INSPECTION REPORT

Milton Keynes LEA

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 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

Milton Keynes LEA

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Milton Keynes LEA (the LEA) contracts with the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the provision of accredited and non-accredited adult and community learning in the area. Provision is delivered directly by Milton Keynes council's (the council's) adult continuing education (ACE) service, working in close partnership with a wide range of local community organisations. ACE is managed within the council's learning and development directorate and is part of its learning and skills division, which also includes libraries.

2. ACE offers courses in 14 areas of learning at around 60 locations, but some have very few enrolments. The areas of learning covered by the remit of this inspection were information and communications technology (ICT), sport and leisure, visual and performing arts, English and languages, foundation programmes, and family learning. In 2003-04, there were 11,500 enrolments by around 6,600 learners on approximately 1,100 separate courses.

3. The learning and skills officer (ACE) has overall operational responsibility for the service. The learning and skills officer (strategy) has responsibility for strategic development. Both posts report to the learning and skills manager. Directing day-to-day activities there are eleven curriculum and functional co-ordinators, including curriculum development organisers, who co-ordinate areas of learning and manage tutors, and curriculum team leaders who are subject specialists. ACE employs 27 full-time permanent staff and 13 part-time permanent staff, together with 340 part-time tutors.

4. Milton Keynes and its environs has one of the fastest growing populations in the country. Between 1991 and 1998 its population grew by 14 per cent, compared with 2.7 per cent nationally and currently it is approximately 207,000. The minority ethnic population is 9 per cent of the total population and it is growing. Local businesses are predominantly in the service sector, including high-technology businesses and major bases of international companies. The area is one of low unemployment, significant inward investment and relatively high wages. However, overall low unemployment, at 1.7 per cent, masks the significant economic and social deprivation in some of the local authority's wards. There are significant skills shortages for developing businesses, within the context of educational participation rates for 16 and 17 year olds, that are well below national averages.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Information & communications technology

5. ICT programmes account for 23 per cent of ACE's provision over the past three years. During 2003-04 there were 1,661 learners enrolled on 90 courses. Since September 2004, 637 learners have enrolled on 42 courses, of whom 2 per cent declared a disability,

30 per cent were men and 36 per cent were from a minority ethnic group. Courses for complete beginners, through to level 3, are offered. Those above beginner level are accredited, including computer literacy and an examination-based qualification in information technology. Courses last from three hours to 62.5 hours. Lessons last two hours or learners book the time they want in flexible learning workshops, which run for blocks of three hours. Courses operate during the daytime Monday to Fridays, in evenings Monday to Thursday and on Saturday mornings. Courses mainly take place at ACE's own four centres, together with a small number in community venues, such as libraries and schools. About 46 per cent of provision is through flexible learning workshops in the main centres. The provision is directly managed by two of ACE's curriculum organisers and is taught by them and a further 15 part-time tutors.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

6. At the time of the inspection there were 258 learners enrolled on 17 evening courses and two daytime courses. During 2003-04 a total of 1,369 learners were enrolled on non-accredited courses and 195 on accredited courses. Most courses are non-accredited courses, with only two accredited courses. Courses are mostly offered at beginner and intermediate, or improver, levels. They are held within one of four adult and community centres and in numerous other community venues, such as schools, community centres and church halls. Courses include badminton, yoga, pilates, tai chi and swimming. There are a small number of cookery classes, including Italian, Japanese and Indian cookery. Most courses take place on weekday evenings. At the time of the inspection, 8.46 per cent of learners were from minority ethnic groups. Just over 78 per cent were female learners, with 0.78 per cent of learners having a disability. Nearly 27 per cent of learners were aged 55 or over at the time of the inspection. The provision is directly managed by one curriculum development organiser and there are 25 part-time tutors.

Visual & performing arts & media

7. The area of learning accounts for over 30 per cent of ACE's provision. At the time of the inspection there were 1,280 learners in the visual and performing arts. The provision is offered in 25 venues across Milton Keynes, including community centres, church halls, galleries, schools, and specialist arts and crafts facilities. In 2003-04, 283 courses were offered in visual arts, of which 31 were accredited. In the performing arts, 109 courses were offered, of which six were accredited. Accredited courses comprise 15 per cent of the provision, with around 200 learners on Open College Network and externally accredited crafts courses. Courses include drawing and painting, ceramics, jewellery, photography, music, dance and film studies. Approximately 75 per cent of the current learners are women, about 30 per cent are aged over 55 and almost 6 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. A curriculum development co-ordinator manages 60 part-time tutors.

English, languages & communications

8. ACE provides courses at 10 learning centres in English, British Sign Language (BSL), lip-reading and foreign languages. At the time of inspection there were 1,052 learners, nearly all of which are for foreign languages. There are courses in 12 European languages and Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi and Urdu. At the time of inspection there were no courses in Finnish, Romanian, Greek, Hindi or Urdu, although these have run in the last year. Courses in English include general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) English, AS level English literature and English as a foreign language at various levels. All foreign languages offered are available at level 1. BSL is available at levels 1 and 2. Most courses lead to a qualification. At the time of the inspection there were courses leading to GCSEs in German, Russian and Spanish. Russian, Chinese, Spanish, French and Italian are available at AS level and Russian at AS level 2. Most of these classes take place during the evening. Almost all of the learners are adults. Thirty-nine per cent are men and 6 per cent are over the age of 65. There is one full-time curriculum organiser and 36 part-time tutors.

Foundation programmes

9. There are 1,011 learners. In provision for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), 653 learners are enrolled on 62 courses. A further 358 are enrolled on 28 literacy and 11 numeracy courses. In addition, 77 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enrolled on literacy and numeracy courses. Courses take place at the four main centres and in venues throughout Milton Keynes, including schools, places of worship, libraries and community centres. Most of the courses run for 10 weeks and are offered at a range of levels, from pre-entry to level 2. Usually, learners attend one or two lessons each week and can join courses at any time. ACE is an approved centre for externally accredited examination boards and administers national literacy and numeracy tests at levels 1 and 2.

10. The inclusive learning co-ordinator has overall responsibility for literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses. There is a full-time curriculum development organiser for ESOL and a fractional 0.8 curriculum development organiser for literacy and numeracy. They manage 23 part-time ESOL tutors and the 17 literacy and numeracy tutors, and carry out lesson observations and initial and diagnostic assessment with new learners. Fourteen volunteers support learners with literacy and numeracy and a further six support ESOL learners. ACE employs 11 learning support assistants that work across all areas of the curriculum supporting those with learning difficulties.

Family learning

11. There are 673 adult learners enrolled on family learning programmes. Of these, 411 learners attend family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) programmes, 262 attend wider family learning provision and 12.5 per cent of them are men. ACE has run 27 family learning courses and 21 workshops in the current academic year. FLLN programmes include workshops, short and intensive literacy and numeracy programmes, together with 'keeping up with the children' courses. Provision is mainly targeted at parents of children at key stages 1 and 2 and the foundation stage. Wider family learning includes programmes to encourage parent and child interaction, craft and activity courses, programmes offering support with aspects of children's learning and behaviour, and those targeted at specific groups, such as fathers. Venues include primary and secondary schools, churches, a farm, community and family centres and youth clubs. Family learning is managed by the widening participation manager, assisted by FLLN and wider family learning organisers. There are 10 FLLN and 28 wider family learning tutors.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	11
Number of inspection days	55
Number of learners interviewed	286
Number of staff interviewed	133
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	51
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	17

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

12. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. ACE's leadership and management are satisfactory, and its approach to equality of opportunity is good. Arrangements for quality assurance are unsatisfactory. Provision is good in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel and satisfactory in ICT, visual and performing arts, English, languages and communications and family learning. Provision in foundation programmes is very weak.

