to 34 weeks. They run during the day, at twilight and in the evenings, generally for two or three hours each week. A few courses are offered on Saturdays. Some courses are at purpose-built centres. Others are at community venues such as church halls, primary schools and specialist centres for learners with disabilities. At the final reinspection visit, 3,309 learners were attending 752 courses at 130 venues. In 2004-05, 4,650 learners enrolled on 648 courses. About 54 per cent of the courses are accredited and 56 per cent of the learners are on courses leading to qualifications. Courses include word processing, spreadsheets and databases, business presentations, e-mailing and surfing the internet. Most courses begin in September and end in July, although learners can usually join at any time. Sixty-two per cent of learners are women and 39 per cent are over 60. There are 120 teachers, mostly on permanent part-time contracts. Each college has a management team that plans the local curriculum. Staffing structures depend on the size of the college and the area it covers.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	7
Number of learners interviewed	87
Number of staff interviewed	33
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	9
Number of visits	3

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. At the previous inspection, business administration, management and professional, and ICT were unsatisfactory. All other areas of learning were satisfactory or good and leadership and management were good. At the end of the reinspection, all aspects of provision were satisfactory or better.

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at previous inspection

Sciences & mathematics		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Mathematics		
⁻ Adult and community learning	444	3

Land-based provision		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Horticulture and agriculture		
⁻ Adult and community learning	88	2
Floristry		
⁻ Adult and community learning	151	2

Business administration, management & professional		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration		
⁻ Adult and community learning	252	4
Teacher/trainer awards		
⁻ Adult and community learning	199	4

Information & communications technology		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT		
⁻ Adult and community learning	5969	4

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Hospitality and catering		
⁻ Adult and community learning	45	None
Leisure, sport and recreation		
⁻ Adult and community learning	7058	3

Hairdressing & beauty therapy		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Beauty therapy - Adult and community learning	1705	2

Health, social care & public services		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas - Other government-funded provision	112	3

Visual & performing arts & media		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Arts - Adult and community learning	1528	3
Crafts - Adult and community learning	6342	3

Humanities		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
History and genealogy - Adult and community learning	735	3
Sociology and psychology - Adult and community learning	412	3

English, languages & communications		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
English - Adult and community learning	143	3
Languages - Adult and community learning	3723	3

Foundation programmes		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Literacy		
⁻ Adult and community learning	1312	2
Numeracy		
⁻ Adult and community learning	525	2
ESOL		
⁻ Adult and community learning	549	2
Independent living and leisure skills		
⁻ Adult and community learning	2422	2

Family learning		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning		
⁻ Adult and community learning	1188	2

Grades awarded at reinspection

Business administration, management & professional		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration		
⁻ Adult and community learning	618	2
Accounting and economics		
⁻ Adult and community learning	184	2
Teacher/trainer awards		
⁻ Adult and community learning	696	2

Information & communications technology		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT		
⁻ Adult and community learning	4650	2

Language of the Adult and Community Learning Sector

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

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

Other terms used in Adult and Community Learning

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

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

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration, management & professional		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration		
⁻ Adult and community learning	618	2
Accounting and economics		
⁻ Adult and community learning	184	2
Teacher/trainer awards		
⁻ Adult and community learning	696	2

Business administration

Strengths

- good retention rates on many courses
- good achievement rates on many courses
- good teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on some courses at some centres

Accounting and economics

Strengths

- good retention rates on many courses
- good achievement rates on the level 3 programme
- good teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on some courses at some centres

Teacher/trainer awards

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- good attainment by learners
- very good teaching and learning
- good support and guidance for learners

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

8. Retention rates remain good and have improved since the previous inspection. In 2004-05, they averaged 95 per cent for accredited courses and 100 per cent for non-accredited courses. For all levels of teacher/trainer courses, retention rates have been good for the past three years. In accounting and bookkeeping, retention rates have steadily improved over the past three years and are well above 80 per cent at all levels. Retention rates are often good for business administration.

