

INSPECTION REPORT

Nottinghamshire County Council Adult and Community Learning Service

29 April 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** 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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

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

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

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The adult and community learning service (ACLS) of Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) was formed in April 2001. It is part of the regeneration division of the council's culture and community department. The ACLS is mainly funded by the Nottinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC), with some additional funding from NCC's regeneration budget and other external funding sources. Most provision is subcontracted to 85 training providers, including colleges, other education providers and community groups throughout the county, although the ACLS offers some family learning programmes directly. The main subcontractors are Broxtowe College, Dukeries College, Kirkby College, Newark & Sherwood College, Next Stage, North Nottinghamshire College, South Nottinghamshire College, Sutton Centre, the Workers' Educational Association, West Nottinghamshire College, Key Skills and New College Nottingham.
2. A management team of four runs the ACLS including the ACLS manager, the service development manager, the local learning manager, and the family learning co-ordinator. Five partnership workers and eight administrators support the management team. Nineteen community operations groups (COGs), comprising local stakeholders, providers and community groups, are based in areas of greatest deprivation and provide an interface between the needs of local communities and the ACLS.
3. In 2003-04, 37 per cent of the ACLS's provision was in visual and performing arts, 13 per cent was in hospitality, sports and fitness, and 12 per cent was in information and communications technology (ICT). In the same year, the ACLS delivered learning to 11,442 learners on 1,980 courses at 506 venues. Provision is all at level 1 or below and targeted at areas of greatest social and economic need and at groups of excluded learners.
4. According to the 2001 census, Nottinghamshire has a population of 748,510, and one-third of the population live in towns and villages with less than 10,000 inhabitants. Eighty per cent of businesses in the county employ fewer than 10 people. Recent surveys indicate that approximately 23 per cent of the local population have literacy and numeracy needs, and skill levels at age 19 are lower than those specified in national training targets. From February 2004 to February 2005, the rate of unemployment in the area fell by 6.1 per cent, from 8,768 to 8,246 people. The percentage of the population from minority ethnic groups is 2.6 per cent. Approximately 75 per cent of ACLS's learners come from the most disadvantaged wards in the county.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 4

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is inadequate.** The ACLS's leadership and management are inadequate, as are its arrangements for quality improvement, ICT and visual and performing arts and media. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory, as is its provision in hospitality, sport and leisure, foundation programmes and family learning.
6. **The inspection team had a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the**

self-assessment process. The ACLS has a particularly effective self-assessment process and its most recent self-assessment report is the fourth that the organisation has produced. The self-assessment report is built up progressively, with all partner and subcontracting organisations using a wide range of consultative processes to produce detailed self-assessment reports that contribute to ACLS’s self-assessment report. In addition, the ACLS also consults widely with key stakeholders and learners, using questionnaires and meetings. The ACLS correctly identified nearly all of the weaknesses that the inspectors found, and most of the strengths, although it judged some satisfactory areas as key strengths. Some grades were not the same as those that the inspectors gave. The ACLS produces very clear action plans arising from its self-assessment report, which it monitors regularly and closely.

7. The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.

The ACLS has identified most of the weaknesses that the inspectors identified, and has begun to carry out improvements. Communication and relationships with partner organisations and subcontractors are sufficiently well developed, and monitoring of improvement strategies takes place. Many of these strategies, such as the introduction of learning plans, observation of teaching and learning, and the creation of curriculum groups, are new and have not yet had a significant effect on the learners.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICE:

- continue to create new opportunities for disadvantaged learners
- build stronger communication between the ACLS and teaching delivery staff
- develop a thorough approach to the assessment of non-accredited achievement
- share good practice
- improve the advice to learners about progress
- develop the effective use of individual learning plans
- improve curriculum-planning arrangements
- implement strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- give more emphasis and guidance on equality and anti-bullying and harassment practices
- further develop quality improvement measures

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

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

Information & communications technology		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Using IT</i> Adult and community learning	342	4 4

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Other contributory areas</i> Adult and community learning	773	3 3

Visual & performing arts & media		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Other contributory areas</i> Adult and community learning	1,121	4 4

Foundation programmes		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Other contributory areas</i> Adult and community learning	97	3 3

Family learning		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i> Adult and community learning	273	3 3

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. The ACLS provides programmes in land-based provision, construction, hairdressing and beauty therapy, health, social care and public services, humanities, and English, languages and communications. None of these had sufficient learners to be within the scope of this inspection. The inspection reported on and graded ICT, cookery and fitness classes within hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, arts and crafts within visual and performing arts and media, foundation programmes and family learning. An inspector visited the ACLS's residential course on the weekend preceding the inspection.