GRADES

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

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	4

Information & communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT - Adult and community learning	637	3

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Leisure, sport and recreation - Adult and community learning	258	2

Visual & performing arts & media		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Arts - Adult and community learning	900	3
Crafts - Adult and community learning	200	3
Other contributory areas - Adult and community learning	180	3

English, languages & communications		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
English - Adult and community learning	152	None
Languages - Adult and community learning	900	3

Foundation programmes		5
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
ESOL - Adult and community learning	653	5
Literacy and numeracy - Adult and community learning	435	4

Family learning	3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
- Adult and community learning	673	3

KEY FINDINGS
Achievement and standards

13. **Learners' attainment is often good.** In most of the areas inspected, learners are successful in achieving their individual learning goals, although in provision for literacy and numeracy and ESOL, learners do not achieve their potential to improve. Literacy and numeracy learners make good personal and social gains. Learners' success in tests and examinations is often good. For example, in English and foreign languages, and in sport and leisure, pass rates and overall achievements are high. Learners' retention is good in some areas, such as ICT, and sport and leisure, but is at least satisfactory in all areas of learning apart from English and languages and foundation studies.

14. **Learners' standards of work are often good and many make good progress.** Visual and performing arts learners achieve high standards of work on accredited courses and make good progress. In English and languages, there is good work by learners in many lessons, and in sport and leisure they make significant gains in skills and fitness and move on to more advanced programmes. Learners' work is satisfactory in ICT. In foundation programmes, however, learners make slow progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and language skills.

Quality of education and training

15. Overall, much of the teaching is satisfactory or better. Forty-seven per cent of all lessons observed were better than satisfactory and 15 per cent were less than satisfactory. **The best teaching is in sport and leisure, English and languages, and in the visual and performing arts,** where lessons are often planned well and tutors stimulate learners with a good range and variety of teaching methods. Learners are motivated by the tutors' enthusiasm and are encouraged by the good individual support they receive. In the visual and performing arts, tutors make good use of practical demonstrations to encourage learning, and in wider family learning there are particularly innovative projects and activities which are fully exploited by tutors.

16. Resources to support teaching and learning are largely satisfactory. **Learning resources are good in ICT,** where welcoming, safe and comfortable environments are resourced well and where computers are maintained to good standards. Visual and performing arts learners have professional quality resources at the Great Linford centre, where many of their programmes are based. Resources in sport and leisure are

satisfactory, although the risk assessment of activities, rather than of facilities, is inadequate. **Resources to support the learning of foundation learners are poor.** Teaching materials are often of poor quality, there is little use of information learning technology (ILT) and some accommodation is cramped and unwelcoming.

17. In all areas inspected, the initial assessment of learners' needs, the setting of targets for improvement and the monitoring of progress are no better than satisfactory. In most areas, the monitoring of learners' progress is inadequate and assessment is inconsistently thorough in sports and leisure. Most notably, there is inadequate target-setting and monitoring of learning in literacy and numeracy, and in ESOL there is poor assessment.

18. The range of courses is satisfactory overall, but in ICT the range is narrow and in the performing arts, the range is too limited. Language provision is extensive.

19. **There is a significant amount of unsatisfactory and poor teaching in foundation studies, especially in provision for ESOL.** Tutors use a narrow range of teaching and learning methods and fail to take learners' individual learning needs sufficiently into account. In ESOL, there is too much reliance on written materials. In ICT, the planning of learning in flexible workshop activities is insufficient.

Leadership and management

20. **ACE successfully promotes adult learning within its local communities.** Its strategic priorities lead to detailed and focused action plans, which it pursues vigorously in partnership with many other local bodies and agencies.

21. **The organisation's management is open and consultative.** The outcomes of weekly management meetings are minuted and resulting actions are monitored. Although many staff feel well supported by their managers, they have an inconsistent understanding of ACE's procedures and policies.

22. **ACE has strong partnerships to develop and use resources effectively.** Strategic partnerships contribute to lifelong learning and the development of capacity to respond to need. ACE shares staff with other providers and closely co-ordinates programmes to best meet demand and provide good progression routes.

23. **Effective management, including the development of new structures, has improved learners' recruitment, retention and achievement over the last two years.** Procedures for the recording the absence and withdrawal of learners, and follow-up actions, have been tightened. For the previous two years the organisation did not meet its LSC targets and was in a poor financial position. This year it achieved its targets. Learners' data is now accurate.

24. **Senior managers attach high importance to equality and diversity, which are central to ACE's plans, aims and actions.** ACE provides expert stimulus and advice for the development of the council's wider strategies for education, training and social and economic development.

25. **ACE's response to educational and social inclusion is good.** It has a clear view of the context in which it works and seeks to meet the needs of many different groups.

26. Learners receive satisfactory information about ACE's approach to equality and diversity, and classes are organised in a way that promotes equality and diversity. ACE meets its obligations under race equality and disability legislation.

27. **Aspects of foundation programmes are poorly managed, especially in ESOL.** ACE recognises its weaknesses in this area, especially the impact of much unsatisfactory teaching on learners, but progress in making significant improvements has been slow.

28. **The analysis and use of learners' data to help determine priorities and to set targets in key areas of equality and diversity is insufficient.**

29. **Quality assurance is unsatisfactory.** ACE has worked hard to improve its quality assurance, and there is now a clear management structure to deal with this. However, there is insufficient attention paid to the quality of teaching and learning and the use of data to monitor performance is inadequate. Self-assessment is improving.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- strong partnerships to develop and use resources effectively
- effective action to improve recruitment, retention and achievement
- good educational and social inclusion

Weaknesses

- much unsatisfactory teaching on foundation programmes
- unsatisfactory quality assurance
- inadequate use of data to monitor performance

Information & communications technology

Using IT

Strengths

- good retention rate
- good physical resources
- good initial advice and guidance

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning and monitoring of learning in flexible workshops
- narrow range of courses

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Leisure, sport and recreation

Strengths

- good achievement and retention rates
- good progression by learners
- good teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- poor accommodation and resources in some centres
- inadequate risk assessments of activities
- inconsistently thorough assessment

Visual & performing arts & media

Arts

Strengths

- high standards of learners' work on accredited courses
- good progression by learners
- effective practical demonstrations by tutors
- professional quality resources at Great Linford

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of drawing to support design work
- inconsistent quality of lesson planning
- insufficiently thorough quality assurance

Crafts

Strengths

- high standards of learners' work on accredited courses
- good progression by learners
- effective practical demonstrations by tutors
- professional quality resources at Great Linford

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of drawing to support design work
- inconsistent quality of lesson planning
- insufficiently thorough quality assurance

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- high standards of learners' work on accredited courses
- good progression by learners
- effective practical demonstrations by tutors
- professional quality resources at Great Linford

Weaknesses

- inconsistent quality of lesson planning
- insufficient range of performing arts courses
- insufficiently thorough quality assurance

English, languages & communications

English

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses
- good work by learners in many lessons
- much well-planned and stimulating teaching.

Weaknesses

- low retention on many courses
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress.
- ineffective management of some issues

Languages

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses.
- good work by learners in many lessons.
- much well-planned and stimulating teaching.
- wide range of learning opportunities in modern foreign languages.