9. Achievement rates have greatly improved since the previous inspection, when they were a weakness. Pass rates are now high for teaching awards at all levels. At level 4, for example, the pass rate was 88 per cent in 2004-05, compared with 51 per cent in 2002-03. At level 2, the rate was 100 per cent. In business administration and in accounting and bookkeeping, pass rates have improved greatly. At level 3, they were good in 2004-05, at 80 per cent overall. At levels 1 and 2, they were 73 per cent and 71 per cent respectively, much better than in 2002-03, when they were about 50 per cent. At some centres, however, pass rates other than for teacher/trainer courses are poor.

10. Learners attain satisfactory standards overall in their lessons. On teacher/trainer awards, learners' attainment is good. They show a thorough understanding of their subjects in discussions and in responses to teachers' questions. Learners enjoy their studies, developing their confidence and becoming more effective in working with other learners. Attendance rates are good.

Quality of education and training

11. Teaching is now good. For teacher/trainer awards it is very good. At the previous inspection, teaching was judged unsatisfactory. At the reinspection, all lessons were at least satisfactory and 86 per cent were better than satisfactory. The best teaching is on the teacher/trainer courses. Teaching is well planned. Teachers pay attention to the needs of individual learners. They are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and get the best from their learners. For example, they encourage learners to draw on their own experience. Teachers make good use of questions to check learners' understanding and to reinforce learning. They make good use of a questionnaire on learners' preferred

teaching styles to plan teaching. They use good learning materials and continue to make good use of information learning technology.

12. Support and guidance for learners on teacher/trainer courses is now good. They receive detailed guidance before and during their courses. Learners' induction is well organised and delivered. Tutors pay attention to learners' strengths and weaknesses and keep detailed records of their initial assessment, preferred learning styles and progress. The extra support learners receive has continued to enable them to make progress and gain qualifications, as well as improving their confidence and self-esteem. Support and guidance are satisfactory for learners in business administration, accounting and bookkeeping.

13. The use of initial assessment results and individual learning plans to plan lessons is now at least satisfactory. For teacher/trainers, it is particularly prominent. Learners are encouraged to use the individual learning plans to plan their work and monitor their progress. In business administration and in accounting and bookkeeping, less use is made of individual learning plans. Learners' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed effectively. Extra support is particularly successful for learners taking teacher/trainer awards.

14. Much has been done to improve assessment since the previous inspection, when the assessment of teacher/trainers was poor. Assessment is now satisfactory and is continuing to improve. At the previous inspection, the feedback given to learners after assessments was inadequate. Assessment relied too much on learners' reflective statements, the range of evidence in portfolios was narrow, professional discussions were not adequately recorded and assessments were poorly planned. Managers have acted promptly to put right these problems. An extensive training programme for assessors at a local further education college is nearly complete. Assessors and learners are now much clearer about what they should do and how they should use assessment to guide learning.

Leadership and management

15. Managers provide good leadership and have made good progress in putting right the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The management of the curriculum is now at least satisfactory. A wide range of courses meet the needs of many learners.

16. A business and professional development group was set up in 2004 and has made good progress in developing a strategy for this area of learning. It also discusses quality improvement, course administration and recording, health and safety, staff development, equality and diversity, and curriculum planning. A wide range of working groups now consider the quality of specific courses and groups of courses. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

17. Internal verification and moderation are now satisfactory. At the previous inspection, arrangements for internal verification were inadequate on the national vocational qualification programme for teaching assistants. This problem has now been

put right. Staff have started to follow agreed procedures. Monthly meetings are held on internal verification and extensive standardisation takes place. Qualified assessors have started to observe learners on teacher/trainer courses in their workplaces. External verifiers' reports are now positive.

18. Quality improvement continues. Managers and staff have carried out the actions identified in a well-conceived action plan prepared after the previous inspection. Self-assessment is thorough and includes staff. Targets are set for retention and achievement on each course. The process of target-setting encourages a focus on quality, standards and the curriculum. A scheme of lesson observations is being introduced. Moderation has identified some inconsistency in the judgements made during observation and this is being dealt with. Tutors are now better supported. A subject coach for business is working successfully with managers and tutors to improve teaching and learning.