Number of inspectors	11
Number of inspection days	57
Number of learners interviewed	320
Number of staff interviewed	60
Number of subcontractors interviewed	48
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	79
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	16
Number of visits	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

9. **Learners develop good practical skills.** In ICT, they gain a range of useful skills in word processing, e-mail use and spreadsheets. Beginners in art and craft courses quickly develop very good skills, sometimes reaching professional standards in card craft and jewellery making. In hospitality, learners gain good skills, both of preparing and presenting food and shopping for healthy ingredients. Fitness learners perform exercises to a high standard and, in family learning, parents achieve a good understanding of how to play with and support their children while learning new practical skills and participating in a range of activities themselves.

10. **Learners on foundation programmes have high rates of achievement.** In 2003-04, 90 per cent of learners achieved accreditation, and 85 per cent achieved on non-accredited programmes. Rates are also high in the current year.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Family learning	1	5	3	1	10
Foundation programmes	1	3	3	0	7
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	12	7	0	19
Information & communications technology	0	3	7	2	12
Visual & performing arts & media	0	12	10	5	27
Total	2	35	30	8	75

11. **Learners gain a wide variety of benefits from learning.** In all areas of learning, learners gain good interpersonal and social skills, and many overcome loneliness. In hospitality, learners benefit from healthy eating advice. Fitness learners benefit from increased mobility following illness and accidents. Visual arts and crafts learners gain confidence and increased dexterity. Foundation learners gain skills to overcome barriers to learning and in their own lives, and family learners gain many benefits in relating to and helping their children.

12. **Teaching is good in hospitality, sport and leisure.** Lessons are well planned and enjoyable. Learners are motivated by stimulating activities. In ICT, visual arts and crafts, foundation programmes and family learning, the best teaching motivates learners. Tutors use humour effectively to engage the learners.

13. **In family learning, the ACLS offers very good personal development activities, which are effective in broadening the learners' experience.** This learning is closely related to increasing parents' understanding of their children's needs.

14. **Resources are good in family learning.** The ACLS uses a bank of high-quality toys to promote play with children, and to develop parents' evaluative skills as they record and evaluate the use of the toy. The ACLS chooses community venues carefully for hospitality, sport and leisure, and for visual arts and crafts, and ensures that they are appropriate for the activities.

15. **Too many aspects of teaching are unsatisfactory in ICT and visual arts and crafts.** Approximately 17 per cent of these classes are unsatisfactory and characterised by insufficient checking of learning and poor planning and structure. In arts and craft classes, creativity is not always encouraged sufficiently.

16. **In ICT and visual arts and crafts, the ACLS does not plan individual learning sufficiently.** Although it makes some use of individual learning plans, these record activities that have taken place but do not evaluate learning or plan future development for individual learners.

17. **The ACLS does not sufficiently emphasise the learners' opportunities to progress in ICT, visual arts and crafts, foundation programmes and family learning.** Although the organisation informs most learners about progress within their own subcontracted provision, they often do not find out about wider progression opportunities. However, they do provide the telephone number of Next Step to all their learners.

Leadership and management

18. **The ACLS has clear strategies to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups.** It has a wide range of partners and subcontractors and well-chosen local venues to widen participation in all areas of learning effectively. The organisation carefully targets the most deprived wards and under-represented groups, such as minority ethnic groups, travellers, people with disabilities, those who live in remote areas, and ex-mining communities. The ACLS uses foundation programmes particularly well to increase and widen participation.

19. **The ACLS manages its self-assessment process well.** It involves all subcontractors and includes the learners' views. It successfully identified nearly all of the weaknesses that this inspectors found, and was the basis of a detailed action plan, which is developing strategies to overcome the weaknesses.

20. **The ACLS manages the curriculum insufficiently in ICT and hospitality, sport and leisure.** It carries out insufficient monitoring and, while its provision is responsive to local needs, the organisation has no overall strategy to help develop future developments and planning. The ACLS has set up groups in both of these areas, but it is too early to judge their effect.

21. **Quality arrangements are not established sufficiently in ICT, visual arts and crafts, hospitality, sport and leisure, and foundation programmes.** Although initiatives such as the observation of teaching and learning have started, it is too early to judge their effect.

22. **The ACLS shares good practice insufficiently.** Much good practice exists in the delivery of all areas of learning, but there are few opportunities to share this. The ACLS recognises this and is developing plans to enable subcontractors to meet more frequently and share good practice.

23. **Learners do not receive sufficient information about anti-harassment and bullying practices.** Although all subcontractors include equality of opportunity and anti-harassment and bullying statements in induction, and the ACLS ensures that all learners have a statement of their entitlement to fair treatment and respect, this is often not presented to learners in an accessible or memorable way.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very wide and comprehensive network of partners to create new learning opportunities
- clear strategies to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups
- particularly effective self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- incomplete curriculum planning and co-ordination
- insufficient promotion of anti-harassment and bullying practices
- insufficiently established quality improvement arrangements

Information & communications technology

Using IT

Grade 4

Strengths

- good development of practical skills
- good strategies to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- many unsatisfactory aspects of teaching
- insufficient planning of individual learning
- inadequate curriculum management