Weaknesses

- low retention on many courses.
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress
- ineffective management of some issues

Foundation programmes

ESOL

Strengths

- successful recruitment to a wide range of courses

Weaknesses

- slow progress in developing language skills by many learners
- unsatisfactory teaching
- inadequate resources
- poor assessment
- poor management of many aspects of programmes

Literacy and numeracy

Strengths

- good personal and social gains for many learners
- good individual support for learners in most lessons

Weaknesses

- slow progress in developing significant improvements in literacy and numeracy skills
- narrow range of teaching and learning strategies
- poor resources on some courses
- inadequate target-setting and monitoring of learning
- poor management of some aspects of programmes

Family learning

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence and potential
- particularly innovative projects and learning activities in wider family learning
- very effective and sustained partnerships

Weaknesses

- poor monitoring of achievement on FLLN courses
- insufficient clarity in the aims of FLLN courses
- inadequate target-setting to develop learners' skills

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT MILTON KEYNES LEA:

- the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends
- the friendly, patient and helpful tutors
- the courses, which provide older people with a new lease of life
- the opportunity to develop confidence after a long break from study
- the chance to take examinations
- the accessible local courses
- the 'adult' atmosphere

WHAT LEARNERS THINK MILTON KEYNES LEA COULD IMPROVE:

- some cold and unwelcoming accommodation, especially in schools
- the number of computers
- the opportunity to take longer courses
- the availability of car parking at some centres

KEY CHALLENGES FOR MILTON KEYNES LEA:

- improve quality assurance
- use data more effectively
- improve the quality of foundation programmes
- develop target-setting and monitoring in learning

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.

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT   Grade 3

Strengths
- strong partnerships to develop and use resources effectively
- effective action to improve recruitment, retention and achievement
- good educational and social inclusion

Weaknesses
- inadequate use of data to monitor performance
- unsatisfactory quality assurance
- inadequate use of data to monitor performance

30. ACE is assertive in raising the profile of adult learning. Strategic priorities are set by the council. Detailed and focused action plans are developed from these and from ACE's business planning and self-assessment process. A council cabinet member is closely involved in management decisions and consults fortnightly with the learning and skills manager via the head of community and economic development. Management is open and consultative. The outcomes of weekly management meetings are minuted and ACE monitors the resulting actions. Termly team meetings for subject tutors are purposeful and focus on development, but not all staff attend, although they are paid if they do. Although many staff feel well supported by their managers, they have an inconsistent understanding of ACE's procedures and policies. This is identified as a weakness in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report.

31. ACE has strong partnerships to develop and use resources effectively. Strategic partnerships such as the Milton Keynes Economy and Learning Partnership contribute to lifelong learning and the development of capacity to respond to need. ACE shares staff with other providers and closely co-ordinates programmes to best meet demand and provide good progression routes. A local arts centre offers professional talent and excellent facilities. Voluntary sector bodies and charities share premises with ACE and gain basic skills support. In family learning, ACE's partnerships with schools provide support to finance enriching experiences for learners, and help develop teaching expertise. ACE's partners appreciate its commitment and loyalty.

32. Effective management, including the development of new structures, has improved learners' recruitment, retention and achievement over the last two years. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Procedures for recording the absence and withdrawal of learners, and follow-up actions, have been tightened. Better initial guidance ensures that learners start on the right course. Curriculum managers have received training about the importance and meaning of retention and achievement. ACE has developed ways to record goals for non-accredited learning. There are now more

accreditation opportunities for learners. For the previous two years the organisation did not meet its LSC targets and was consequently in a poor financial position. This year it achieved its targets. Learners' data is now accurate and managers have much more information readily available to them to help them manage.

33. New accommodation is expanding choice for learners, with more specialist accommodation and more opportunity for daytime classes. Refurbished and improved facilities have more space. More isolated venues are well supported. A manager visits all sites to perform health and safety checks and ensure that equipment is safe and suitable. Swift action in collaboration with site caretakers maintains good standards. A 24-hour maintenance contract for information technology (IT) ensures that computers are well maintained and faults are fixed quickly. Some aspects of resources are unwelcoming or unsuitable. For example, there are some poorly signposted premises.

34. Aspects of foundation programmes are poorly managed, especially in ESOL. ACE recognises its weaknesses, especially the impact of much unsatisfactory teaching on learners, but progress in making significant improvements has been slow. Self-critical senior managers intend to continue with their plans to improve the recruitment and retention of staff, for investment in ILT and for stringent targets to significantly increase the proportion of learners achieving a recognised national qualification.

Equality of opportunity   Contributory grade 2

35. Senior managers attach high importance to equality and diversity, which are central to ACE's plans, aims and actions. ACE provides expert stimulus and advice for the development of the council's wider strategies for education, training and social and economic development. The equalities group, with a membership from across ACE, identifies key aspects for development and sets realistic targets for improvement in many of the day-to-day aspects impacting on learners. ACE encourages the participation of learners through the learners' forum. Learners show a genuine understanding of, and appreciation for, the values of mutual respect and equality of opportunity promoted by ACE.

36. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that ACE's response to educational and social inclusion is good. It has a clear view of the wider context in which it works and what education and training is needed. Co-ordinators for widening participation and inclusive learning lead the significant contribution to the strategy to widen the participation of under-represented groups in learning. ACE has strong partnership networks across the community, with colleges, the voluntary sector and other agencies. The joint work with the local further education college is unusually positive. Closer working links are developing with employers.

37. ACE attends the needs of many different groups, including people from minority ethnic groups, adults with learning difficulties, learners whose first language is not English, learners with low levels of literacy and/or numeracy, and for groups requiring specific provision because of age or gender. With the college, ACE is mapping opportunities for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The learning initiative for minority

ethnic communities tackles the needs of minority ethnic groups. In the current year, 180 learners have attended programmes specifically designed in response to their requests. For example, a food hygiene certificate for Muslim women has recently been delivered with a Bengali interpreter. Learners are beginning to progress to more substantial programmes. Significant widening of participation is also achieved through the family learning programmes.

38. ACE effectively uses the council's comprehensive and easily understood equality of opportunity policies and procedures. ACE has its own up-to-date policy and guidelines document. There is an exemplary disability statement published jointly with the local further education college. ACE meets its obligations under race equality and disability legislation. Preparations for the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 were particularly thorough. Staff development for this and for diversity is extensive. Training involves learners who work with tutors to educate them about their needs. Learners receive satisfactory information about ACE's stance on equality and diversity. Summary information is contained in an introductory leaflet, although learners do not have a ready recollection of being introduced to these matters at the beginning of their programmes. The learners' complaints procedure is described in the welcome leaflet. Arrangements are clear and complaints are dealt with effectively.

39. Classes promote equality and diversity effectively. For example, a basic cookery learner with learning difficulties and a hearing impairment is supported by a learning assistant. In another case, a music keyboard learner, who has difficulty in reading, is provided with IT support. In collaboration with a local charity, a course in non-violent communication is run for disaffected young men. There is also the sensitive recognition of diversity in the staffing of lessons, as in ethnic cookery where teachers are usually from the country of the cuisine. In a few instances, tutors do not integrate aspects of equality and diversity into their teaching.

40. As the self-assessment report identifies, there is insufficient analysis and use of learners' data to help determine priorities and to set meaningful targets in key areas of equality and diversity. Data is available and detailed summaries of learners' numbers and achievements and retention, by key categories, are produced annually and more frequently for submissions to the LSC.

Quality assurance   Contributory grade 4

41. ACE has worked hard to improve quality assurance. A quality improvement and staff development co-ordinator was appointed last September, following interim management re-structuring. Self-assessment has improved. Previous self-assessment reports were insufficiently evaluative and plans were not thorough or effective enough. The organisation's most recent self-assessment report is much more focused, and identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses seen by inspectors.