Information & communications technology

Information & communications technology		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT		
⁻ Adult and community learning	4650	2

Using IT

Strengths

- very good retention and achievement rates
- good attainment of practical skills
- very good teaching and learning
- good resources in many centres

Weaknesses

- incomplete assessment of learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills

Achievement and standards

19. Retention and achievement rates are very good and improving. At the previous inspection, the overall retention rate was 92 per cent for accredited courses and 98 per cent for non-accredited courses. In 2003-04, the retention rate was 95 per cent for accredited courses and 98 per cent for non-accredited courses. In 2004-05, the retention rate was 96 per cent for accredited courses and 99 per cent for non-accredited courses. The achievement rate improved from 77 per cent in 2002-03 to 80 per cent in 2003-04. In 2004-05 the rate improved again, to 84 per cent.

20. In 2004-05, the achievement rate was 88 per cent for a level 1 qualification and 73 per cent for an examination-based level 2 qualification. This was an improvement on 2003-04, when the rates had been 82 per cent for level 1 and 49 per cent for level 2.

21. Learners make good progress and produce work of a good standard. They develop good ICT skills, for example in word processing and using databases. They benefit from the opportunity to meet other learners. They often mention how this has improved their confidence. Many learners have used their new skills outside the classroom. Attendance rates are good. During the reinspection, the attendance rate was 92 per cent.

Quality of education and training

22. The teaching of ICT skills is now very good. Seventy-five per cent of the ICT lessons that were observed were graded good or better. This is a big improvement since the previous inspection. Lessons have clear aims and are well planned. Learners practise their skills by working through a wide variety of graded practical exercises. The tutors use a good range of teaching methods. Learners receive good individual coaching and helpful advice. Tutors develop good relationships with the learners and respond to their individual needs. Tutors keep detailed records of learners' progress. Specific provision is available for learners with visual impairments.

23. Learning resources remain good in many centres. This was a strength identified in the previous inspection. Most centres are welcoming. Some centres have good computer suites and interactive whiteboards. Learning aids for people with disabilities are good. These include large keypads and touch pads. Most centres are suitable for people using wheelchairs and have adapted toilets and automatic doors. Many centres have induction loops. A well-equipped mobile unit can be used in small villages. However, a few classrooms are cramped and have unsuitable chairs. A few do not have projectors or whiteboards and learners have nowhere to store their work.

24. The range of ICT courses meets the needs and interests of learners. Learners are able to progress from entry level to intermediate and advanced levels. Most learners have good opportunities to work towards recognised qualifications. The centres offer many suitable short courses. Centres seek learners' views about new courses.

25. Assessment is now satisfactory. This was a weakness in the previous inspection. Action has been taken to improve assessment. Individual learning plans are more detailed and clearly record learners' goals and progress. The proportion of accredited courses has increased to 54 per cent. The results of assessments are recorded and used to guide improvement. Clear guidelines for measuring achievement have been introduced. Learners have a clearer understanding of their achievements than at the previous inspection.

26. Learners receive satisfactory guidance and information before they start their courses. Guidance and information were a weakness at the previous inspection. Publicity materials describe the courses accurately. Marketing materials describe the content of the courses and say how much they cost. Managers are continuing to review pre-course guidance and publicity to ensure it is accurate. Some centres still use material inconsistently.

27. Learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills are not assessed fully. Help is given to learners who have difficulties with spelling and punctuation. A few centres do assess learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills fully and identify their difficulties. However, not enough is done to teach literacy through ICT training. There is not enough material for learners to develop their literacy, numeracy and language skills alongside

their ICT skills. Too few ICT tutors have been trained in assessing and developing learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills.

Leadership and management

28. Curriculum management has improved greatly since the previous inspection and leadership is good. Many aspects of the provision have improved since the previous inspection. Teaching is now effective and achievement rates and now good. At the previous inspection, little was done to manage ICT centrally. Now a professional development group, chaired by a principal has been set up. This is beginning to provide the necessary strategic leadership. However, there is no overall manager for this curriculum area. Staff are interviewed in detail each year about their professional development and individual training needs are met. Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively. However, not enough is done to check and develop learners' understanding of equality of opportunity.

29. The approach to quality assurance is thoughtful and well planned. There is now a schedule for observing teaching. The quality of teaching was a weakness at the previous inspection. Arrangements to share good practice among tutors are improving. Many staff were involved in planning improvements after the previous inspection.