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Other contributory areas

Grade 3

Strengths

- wide range of health, social and lifestyle benefits
- good teaching and learning
- good use of partnerships and venues to develop learning in the community

Weaknesses

- incomplete curriculum planning and co-ordination
- insufficiently established quality assurance arrangements

Visual & performing arts & media

Other contributory areas

Grade 3

Strengths

- good standard of practical skills in beginners' classes
- good local provision in response to local needs

Weaknesses

- much unsatisfactory teaching and learning
- incomplete arrangements for quality improvement

Foundation programmes

Other contributory areas

Grade 3

Strengths

- good achievement rates
- well-designed programmes to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups
- well-designed learning activities promote good response and engagement by learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient information and advice to support learners' progress into further learning
- insufficient sharing of good practice
- insufficient use of observations to contribute to improvements in teaching and learning

Family learning

Adult and community learning

Strengths

- good achievement of identified goals
- very effective additional activities that broaden the learners' experience
- good use of resources

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of individual learning plans
- insufficient information and advice to support learners' progress into further learning

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICE:

- getting positive comments from tutors and other learners
- the chance to return to learning
- feeling more confident
- free lessons
- the convenient location of classes

WHAT LEARNERS THINK NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICE COULD IMPROVE:

- the sets of notes provided to assist learning
- keyboards and mice to use with laptop computers
- the equipment and resources

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 Mentor	Person teaching adult learners or guiding or facilitating their learning Person providing individual, additional support, guidance and advice to learners to help them
Learning goals	Main learning goals Secondary	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. 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 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 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.
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 self managing, sustainable communities.

Active citizenship	The process whereby people recognise the power they have to improve the quality of life for others and make 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.
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DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

Strengths

- very wide and comprehensive network of partners to create new learning opportunities
- clear strategies to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups
- particularly effective self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- incomplete curriculum planning and co-ordination
- insufficient promotion of anti-harassment and bullying practices
- insufficiently established quality improvement arrangements

24. Strategic leadership and management at the ACLS is clear and focused on widening the participation of learners from under-represented groups. However, operational management is new and in the early stages of development, and it has not yet had a significant effect on all teaching and learning. The ACLS is responsive to local requests for additional learning opportunities. It encourages and enables the development of new learning provision by smaller voluntary and community groups and individuals within targeted areas of deprivation. The ACLS's location within the council's regeneration division reinforces its close strategic links to other social and economic regeneration agendas within NCC. Overall objectives for the service are set out clearly in the ACLS's three-year plan, which supports NCC's community strategy and the key priorities within NCC's strategic plan. The ACLS has a detailed annual business plan setting out specific targets for new learner engagement, retention and achievement, although these are not always challenging. For example, retention rates are based on learners who attend for 50 per cent of a course.

25. The ACLS has developed an extensive range of partnerships that work closely together to build local capacity and to facilitate First Step learning opportunities. These partners include local strategic partnerships, local further education colleges, schools, and community colleges, as well as a very wide range of community and voluntary organisations and specialist agencies, such as advice and guidance services and the Probation Service. The ACLS works effectively with its partners to enable the development of provision for new learners. It fosters strong, open and regular communications between partners to share information on funding arrangements, and to support local First Step provision which responds closely to needs in targeted areas of deprivation, particularly in the north of the county. A well-established grant-bidding system is now simplified to encourage smaller community groups to request funding for locally based learning initiatives. In particular, the ACLS has developed and manages an extensive network of COGs across the county, which are led by its partnership workers. Through the COGs, the ACLS very successfully brings together diverse local voluntary groups, specialist agencies, and providers, to identify local needs in targeted areas. Partners within each COG work closely together to develop detailed local learning plans and learning guides, and to provide

good additional local access to training opportunities. However, many provision and progression opportunities are insufficiently planned across the provision. Systems to assure the quality of provision are not yet sufficiently established. The ACLS also works closely with funding bodies such as the LSC at local and regional level, and with other government agencies and local council authorities. For example, it has established an effective exchange of information through a twinning arrangement with Cheshire Council.

26. The ACLS manages its resources effectively. It plans budgets carefully and clearly defines them in advance, and formally agrees them with NCC, whose staff carry out regular audits of expenditure. Staff at the ACLS that NCC employs directly, as well as tutors that the ACLS's subcontractor employs, have suitable qualifications and professional experience and expertise. Resources provided through subcontractors are generally adequate, although some accommodation and equipment are unsuitable for the type of provision being offered, for example in foundation and ICT programmes. The ACLS recognises this and has recently purchased additional computing equipment to support learning in ICT.

27. The ACLS has satisfactory internal communications, with a very open and consultative management approach. The management and partnership-worker teams meet regularly to review progress against targets, and to share information and ideas. The ACLS publishes a regular newsletter, which it sends to a wide range of partner organisations.

28. The use of management information is satisfactory. Following the introduction of a new system, the quality of data has improved considerably, and the ACLS uses management reports routinely to help develop its management decisions and to identify areas for action in its discussions with subcontracting providers, for example in response to data on retention.