42. The monthly quality assurance group meeting, comprising senior and middle managers, monitors the quality of work and the implementation of the self-assessment development plan. They have started to promote the sharing of good practice, but it

does not sufficiently consider teaching, learning and attainment, and there is little discussion of performance data or target-setting. The ACE advisory group, comprising partners and funding representatives, gives guidance on quality assurance and continuous improvement. New tutors are mentored and developed effectively. ACE provides teaching courses to help them to qualify speedily. Seventy-two per cent of all teaching-related staff have a teaching qualification. Tutors' feedback, through completing questionnaires, is analysed and used to plan staff development. Learners also complete three questionnaires during their courses, but their views are not analysed systematically or acted upon.

43. The quality assurance framework focuses insufficiently on teaching and learning. This weakness is not recognised in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report. The outcomes of annual appraisals for permanent staff are used to set development targets. Tutors, appointed termly, are observed in their teaching annually as part of their appraisal. However, while some tutors receive valuable and developmental feedback, too many observations are insufficiently thorough and objective. Although some curriculum co-ordinators use the outcomes of observation to design effective workshops to improve teaching, no common themes for staff development are developed. Planning for learning is unsystematic. Lesson plans, records of achievement and schemes of work are used inconsistently. Objectives and recorded outcomes are often too vague or insufficiently considered. Initial assessment is usually carried out, but not sufficiently used to plan learning. Individual learning plans are not specific to each learner. There is too much unsatisfactory teaching in foundation programmes.

44. The use of data to monitor performance is inadequate. This was identified as a weakness in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report. There has been much progress in cleansing learners' data and records are now accurate. Reports are generated monthly for curriculum co-ordinators and managers. However, this progress has relied heavily on external consultants, who generate the data reports. Staff have had some training, but still do not understand how to use the data to monitor performance and plan improvement. Responsibilities and procedures for monitoring and acting on information are not clear.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Information & communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT - Adult and community learning	637	3

Using IT

Strengths

- good retention rate
- good physical resources
- good initial advice and guidance

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning and monitoring of learning in flexible workshops
- narrow range of courses

Achievement and standards

45. The retention rate of learners is good. Rates for both accredited and non-accredited courses are around 90 per cent for each of the last three years. Based on single units of achievement, achievements are satisfactory at about 80 per cent. There is a wide variation in the time taken for learners to achieve a pass, consistent with the flexible approach to much learning. However, the proportion of learners taking longer than expected is matched by a similar proportion achieving in a shorter time than expected.

46. The standard of work in lessons is at a level appropriate to the learners and the courses they are on. The most basic courses teach fundamentals of the computer and the internet, before going on to teach about application software, such as word processors, spreadsheets and databases. As learners progress, they learn to integrate office software applications, while a few learn about webpage design and digital photography. Attendance at lessons is satisfactory.

Quality of education and training

47. Inspectors agreed with the organisation's most recent self-assessment report that the physical resources provided for learners are good. The computers are modern and the software they use is mostly the latest version. The wider computer systems, servers and the internet are fast and reliable. A good maintenance contract is effective in ensuring that learners have access to fully working computers. Many classrooms have an

interactive whiteboard which tutors are beginning to use. Portable data projectors are available where one is not built into the classroom. All classrooms are provided with specialist computer desks, giving learners sufficient room for the booklet or exercise sheet from which they are working. Appropriate computer chairs are provided at all venues. A wide range of adaptive technology for learners with disabilities is readily available. As well as large keyboards and mice, tracker balls and adjustable tables, ACE has access to image-enlarging software for learners with a visual impairment. Tutors are mostly appropriately qualified in both ICT and teaching. New tutors are offered the chance to work towards an initial teaching qualification when they are first employed.

48. The advice and guidance learners receive when first making enquiries and arriving at a flexible learning workshop are good. They have initial contact with an ICT tutor, who is able to assess their needs thoroughly and describe the programmes in detail. Learners join courses which are appropriate to their needs. Tutors are aware of sources of help for learners with support needs and are able to meet such needs readily. Tutors are aware of the access fund but there has been no significant use of it. Learners are not consistently aware of their progression routes.

49. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Flexible learning workshops allow learners to attend at times convenient to them where they proceed through the learning material independently. In the better sessions, learners are aware of their goals for both short and longer terms. Tutors intervene to ensure that learners do not spend too long on exercises during which they are performing a task incorrectly. Tutors are well prepared and move learners to appropriate places in their learning quickly as they arrive at sessions. Questions are well used by both tutors and learners to check and increase learning. Learners help one another and are confident enough to have their mistakes used as examples for the whole group to learn from.

50. In the poorer sessions, tutors wait until learners ask for help before any intervention. In some cases, they are too quick to take over control of the learner's computer, correcting the problem but not giving learners the opportunity to learn for themselves. There is an over-emphasis on awarding bodies' procedural requirements and too little attention to the more broad development of ICT skills. These weaknesses were not noted in the self-assessment report. In all sessions, working relationships between tutors and learners are effective in promoting learning.

51. The planning and monitoring of learning in flexible workshops are insufficient. Although the initial assessment of learners' needs is well done, recording is not carried out consistently. Tutors advising learners about the later direction of their programme cannot rely on the availability of a full record of initial advice. On programmes, learners' work is marked thoroughly. Their completion of the exercise is recorded together with a note of any errors they have made. However, no record is kept of the ICT skills and competences learners develop or find difficult. There is insufficient individual planning of learning to take account of difficulties learners have with particular ICT skills. The assessment of learners' fully meets awarding body requirements.

52. The range of courses offered, especially through flexible learning workshops, is

narrow, with only one progression route available for learners. The range of modules offered from the computer literacy qualification, which is the mainstay of the workshops, is smaller than that offered by the accrediting body. There is also little available for learners who wish to study a wider range of subject areas at a lower level.

Leadership and management

53. Formal and minuted team meetings are held twice yearly, but an effective informal network enables communications between flexible learning tutors and managers. Targets for recruitment and achievement are set and monitored for the area of learning overall, but are not set within the area. Data is available and used to monitor overall effectiveness of the flexible learning workshops, but are not routinely analysed sufficiently.

54. The quality of the learning materials used in the flexible learning workshops is assured by being centrally provided. All four flexible centres are equipped and laid out largely in the same way to support tutors and to help them if they have not worked at a particular centre before. Marking guides are provided for all standard exercises and examinations to help consistency of marking. Schemes of work and session plans of new tutors are checked by managers. Observations of teaching and learning are carried out regularly by staff trained in ICT. Observations are detailed, using a comprehensive reporting form. The results are discussed with the tutor, but some action plans are insufficiently precise and most do not have timescales for implementation. The self-assessment process is improving. The latest report is considerably more analytical and judgmental than earlier reports. Inspectors agreed with most of its judgements. However, there is insufficient involvement of staff.