29. Staff development at the ACLS is satisfactory. The organisation supports and encourages its core team of staff to gain additional skills and qualifications, and most are involved in further professional training, for example to gain qualifications in counselling or gain a degree. The ACLS also supports its staff to attend short updating programmes, for example in relation to disability discrimination. Within its annual development plan, the ACLS has clearly identified the need for additional tutor training to support recent developments and improve the quality of its provision. It has made financial provision for this within its budget. Some very effective training for tutors has taken place recently in family learning.

30. The ACLS has a satisfactory system for the support of learners' development needs in literacy, numeracy and language skills. Where the organisation identifies learners' needs or learners refer themselves for support, they are promptly assisted in gaining professional support. Learners with specific needs, for example in dyslexia, receive effective additional support. The ACLS encourages learners on First Step courses to progress to further programmes of learning in skills for life. However, it does not identify all learners' needs quickly enough. The ACLS recognises this, and has recently provided some additional tutor training to raise their awareness of potential learners' development needs in literacy, numeracy and language.

31. Development of the curriculum in many areas is incomplete, and, with the exception of family learning, the ACLS does not plan or co-ordinate its provision sufficiently within individual areas of learning. For example, assessment strategies are not always co-ordinated

across areas of learning. Curriculum planning is unclear in many instances, and much provision is based largely on existing patterns of demand. The ACLS recognises this weakness and has very recently established curriculum co-ordinating groups for ICT and visual and performing arts and media. Another is planned for hospitality and sports. It is too soon to be able to comment on the effect of these groups. In addition, good practice that tutors have developed in some areas of provision is insufficiently shared with other tutors providing similar programmes. The ACLS recognises that it offers too few opportunities for tutors to meet. It has begun to organise additional workshops for staff, for example a recent very effective event in visual and performing arts and media on a Saturday attracted nearly half of all the tutors. In another example, the ACLS recently introduced individual learning plans into its provision. However, these initiatives have not yet had a significant effect on the quality of provision. Tutors do not use these plans consistently, with many tutors not using them to plan learning effectively. More than half of ACLS's learners are in provision judged to be unsatisfactory. The ACLS recognises this weakness and is planning additional training for tutors and formal review of the current individual learning plan this year.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

32. The ACLS successfully uses a wide range of strategies to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups, which reflect its key aim of providing First Step learning opportunities and widening participation, largely through the subcontracted delivery of learning provision. For example, learners in economically disadvantaged areas are thoughtfully supported by being able to pay for classes weekly. Local councillors ensure that the needs of disadvantaged groups are responded to, for example the specific needs of former mining communities. Local culture is drawn upon to motivate people to attend interesting learning projects. For example, a group has carried out a wide variety of learning activities in order to re-establish a traditional festival in a mining town. Sport and outdoor activities successfully engage fathers in learning. The ACLS carefully places provision in remote rural areas to meet the needs of learners who have no transport and limited access to bigger centres. It also targets provision at minority ethnic groups and travellers, and provides crèches at many centres, enabling parents of young children to attend classes. Sutton Centre has introduced a range of free taster sessions for new learners, who are then given priority for enrolment onto follow-on classes. To encourage progress, the Sutton Centre offers learners at this centre free accredited classes in the year after they leave the ACLS's provision.

33. The ACLS has strong and effective partnerships with a large number of providers, and they facilitate the pooling of resources to increase the diversity of their offer. For example, they audit the support equipment available from partner providers. The ACLS has also purchased some of the most frequently requested equipment so that it can loan it to providers. The Advocacy Alliance worked with learners to produce an enrolment form which is accessible to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. The partnerships with local charities and community groups give access to communities that are under-represented in learning activities.

34. The ACLS aims to offer programmes that meet the needs of learners in areas of greatest social and economic disadvantage across the county. More than 75 per cent of learners come from the 50 most deprived wards in the county. All centres seen were accessible to learners, although in some cases signage was not clear. The ACLS's staff have received training recently in disability awareness and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

They also have regular updates of equality of opportunity and diversity training. The ACLS gives all of its staff and learners an entitlement statement, which clearly outlines their rights and responsibilities while on its managed programmes. However, this is not memorable or easy to read for some learners.

35. The ACLS's collection of ethnicity and disability data is satisfactory. In most cases, retention and achievement rates for different gender and ethnic groups, and those with disabilities, show no significant differences. Where figures for members of specific groups are significantly different from the figures for all learners, the organisation investigates the cause and takes action where necessary.

36. The complaints system is satisfactory. Regular meetings with partners ensure that the ACLS is aware of complaints relating to its provision. It keeps a record of complaints, together with the actions taken to resolve them. Learners are told how to complain and one recent initiative encourages them to give instant postal feedback direct to the ACLS about any issues relating to its provision. This has been successful in encouraging less confident learners to alert the ACLS to issues in its provision.

37. Although the ACLS requires all subcontractors to have equality of opportunity policies and procedures, and to include respect for others in their induction, it does not check that the language in the procedures is appropriate. Some information that the learners receive about these issues is inaccessible to them, as it is written in complex language and in small font. The ACLS's own up-to-date disability and equal opportunities policies are written in complex language, but available in different formats, and translations are available if requested.

38. Learners receive insufficient information about the nature of bullying and harassment, and their right to safety from this. This is particularly important for provision which has a high proportion of vulnerable learners. Although they are told how to complain, and that they must be treated with respect, the ACLS does not explain what this means to the learners in practice, or gives them scenarios of bullying situations. However, no learners were seen to be at risk during the inspection, and tutors challenged inappropriate behaviour.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 4

39. The ACLS has a particularly effective self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is built up progressively, with partner and subcontracting organisations using a wide range of consultative processes. COGs led by partnership workers thoroughly review provision in their local area and prepare a detailed mini self-assessment report, which includes careful analysis of strengths and weaknesses, and the actions needed. Larger providers also produce detailed self-assessment reports which contribute to the ACLS's self-assessment report. In addition, the ACLS also consults widely with key stakeholders and learners through questionnaires and meetings. The ACLS correctly identified nearly all of the weaknesses that the inspectors found, and most of the strengths, although it judged some satisfactory areas as key strengths. The ACLS also produces very clear action plans arising from its self-assessment report, which it monitors regularly and closely.

40. The ACLS uses learners' feedback effectively to plan improvements to the quality of its provision. All learners who complete programmes also complete evaluation forms, which the organisation assesses thoroughly and takes action on any weaknesses identified. For

example, the ACLS identified that it gives insufficient information to learners on progress routes, and it is now working closely with Next Step, the Nottinghamshire advice and guidance service, to improve the provision of information to tutors and learners. The ACLS has also recently set up a number of learners' forums.

41. The ACLS has detailed, service level agreements with its subcontractors. It regularly reviews these agreements and provision with its subcontracted partners at scheduled meetings. It agrees actions resulting from these meetings jointly and records them and sets targets dates for the completion of actions. Where it identifies weaknesses in its provision, for example through the analysis of learners' feedback or observation of teaching and learning, it reacts promptly to plan ways of overcoming problems.

42. Arrangements for quality improvement are insufficiently established, and the current monitoring of provision is incomplete. Over the past 18 months, the ACLS has developed its arrangements for quality improvement considerably, for example in the observation of teaching and learning. Information on these arrangements has been included in a well-designed quality improvement directory, which has been distributed widely to the ACLS's subcontractors and tutors, on CD-ROM. However, tutor practice is too inconsistent in the delivery of aspects of provision such as induction, the assessment of learners, teaching delivery and the provision of information and advice on progress to learners. In particular, although external consultants have carried out some observation of teaching and learning, and feedback to those tutors involved has supported improvement, too little observation of teaching and learning takes place currently to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning effectively across all areas of provision. Inspectors found the profile of teaching and learning to be significantly lower than the average for adult and community learning in the Chief Inspector's Annual Report, 2003-04, with 49 per cent judged good or better, against an average of 61 per cent nationally. The ACLS recognises this, and has initiated additional external observations and the training of a team of observers, with a clear target for increased tutor observations in the current year.

43. The ACLS has clearly recognised its weaknesses in quality assurance in its most recent self-assessment report, and it has already taken positive steps to improve. However, these have not yet had sufficient effect on the quality of provision for learners.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Grade 4

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Using IT</i> Adult and community learning	342	4 4

44. During 2003-04, the ACLS offered 300 courses in ICT through 15 subcontractors. The main contractors are West Nottinghamshire College, with 21.1 per cent of learners, and Newark & Sherwood College, with 19 per cent. Classes run in a total of 65 different venues throughout the county. In the week of inspection, 342 learners were on 48 courses. The range of these courses includes First Step provision ranging from tasters and introductory short courses, to longer programmes over a term or year. The ACLS also offers courses for more experienced computer users, such as digital imaging and aspects of web page design. Most of these courses are non-accredited, with 9 per cent of learners in 2003-04 studying on accredited provision.

45. The ACLS provides significant numbers of these courses for low skilled learners, as well as learners with drug- or alcohol-related problems, older learners, and learners with mobility or learning difficulties or disabilities. A significant number are women and 4.7 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. The ACLS offers these courses mostly during the day in community centres, schools and day centres.

Using IT

Grade 4

Strengths

- good development of practical skills
- good strategies to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- many unsatisfactory aspects of teaching
- insufficient planning of individual learning
- inadequate curriculum management

Achievement and standards

46. Learners develop good practical skills from little or no experience of ICT. Many soon demonstrate confidence in using the software. Some learners successfully set up a web-based e-mail account at the end of a four-week course. Learners on digital photography courses demonstrate good levels of skill in manipulating the photographs to produce new and interesting images. Word-processing learners create letters of a good professional standard. In one class, learners gained useful word-processing and spreadsheet skills to enable them to manage their local community organisation more effectively. In addition to these ICT skills, many learners benefit from the opportunities for social interaction that the courses provide. In one lesson, older learners clearly benefited

from meeting and working with others. In another class, younger people, many of whom had previously been homeless, develop improved interpersonal skills and learn to work effectively in a group.