55. Recruitment of learners from minority ethnic groups is very successful. Thirty-six per cent of learners recruited since September 2004 are from such groups. Learners with a disability are well supported. All venues are fully accessible and adaptive technology is readily available where it is needed. Some learners bring their own support workers, who are welcomed into the group. A signer is employed to enable profoundly deaf learners to be able to participate in a specially arranged digital photography class. However, more broadly, there is no analysis of data to evaluate learners' success by factors such as gender, ethnicity or age.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Leisure, sport and recreation - Adult and community learning	258	2

Leisure, sport and recreation

Strengths

- good achievement and retention rates
- good progression by learners
- good teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- poor accommodation and resources in some centres
- inadequate risk assessments of activities
- inconsistently thorough assessment

Achievement and standards

56. Learners' achievement and retention rates are good. This strength is identified in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report. Overall achievement is assessed using a combination of course completion data and the achievement of learning goals, set by tutors and/or learners. In 2003-04, the achievement rate for non-accredited sports courses was 80 per cent and for cookery courses was 82 per cent. Retention is good. The retention rate for non-accredited sports courses in 2003-04 was 84 per cent and for cookery courses was 90 per cent. In the lessons observed, retention was satisfactory overall. At 78 per cent, attendance during the inspection was satisfactory.

57. Learners reach good standards in their lessons and make good progress. They develop good technical vocabulary for the different activities. For example, in yoga they understand the 'heart chakra' in relation to wellbeing. Significant progress is made with mobility and the development of motor skills in sport and leisure lessons. For example, in a badminton class, learners made good progress with the fast drop shot and, in yoga, learners showed good development of co-ordination of demanding poses. A number of learners report that they benefit greatly both physically and mentally from the courses they follow. They report an increase in personal fitness, using techniques to develop a healthier lifestyle and to manage stress. One tai chi learner reported that she had 'grown three inches' personally and has had the courage to quit an unfulfilling job due to her tai chi experiences. Many learners report a significant development of their own goals, such as increased flexibility in yoga, being able to make Indian breads, and in Japanese cookery, working confidently with new ingredients.

58. Many learners move on from one course to another at a more demanding level. For example, 24 out of 34 learners following improvers' Indian cookery in the spring term of 2005 had been on the beginners' course.

Quality of education and training

59. Teaching and learning are good. Tutors plan their lessons well, thinking carefully about what their learners want to achieve. In a yoga class learners had recorded that their diverse needs had been met, for example to help with fertility treatment or to cope with cancer treatment. In most teaching, learners are suitably challenged by the use of different levels of learning activities. For example, in a yoga lesson, a range of different poses, different levels of difficulty, allowed all learners to reach their potential and attain well. Tutors use questions well to determine learners' understanding and the extent of their progress.

60. Learners have a high regard for the support and guidance that they receive. Initial guidance for learners is good, with clear and unambiguous information about the courses on offer, with very well-constructed information sheets. These provide details about the level and content of each course, helping learners to choose the right one. Tutors provide good personal support. They know the learners well and this helps to motivate and retain them. Health screening is appropriately implemented and places responsibility on learners to consult their general practitioner if they have health concerns.

61. The small amount of weaker teaching, which is not identified in the self-assessment report, is characterised by too much tutor-centred work with insufficient attention to learners' individual progress. There is little feedback to individual learners and tutors take little account of their different starting points.

62. Aspects of accommodation and resources are poor in some centres. For example, a much-used school swimming pool has inadequate heating. This has been reported to the school but the problem remains. Some changing rooms are cleaned inadequately and learners have complained, but without effect. In one cookery lesson, the learners or the tutor supply most of the cookery equipment and the tutor does not have enough storage space for her equipment. Teaching qualifications are appropriate, with many tutors holding appropriate governing body awards. Many tutors are well qualified and have a considerable amount of experience in teaching adults.

63. While there are appropriate assessments of risks related to venues, the risk assessment of activities is inadequate. Tutors often make their own informal assessments but these are mostly inadequate. In yoga lessons, contra-indicative exercises are identified and the tutors plan postures to ensure safe practice, but this is not carried out in all activities and there is no evaluation of the procedures. In one observed cookery lesson there was no formal risk assessment. Risk assessment for venues has action points documented and followed up, for example with the testing of electrical equipment.

64. Learners' assessment and monitoring of their progress is inconsistently thorough. Initial assessments of learners' needs are often recorded, but there is little evidence that these are used to inform teaching. While most tutors maintain their own records of learners' progress, there is considerable resistance to the completion of standardised ACE records and progress sheets. The completion of ongoing assessments of learners' progress by tutors is inconsistent, with some tutors using different grading scales and some leaving assessment records incomplete. Assessment outcomes are not used routinely to plan an effective scheme of work or modify teaching in the light of progress.

65. While the range of community-based courses is good, with good opportunities to progress to more advanced courses, the provision of daytime courses is insufficient. Only two were running at the time of the inspection. Most courses take place on weekday evenings. There are very few learners on some courses, with falling enrolments in some areas. The participation by learners with disabilities is low.

Leadership and management

66. A curriculum co-ordinator provides clear direction, to implement new policies to ensure a more effective service. Learners' achievements and retention and the quality of teaching and learning continue to improve. However, poor communication between part-time tutors limits opportunities to share good practice. There have been attempts to increase the number of tutors' meetings, by paying them for attendance, but with a disappointing response.

67. Quality assurance is satisfactory. The self-assessment process has developed well. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the organisation's most recent self-assessment. Appropriate action plans have been formulated based on self-assessment. Observations of teaching and learning take place regularly, with the emphasis on observing new tutors. However, the outcomes of observation are insufficiently linked to the professional development of tutors. Curriculum specialists do not carry out all of the observations and judgements are often too generic to help raise standards in teaching and learning or to deal with specific issues. The views of learners are effectively canvassed, recorded and issues identified. Learners' feedback shows very high levels of satisfaction.

68. The importance of equality and diversity is recognised. For example, the need to attract more learners with disabilities to cookery classes has initiated a new project to work jointly with a voluntary organisation to make an appropriate venue available. In lessons, learners from minority ethnic groups were well represented. In cookery, the tutors' origin often reflects the ethnicity of the cookery. In Japanese cookery, this had resulted in the promotion of the culture as well as cooking skills, with two learners consequently joining a Japanese language class. However, the formal targeting of groups of people to increase participation is inadequate. For example, there is a significant imbalance of enrolments between male and female learners, and this is yet to be fully recognised or dealt with. Opportunities for access to buildings for learners using wheelchairs are very mixed.

Visual & performing arts & media

Visual & performing arts & media		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Arts		
⁻ Adult and community learning	900	3
Crafts		
⁻ Adult and community learning	200	3
Other contributory areas		
⁻ Adult and community learning	180	3

Arts

Strengths

- high standards of learners' work on accredited courses
- good progression by learners
- effective practical demonstrations by tutors
- professional quality resources at Great Linford

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of drawing to support design work
- inconsistent quality of lesson planning
- insufficiently thorough quality assurance

Crafts

Strengths

- high standards of learners' work on accredited courses
- good progression by learners
- effective practical demonstrations by tutors
- professional quality resources at Great Linford

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of drawing to support design work
- inconsistent quality of lesson planning
- insufficiently thorough quality assurance

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- high standards of learners' work on accredited courses
- good progression by learners
- effective practical demonstrations by tutors
- professional quality resources at Great Linford

Weaknesses

- inconsistent quality of lesson planning
- insufficient range of performing arts courses
- insufficiently thorough quality assurance

Achievement and standards

69. Learners' retention is generally good, with 86 per cent of all learners completing their courses in 2003-04. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is good achievement on accredited courses, with all learners who submitted work for an externally accredited course in jewellery and embroidery passing at level 1 and level 2. Standards of work are particularly high on accredited courses in dressmaking, embroidery, jewellery and silversmithing. Achievement is also good on acrylics, dance, interior design, music, watercolour painting and calligraphy courses. Many learners speak of the confidence they have gained and of the practical use their newly acquired skills are having on different aspects of their lives. Equally important to some students is the social aspect of meeting people, building confidence and making new friends through shared learning. The focus on many courses in arts and crafts is the exploration and development of ideas and finished works of art and artefacts. However, in some learners' work there was insufficient evidence of drawing and sketching used to develop concepts and designs.