47. Retention rates are satisfactory. During 2003-04, 74 per cent of learners on accredited courses and 89 per cent of learners on non-accredited courses completed their awards. During the first term of 2004-05, the retention rate for non-accredited courses was 92 per cent. Overall, attendance was satisfactory during the week of inspection at 84 per cent, although inspectors saw a small number of classes where the average attendance rate was below 30 per cent.

The quality of provision

48. The range of courses is satisfactory. It is based on requests from local community groups and the ACLS runs most courses that they request. Some courses target specific groups of people, such as older learners or those from a particular housing estate. A number of the courses improve the capacity of local groups to build social cohesion. All of the provision during the week of the inspection was concerned with the use of applications software, such as word processing, spreadsheets or image manipulation software.

49. Most ICT learners receive appropriate support from their tutors to make progress on their chosen course. Tutors are friendly and approachable and give the learners extra time when it is needed. However, support for learners with literacy or numeracy needs is inconsistent. Pre-course information is generally appropriate but not all learners receive the same amount of information about opportunities to progress.

50. Many aspects of the teaching are unsatisfactory. Of the lessons that the inspectors observed, 17 per cent were unsatisfactory. Tutors did not always check the learners' understanding effectively, plan individual learning effectively, and have sufficient knowledge of their previous learning. Some individual learners' progress is very slow. Learners are asked to complete tasks that they do not understand and for which they do not have the appropriate equipment. In a few classes, demonstrations of software use are carried out on laptop computers which many learners are unable to see. Insufficient handouts, and in some cases insufficient access to computers, are available to assist learners. Aims and objectives of lessons are not always clear. Not all rooms are appropriate. For example, one room was used by people not involved in the lesson, who chatted to the learners, which interrupted their concentration and slowed their progress significantly. However, in the better lessons, tutors develop detailed individual lesson plans and have effective plans to assess the learners' progress. In one lesson, learners' diaries were used effectively to monitor their progress, and they received very detailed feedback to help them make further progress. Tutors clearly motivate the learners with good use of humour. In these lessons, there is an excellent relationship between tutors and learners and lessons are clearly enjoyable. Much of the individual coaching that learners receive is well delivered, sensitive, and takes account of the individual's situation. In the better lessons, this support is effective for those who need to understand the basic skills of computer use and those who need to be challenged and stretched to achieve higher-level skills.

51. The ACLS plans individual learning insufficiently. Most tutors do not effectively assess learners' prior knowledge in ICT and some learners are not on the most appropriate course. The ACLS has recently introduced a new individual learning plan but many tutors do not use this effectively. It contains space for the tutor and the learner to record group learning

objectives and individual learning objectives, but these are often imprecise and learners do not always receive any help from the tutor in completing this section of the plan. Most tutors do not take into account these personal learning objectives of learners when planning the course. Most tutors do not work with individual learners to decide what they should do in the following lesson and they do not use short-term goals to motivate them. In most lessons, learners move from one exercise to the next sequentially through the learning materials without regard for their individual needs. In many non-accredited courses, the ACLS does not use assessment effectively to determine the progress of each learner and what should be done next.

Leadership and management

52. The ACLS has good strategies to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups in ICT. It works effectively with community groups to determine local need and closely involves the subcontractors with this. Courses are run in venues that are accessible and non-threatening for the target client group, such as sheltered housing, and at the premises of charities dealing with homelessness and substance misuse. Other courses improve social cohesion. For example, those which are run in the more deprived housing estates give local people the ICT skills to help them run their own community centre more effectively.

53. Resources for ICT classes are broadly satisfactory. Most learners have access to appropriate equipment. The ACLS has recently purchased a significant amount of new computing equipment to assist its subcontractors. However, in some places insufficient printers are available to enable learners to work effectively, and equipment to support the needs of learners with specific disabilities is not always in place. The ACLS does not always ensure that accommodation is appropriate. Some classes take place in rooms that are cramped or have inappropriate chairs and are unsuitable for teaching.

54. Most tutors are appropriately qualified to teach the course they are delivering. However, a small number have no teaching or training qualification or no qualification in ICT.

55. The self-assessment report for ICT identified most of the weaknesses that the inspectors found, although some of the strengths it identified are normal practice.

56. Curriculum management is inadequate. The ACLS has not monitored the provision effectively to ensure that all learners receive an equally good experience. For example, some learners receive an effective induction while others are not adequately informed about the course. Equality of opportunity is often not promoted effectively during induction. Reference to it is often brief and not in sufficient depth to ensure that learners understand and remember their rights and responsibilities and issues surrounding bullying and harassment. Too few tutors have had training on equality of opportunity. Not all tutors deal with health and safety issues effectively. The ACLS does not use the recently introduced individual learning plans consistently. Some tutors use them effectively to assist in planning lessons, but many simply use them to record what learners have done.