70. Many learners have their achievement recognised on non-accredited courses. Students can enter for an international dance tutors' awards from the social tea dance course. One student has already achieved a gold award in Latin-American dance. Opportunities for learners to progress are good. For example, learners on accredited courses can progress from level 1 to level 3 and learners on non- accredited course have lessons designed for beginners, intermediate and advanced levels.

Quality of education and training

71. The best teaching is marked by tutors' ability to demonstrate particular aspects of the work, giving students a practical example of the standard to be achieved. In a successful watercolour lesson, the tutor, a practising water-colourist, demonstrated the way 'negative space' can be filled using bold colours and selecting tones to complement the main subject of the painting. Students could see in practice the standard they could work to. The learners then produced their own versions of these taught techniques under

close supervision from the tutor.

72. Most teaching and learning is satisfactory or better, with inspectors observing some very good teaching. In the better lessons, learners are highly motivated and work productively with great enthusiasm. In these lessons, tutors are well prepared, have comprehensive plans and detailed schemes of work. They give clear and constructive feedback to learners. In one excellent lesson in jewellery and silversmithing the enthusiasm and expertise of the tutor ensured that no time was lost and that each learner knew what was expected of them. Learners were clearly challenged and developing a very good understanding of both design and making.

73. There are excellent resources provided for courses offered in Great Linford. These include professional quality workshops, studios and galleries. The centre provides an inspirational environment in which learners have the opportunity to meet and see the work of professional artists and designers.

74. Other sites provide an adequate range of classrooms and studios. However, some accommodation offered in schools and church halls is inappropriate for aspects of specialist work. Physical resources are adequate for performing arts lessons, taking place in a range of community halls and school classrooms and gyms. Dance spaces do not have mirrors and sprung floors. The quality and reliability of the music equipment is variable. Most tutors are experienced and appropriately qualified.

75. The monitoring and assessment of learners' work is satisfactory. Assessment and internal verification for accredited work are good. The monitoring and assessment of learners' progress in the best lessons ensure that learners know precisely how they are doing and how they can make progress. Some tutors use digital photography to record and assess learners' work. Learners speak positively about how tutors use their specialist knowledge to give them supportive feedback in lessons.

76. Initial guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. An appropriate range of information is provided for prospective learners. A variety of events and activities help learners to understand what is available and what opportunities there are for progression. For example, the annual exhibition of ACE's work at Great Linford enables learners to share their achievements and provide publicity. In a few instances, information sheets are not available on time and learners are not given appropriate information about progression opportunities. This has had a detrimental impact on recruitment.

77. In too many lessons there is a lack of consistency in the quality of lesson planning, inadequate structure in teaching and insufficient emphasis on learning. In these lessons, some learners are challenged insufficiently. Tutors and managers make insufficient use of outcomes from assessment to aid curriculum and lesson planning. These weaknesses are not recognised in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report.

78. There is an insufficient range of courses in the performing arts, with nothing available for learners wishing to study drama. In the visual arts the offer is satisfactory. Most

courses are well established and have been offered for several years. In the last two years a good proportion of new learners have been recruited, resulting in a widening of participation for learners in residential homes and sheltered housing. A series of short courses in the history of art and photography are run at the local gallery.

Leadership and management

79. Every effort is made to ensure that communication between managers and tutors is effective. For example, a tutor bulletin is sent to all tutors providing them with information on matters affecting adult learning. Recent bulletins have focused on preparation for inspection and provided tutors with useful guidance and support.

80. There is an improving overview and direction for the area of learning and managers are aware of the issues affecting the quality of provision. They have established procedures for improving the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. Improvements include standardised course files containing comprehensive information on the content, structure and delivery of courses. These files enable tutors to record information on learners' progress against learning outcomes and profiles of individual learners. However, there is inconsistent quality in the sections on lesson planning and schemes of work.

81. Overall, quality assurance is incomplete and has not had sufficient effect on learners' achievement or the quality of teaching and learning on some sites. Some lesson observations lack critical evaluation and findings are often too descriptive. Good practice is not yet shared across the area of learning. The process of self-assessment is improving but more open and critical debate needs to be encouraged. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report.

82. Equality of opportunity is evident in the growing number of new learners and in the widening of participation. New initiatives include drawing and painting for beginners, offered in the most deprived areas of the town, courses established for learners with disabilities, courses for those in sheltered housing, and an 'Asian Fashion' course.

English, languages & communications

English, languages & communications		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
English - Adult and community learning	152	None
Languages - Adult and community learning	900	3

English

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses
- good work by learners in many lessons
- much well-planned and stimulating teaching.

Weaknesses

- low retention on many courses
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress.
- ineffective management of some issues

Languages

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses.
- good work by learners in many lessons.
- much well-planned and stimulating teaching.
- wide range of learning opportunities in modern foreign languages.

Weaknesses

- low retention on many courses.
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress
- ineffective management of some issues

Achievement and standards

83. Pass rates are high on many accredited courses. All learners who completed A-level Chinese in 2003 and 2004, A-level Italian in 2002 and 2003, AS level in English language in 2002 and 2003, and French AS level from 2002 to 2004, were successful. A high percentage of learners completing GCSE courses in English, French, German, Italian and Russian from 2002 onwards were successful. On individual courses there are often small numbers of learners, but the total number succeeding is significant. On many of these

courses, and many non-accredited courses, retention is low. In AS level Russian and German no learners completed the course in 2003. In one GCSE English group this year, only four of the 14 who enrolled in 2004 remained on the course at the time of the inspection.

84. In many lessons learners contribute well, and show good skills in using language to convey ideas and information. In beginners modern languages lessons, most learners are willing to develop vocabulary through talking in the target language. In advanced modern language lessons and lessons in English as a foreign language, learners are able to make extensive use of the foreign language to discuss a diverse range of topics such as choosing wine, healthy eating, and experiencing other cultures. In a GCSE English lesson, learners gave the first presentations of their talks for assessment. These were confident, clear and well researched. In several English lessons learners were able to analyse the language used by writers and make perceptive detailed comments on the style, tone and layout. In samples of learners' written work there was good evidence that they have developed skills in using language clearly and accurately. In many lessons, learners work well with each other and with the tutor. During the inspection the attendance in lessons observed was 71 per cent, and was low in some classes.

Quality of education and training

85. Most teaching is good or better, but some fails to provide stimulating learning. In the better lessons, tutors plan work carefully, make good use of varied resources and give learners good opportunities to develop skills and ideas through active participation. In one lesson of English as a foreign language the tutor used a video of part of a television documentary on school meals. This was used well as a listening comprehension and also as a stimulus to discussion on healthy eating. In one foreign language lesson the tutor encouraged learners to develop new vocabulary relating to food and drink by using pictures of food items and types of drink, and by dividing the learners into two teams. The teams competed enthusiastically to provide a complete list of words beginning with a selection of initial letters. Another modern language tutor used information on Spanish hotels printed from the internet to give learners enjoyable opportunities to practise the language skills needed to research and book a holiday. In an AS level English lesson, learners worked in groups annotating different passages chosen by the tutor from a set book. This produced some very high-quality comment and analysis by all learners as they discussed which passages were most representative of the author's style.