57. The ACLS monitors attendance and retention only after a course has finished. In one class, few learners completed the full length of the course. The ACLS has no long-term strategic direction for its adult and community ICT provision. The provision specifically intends to provide first-rung provision, with other organisations providing further progress.

However, most tutors are aware only of the courses that their own organisation offers and have no knowledge of the provision that the rest of the ACLS or other providers in the area provide. The ACLS shares good practices insufficiently across the provision, both in terms of teaching and learning strategies and teaching materials. It has recently introduced a regular meeting of ICT tutors to discuss issues relating to teaching and to share good practice, although this is too recent to have had any effect on the provision.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas		3
Adult and community learning	773	3

58. The ACLS provides a variety of hospitality, sport and leisure courses, including yoga, tai chi, Pilates, over 50s keep fit, sugarcraft, cake decorating, healthy eating, food hygiene and a variety of cookery courses. In 2003-04, there were 230 such courses, which represented 13 per cent of the overall provision, 23 of which were accredited, including a basic food hygiene certificate and Open College Network accredited personal fitness. Some of these courses are targeted at specific groups, such as those aged over 50 and those with disabilities. The ACLS offers courses throughout the county at different times of the day and evening, and holds them at venues that are accessible to the community, such as schools, village halls, community centres, colleges and day care centres. The area of learning curriculum is delivered through a range of partners, including six further education colleges, three community colleges and a number of voluntary and statutory organisations. In 2003-04, Sutton Centre accounted for 24 per cent of the provision, West Nottinghamshire College 15 per cent and Newark & Sherwood College 13.24 per cent. Most courses are run on a termly basis over a 10-12 week period. Sixty-six per cent of learners are aged between 19-59. The percentage of learners from minority ethnic groups was 7.56 per cent and 8 per cent of learners had disabilities. Currently, 31 tutors deliver the provision, all of whom are employed part time by the subcontractors. At the time of inspection, 66 courses were running in this area, 18 in catering with 172 learners and 48 in sports and fitness with 601 learners.

Other contributory areas

Grade 3

Strengths

- wide range of health, social and lifestyle benefits
- good teaching and learning
- good use of partnerships and venues to develop learning in the community

Weaknesses

- incomplete curriculum planning and co-ordination
- insufficiently established quality assurance arrangements

Achievement and standards

59. Many learners improve their skills and derive a wide range of benefits from participating in learning. Many of them benefit from the development of their social skills, including increased confidence, improved communication and, on some courses, working with others. Learners on sports courses maintain and improve their fitness, while some learners with specific health conditions, including multiple sclerosis, arthritis and strokes, benefit from exercise regimes that result in increased mobility, improved posture and greater flexibility. Learners on most cookery classes have an increased understanding of

healthy eating, which enables them to select, purchase and prepare foods of which they were previously unaware and develop a greater understanding of foods from different cultures. On sugarcraft courses, learners develop research skills using books and the internet to locate examples of plants, flowers and other objects that they wish to create. In making and assembling pieces of sugarcraft, learners develop good dexterity and a great degree of patience and concentration, as well as an understanding of shape, size and colouring, in order to achieve realistic effects. Some learners are commissioned to bake and decorate cakes for specific events and celebrations. Most learners on the sugarcraft courses go on planned trips to major exhibitions, which gives them an insight into best practice. Learners on food hygiene courses achieve qualifications which help them in their job roles in the food industry and this qualification helps some learners to gain employment.

The quality of provision

60. Much good teaching and learning takes place, with 63 per cent of teaching judged good or better and no inadequate teaching. Lessons are well planned and tutors use a variety of activities to help promote the learners' understanding and enjoyment, including demonstrations, videos, quizzes and realistic models of vermin and insects in food hygiene sessions. Lessons are well resourced, with the learners and the tutors providing the necessary commodities and equipment. In one sugarcraft class, a small group of learners are so motivated to improve that they arrange car boot sales to purchase specialist equipment for class and personal use. Schemes of work and lesson plans are now well linked to learners' initial assessment and individual learning plans, which the ACLS is introducing into all classes. The checking of learning and verbal feedback are good, and this formative assessment helps learners understand how to improve. Tutors create a motivating atmosphere which stimulates interest and learners enjoy the sessions. In many classes they share ideas and equipment. In most sports and fitness classes, tutors are aware of their learners' abilities and health status and use this knowledge to suggest suitable modifications and alternatives in lessons. Some use of individual teaching and support from colleagues promotes learning, but in some classes the learners' own expertise and knowledge is used insufficiently. Detailed and good-quality handouts on class activities reinforce learning. The ACLS successfully encourages learners to practise skills at home, including yoga, general exercises, cookery and sugarcraft. Tutors have good skills and current occupational qualifications and most have both a teaching qualification and teaching experience.