86. In the less stimulating lessons tutors fail to plan enough interesting and varied activities, and rely too extensively on whole-class teaching, which does not meet the needs of many individual learners. These aspects are not dealt with in the self-assessment report. In some lessons, exercises to develop language skills and understanding are not related to any opportunities to apply new knowledge and vocabulary in discussion or conversation. In one GCSE English lesson, the tutor explained what two poems were about and denied learners the opportunity of formulating their own responses.

87. The range of learning opportunities is extensive in modern foreign languages with 17

languages offered. Five of these are available to level 3. There is strong emphasis on encouraging learners to start or restart languages with a wide range of entry-level courses, such as beginners' courses in French and for those whose French is 'rusty'.

88. Support for learners is satisfactory. Tutors are well aware of the extra help, which some learners need. They give good encouragement to the less confident, and help them to understand tasks by giving extra guidance or information. However, there is no effective system of initial assessment. The self-assessment procedure, which is used by some learners, requires more help than they often receive to be effective. Some course information is inadequate. Some learners begin studying at an inappropriate level. Learners' progress is monitored inadequately. Most tutors record learners' progress and achievement, particularly in assessed written work, but there is no standard way of doing this and methods used vary considerably in effectiveness. Tutors write helpful comments on learners' written work, which enables them to see clearly what improvements are needed, and what they have done well.

89. Resources are satisfactory. Most tutors are experienced and 76 per cent of them have teaching qualifications. Many of the modern language tutors are teaching courses in their first language. Tutors have access to a good range of resources, including video players, overhead projectors and cassette players. The use of ICT is very limited and tutors have not been fully trained to use the interactive whiteboards. Most accommodation is suitable, but in some centres rooms are too small for the group sizes taught there. At times this restricts the range of teaching. Some centres are much more welcoming and attractive than others.

Leadership and management

90. New management posts have been created recently. They have produced benefits through improved support for individual tutors, purposeful meetings, improved feedback from lesson observations, and some training opportunities. Tutors value this additional support, particularly the helpful comments from lesson observers. It is too early to evaluate the possible long-term benefits of these improvements.

91. Equal opportunities are promoted successfully in the willingness to support learners with a variety of learning difficulties, and in the experience of other cultures, which feature in many courses. Many courses have been successful in attracting a higher proportion of male learners than is customary in this area. However, there are very few male tutors.

92. Leadership and management are still to deal effectively with some important issues, although they are not identified in the self-assessment report. Managers have not investigated the underlying causes of the low retention rates, and they have not yet evolved coherent policies to improve retention and attendance on some courses. There are no policies for ensuring effective initial assessment of learners, and recording their subsequent progress in learning. There has been insufficient evaluation of the extent to which the provision matches the needs of the local community and local business. This year, 30 per cent of the advertised courses have not recruited and have been cancelled.

93. The recent self-assessment report does not use the identification of good and poor practice in teaching and learning, which has occurred during lesson observations, to indicate how improvements in teaching and learning could be achieved. It makes little comment relating to learners' retention rates. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the report, but noted additional weaknesses.

Foundation programmes

Foundation programmes		5
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
ESOL		
- Adult and community learning	653	5
Literacy and numeracy		
- Adult and community learning	435	4

ESOL

Strengths

- successful recruitment to a wide range of courses

Weaknesses

- slow progress in developing language skills by many learners
- unsatisfactory teaching
- inadequate resources
- poor assessment
- poor management of many aspects of programmes

Literacy and numeracy

Strengths

- good personal and social gains for many learners
- good individual support for learners in most lessons

Weaknesses

- slow progress in developing significant improvements in literacy and numeracy skills
- narrow range of teaching and learning strategies
- poor resources on some courses
- inadequate target-setting and monitoring of learning
- poor management of some aspects of programmes

Achievement and standards

94. Learners benefit from literacy and numeracy programmes. They speak readily of their increased confidence, their greater independence and how they are more prepared to tackle reading and writing tasks in front of other people. Many can face up to their difficulties and talk about what they need to do to improve. Learners on ESOL programmes appreciate the opportunity to meet other people in a safe and friendly environment.

95. Some learners complete tasks or learning activities appropriately and make satisfactory progress during lessons. However, many do not make significant progress in completing literacy and numeracy tasks accurately and effectively without the support of a tutor. Some do not receive sufficient guidance to help them develop good standards in spelling, punctuation or writing. In some cases, learners do not significantly develop their reading or vocabulary or their ability to calculate after completing several courses. The standard of learners' work in ESOL is poor in most lessons. Many make slow progress in improving their pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. They often improve their listening skills, for example, in conversation with fellow learners, but are often unable to reply effectively or make themselves understood. Too few learners are successful in external tests.

96. Attendance is poor in ESOL. As few as half the learners regularly attend some lessons. Retention rates on most foundation courses not leading to qualifications are unsatisfactory, often at around 50 per cent.

Quality of education and training

97. A good range of ESOL programmes, from pre-entry to level 2, takes place at different times of day, including at weekends and evenings. They are promoted well through particularly successful links with community organisations. Learners at venues such as schools, community centres and places of worship, benefit from learning in groups with widely diverse cultures and backgrounds. The range of programmes in literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. A shortage of tutors has restricted their expansion.

98. Most literacy and numeracy learners receive good individual support during lessons. Tutors are skilled at ensuring that learners feel comfortable working at their own pace. They thoughtfully provide an appropriate level of support to help encourage independence in completing tasks successfully. Many volunteer tutors and learning support assistants provide good additional support, but some tutors do not adequately plan for their involvement.

99. A minority of learners are inspired to learn and attain well. Some tutors successfully engage their interest through sharing their specialist knowledge in an aspect of language, literacy or numeracy, or through imaginative learning activities. Some learners participate well in interesting and well-planned speaking and listening ESOL activities.

100. However, few literacy and numeracy lessons have an adequate range of learning activities. Whole-group lessons often focus too much on learning words and forming sentences. Too much individual work is spent on learners completing exercises on words, numbers or free writing. Too few activities help learners develop a broad range of strategies to improve their skills. Tutors do not adequately consider learners' interests, needs and priorities when selecting topics for learning or individual words for spelling. Most tutors lack expertise in helping learners develop a wide range of strategies to improve skills.

101. Teaching for ESOL is unsatisfactory. Tutors do not consider learners' individual needs sufficiently when planning lessons. They follow published learning materials too closely and inadequately consider whether the content is relevant or useful. Most tutors allow learners to rely on the written word too much during speaking and listening activities. Learners do not receive sufficient feedback on their performance during lessons. For example, some tutors do not sufficiently tell learners if they need to improve their pronunciation or give them constructive feedback on overall progress.

102. Some tutors develop well-designed visual aids and prompts and make good use of resources. However, many rely too much on worksheets, some of which are too difficult to read. Few learners are encouraged to bring items from their daily lives or discuss which types of resources they prefer to use. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that a few learners benefit from using computers, but mainly only for completing interactive worksheets. Many tutors have a poor awareness of the benefits of using ILT and have not received sufficient training. Accommodation at some centres is good, but some lessons take place in cramped, untidy or cluttered rooms. Outside noise, people walking through rooms, or two classes sharing the same room, disrupt teaching.

103. ACE has recently improved the procedures for developing individual learning programmes. All new learners are interviewed and take part in an initial assessment to check that provision is suitable. Diagnostic assessments provide a long list of learning objectives that some tutors and learners use to select short-term targets. Most tutors complete ACE documents, but they do not identify learners' long-term goals adequately. Learners receive very little timely advice and guidance on career or employment options, or how to achieve wider goals. Individual learning plans do not include learners' long- or medium-term goals and give too little emphasis to potential progression routes and wider use of learning. Learners' progress reviews are weak. Progress records are bland, with insufficient details on skills achieved. Assessment of learners' needs is particularly poor on ESOL programmes. Many learners do not know what they need to do to improve. These weaknesses are not identified in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

104. The development of foundation programmes is a high priority for ACE. Senior managers are self-critical in their appraisal of the provision and invest significant time and resources to improve it. Plans include the continuation of the programme to improve the recruitment and retention of staff, investment in ILT and stringent targets to increase the proportion of learners achieving a national qualification. However, the strategy for meeting the literacy, numeracy and language needs of the local community is unclear to many staff. They are not sufficiently aware of targets or their role in achieving them. A recent staff meeting helped provide an overview of some of the changes required.

105. ACE provides good support for some learners with specific support needs. For example, courses are arranged for dyslexic learners and for women who prefer to learn as one group. Many tutors and volunteer tutors have attended training on racial awareness

and the promotion of equality. However, many learning materials do not reflect or reinforce a multi-cultural society or challenge stereotyping adequately.

106. Aspects of programmes are managed inadequately, especially in ESOL. Some systems to keep tutors informed are not routinely implemented. For example, ESOL tutors do not always receive essential information, such as when to expect new learners or volunteer tutors to a lesson. Training and support for foundation staff are unsatisfactory. Termly meetings and tutors' training events are too infrequent. Many volunteer tutors work in isolation and do not receive adequate training. Staff turnover is particularly high and recruitment is slow. The lack of continuity often disrupts learners' progress.

107. Many quality assurance arrangements are implemented ineffectively. Managers do not use data adequately to evaluate and improve the quality of provision. Some staff do not have the expertise to analyse and use management information effectively. Managers have observed all tutors since September 2004, but the process has failed to identify poor teaching. ACE has recently identified inadequacies in the internal moderation of assessments. Managers are developing a moderation process for assessments in literacy and numeracy. Some judgements in the most recent self-assessment report are self-critical but many important weaknesses are not identified, especially in literacy and numeracy provision. Self-assessment of strategic leadership and management of learning is not dealt with.

Family learning

Family learning		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
- Adult and community learning	673	3

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence and potential
- particularly innovative projects and learning activities in wider family learning
- very effective and sustained partnerships

Weaknesses

- poor monitoring of achievement on FLLN courses
- insufficient clarity in the aims of FLLN courses
- inadequate target-setting to develop learners' skills

Achievement and standards

108. Many parents and carers report improved confidence in their skills in supporting or interacting with their children. For example, they deal with children's temper tantrums more effectively and help their child with reading. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that parents and carers' attainment of non-accredited outcomes is good. For example, some parents have joined parent-teacher associations or 'friends' associations' as a direct result of participating in family learning programmes. Others have volunteered in their school, have become volunteer readers or school parent governors. Some parents report increased confidence in participating in school outings or in taking their children to the library. In one instance, parents on a wider family learning course returned unsolicited to complete a mural at a community centre after the course had finished. Headteachers comment favourably on the impact of FLLN programmes on their schools. In another example, a librarian indicated that he had noticed more parents and carers visit the library as a result of FLLN programmes.

109. Retention is good, although many programmes are of only a short duration. Attendance on some courses is low.

110. Attainment of learning outcomes is satisfactory overall, but there are no systems in place for monitoring learners' achievement over time where learners attend a succession of short courses and workshops.

Quality of education and training

111. Very imaginative projects and activities, especially in wider family learning, engage learners and spark their enthusiasm. The programme offer includes subjects such as 'making bird-tables', 'welly walks', 'messy play', 'glass and paint' and 'planning a city trip'. Learners respond with imagination to many suggestions from tutors, for example in making bird-tables, Christmas cards and in contributing to 'memory boxes'. Tutors take digital photographs to record achievement. In one session, learners completed activity cards to demonstrate they had achieved learning outcomes. In another, learners used activity cards to plan how they would practise what they had learnt in class with their children.

112. ACE makes very effective use of sustained partnerships to widen participation on wider family learning programmes. The family learning team provide a wide variety of programmes in response to community and learners' needs. Learners attend a good range of community venues. Partners include 'Surestart', early years children's organisations, places of worship, libraries, health visitors, a local nature reserve, an environmental study centre, the voluntary and community sector and children's centres. Partners comment favourably on the quality of the relationship with ACE and the impact on the parents and carers with whom they work. In FLLN, ACE works closely with other parts of the council and schools. Programmes are located at new schools attempting to build links with the community, or are established in response to approaches by head teachers.

113. Advice and guidance on wider family learning programmes are good. The organiser visits most programmes as least twice in order to advise learners of further learning and training opportunities. Tutors and organisers secure a supportive learning environment and offer good levels of support on personal issues.

114. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners clearly enjoy family learning sessions. Tutors use a good variety of methods to engage learners, include practical sessions, use of questioning and discussion. Most learners participate well in discussions and respond well to questioning. Most session plans are of an adequate standard.

115. Resources are satisfactory overall and learners use a good range of materials. IT equipment is not available for all learners. Learners in one IT session based in a school used old and unreliable machines. Most accommodation is suitable to meet the needs of adult learners. Most settings are reasonably comfortable and quiet and provide an acceptable degree of privacy. However, some schools do not provide furniture suitable for adults. Most tutors are either qualified teachers or are working towards teaching qualifications. However, FLLN staff have few qualifications in teaching literacy, language or numeracy to adults.

116. Advice and guidance for FLLN learners are adequate. Most learners receive supportive guidance, but this may not relate to further development of their literacy, numeracy and language skills. Provision for learners identified with additional support needs is satisfactory, including the use of 'learner supporters', although arrangements for

diagnosis of additional support needs are insufficiently developed.

117. The aims and objectives of FLLN programmes are insufficiently clear to some tutors and learners. Tutors make limited use of differentiation to meet the needs of FLLN learners and literacy, numeracy and language are not taught explicitly in some sessions. Some learners are unaware that they are on courses that should improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills. Tutors do not make sufficient use of individual learning plans and learners do not use them to guide their acquisition of literacy, numeracy and language skills. Some of these weaknesses are noted in the self-assessment report.

118. Target-setting to develop learners' skills is inadequate. Literacy, numeracy and language targets are not outlined in sufficient detail in FLLN individual learning plans and tutors make insufficient use of diagnostic assessment to set targets. Some learners are not working at an appropriate level. For example, in one FLLN session some learners who were clearly at or above level 2 were working on level 1 tasks. Learners' progress in FLLN courses is not monitored sufficiently thoroughly. There is no initial assessment for wider family learning learners.

Leadership and management

119. Managers support staff well and tutors feel valued. Managers also communicate well with staff and there are regular and frequent staff meetings.

120. Family learning programmes make a significant contribution to the promotion of equality and diversity. However, there is little sustained effort to promote equality and diversity through teaching and learning materials and activities. One tutor with a disability praised the support she had received from ACE in enabling her to continue with her career.

121. Managers are eager to deal with issues for improvement. For example, they have begun to remedy the piece-meal approach to developing FLLN and the improvement of tutors' abilities to develop learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills in a planned way, but this has yet to have an impact. They are also beginning to develop a clearer strategy for the relationship between FLLN, wider family learning and skills for life, the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and language.

122. The organisation's most recent self-assessment report identifies many of the issues noted by inspectors, who largely agreed with its judgements. However, some weaknesses in teaching were not mentioned in the report. Staff are increasingly offered training on issues related to family learning.