61. The ACLS creates good development of learning in the community through the use of partnerships and venues. Each provider uses a wide range of community-based locations, including church halls, schools and day centres, that are local to many of the target communities. Advertising for the courses is widespread, and includes community college prospectuses, local newspapers, fliers from schools and local radio. Many learners enrol on courses after recommendations from friends and neighbours. Some of the classes are in schools attended by learners' children and many of these have crèche provision and after-school clubs, which helps learners with young children to attend. Local venues overcome transport problems and give learners increased confidence to take up learning opportunities. Not all centres are well designed for learning but tutors are very flexible and adaptable, make the best of what is available and often bring specialist small equipment to the class. Although the ACLS assesses buildings for health and safety risks, there is insufficient risk assessment related to specific learning activities. The ACLS offers progress routes on some courses, including yoga, tai chi and sugarcraft. Employment and legislation

needs have been well met through courses in food hygiene. In areas of social deprivation, courses on offer are dealing with national issues, including improved health, obesity, and social and behavioural problems.

62. Learners receive satisfactory guidance and support. A large number of learners in cookery and sugarcraft classes benefit from the availability of crèche facilities. In many classes the ACLS provides all materials, and in other classes, tutors hold a core supply of equipment for the learners to borrow. Some learners pay reduced fees and others are able to pay for classes on a weekly basis. Learners attending classes arranged through individual organisations are supported by project workers who work alongside the tutor. Some learners bring their own support person along with them. Interpretation services are available and food hygiene classes have been run in a number of languages, including Chinese, Gujarati and Turkish. Initial assessment processes and individual learning plans help identify learning needs so that the ACLS can offer the necessary support, including support for literacy and numeracy.

Leadership and management

63. The ACLS and its subcontractors are aware of equality of opportunity, and they do have policies and procedures, but they do not promote a full understanding of the issues sufficiently. In some classes, tutors are aware of the specific literacy and numeracy needs of some learners and provide them with and some individual support.

64. Curriculum planning and co-ordination are incomplete. The ACLS's partners that are committed to the development of area plans carry out planning, with input from COGs. The ACLS and its partners set and review targets. However, the curriculum is limited, has not changed for a significant amount of time and includes high levels of specific subjects, such as yoga and sugarcraft. A large number of longer-term learners attend some classes to both maintain fitness and develop new skills. The current curriculum is meeting some specific needs and reaching some of the intended targets but arrangements for deciding the overall curriculum offer, and whether it is fully meeting the needs of the different communities, are not sufficiently clear. The ACLS enrolls men and a large number of older learners. However, it now offers some new taster courses and targets some specific groups. Where the organisation introduces successful initiatives it does not share good practice sufficiently. However, it has plans to implement a curriculum overview group for the area of learning.

65. Each of the partners delivering the curriculum has quality systems but quality assurance arrangements are not yet fully established. Initial assessment practice is varied and the ACLS is not using the recently introduced individual learning plans effectively in all classes. It records some classes' activities but makes little mention of learning needs or outcomes. The ACLS carries out health and safety risk assessments for all premises but pays insufficient attention to some of the risks attached to the specific activities in the classes. Staff are qualified and carry out some development but this is not sufficiently planned to ensure the ACLS meets the needs of communities adequately. Internal and external teams carry out observations of teaching and learning and the organisation is implementing some of the recommendations. It is using data to help make improvements to the service and target specific areas and groups. The ACLS's most recent self-assessment report is detailed and identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses that the inspectors found, but contains limited information about hospitality.

Visual & performing arts & media

Grade 4

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas		4
Adult and community learning	1,121	4

66. Visual and performing arts is the largest of the ACLS's areas of learning accounting for 37 per cent of enrolments in 2003-04. In 2003-04, there were 6,614 enrolments for non-accredited courses and 150 enrolments for accredited courses. In the summer term, 1,096 enrolments took place. The accredited provision accounts for 4 per cent of the course offer in 2004-05. In 2004-05 so far, there have been 3,881 enrolments for non-accredited courses and 123 enrolments for accredited courses. The courses are held in centres spread throughout the county. The provision is subcontracted to local providers, five of whom account for 65 per cent of enrolments. Next Stage and Sutton Centre are the largest contributors, accounting for 44 per cent of those enrolled. The courses cover a range of visual arts and crafts, including watercolour painting, needlecraft, card making, patchwork, quilting, pottery, jewellery making and fused glass. The performing arts provision was not inspected. Of the 89 courses operating during the inspection, 15 were art classes and 75 were craft classes, between them catering for 1,121 learners. Part-time staff teach a range of six-, 10- and 30-week courses that the ACLS offers during the day and the evening.

Other contributory areas

Grade 3

Strengths

- good standard of practical skills in beginners' classes
- good local provision in response to local needs

Weaknesses

- much unsatisfactory teaching and learning
- incomplete arrangements for quality improvement

Achievement and standards

67. New learners develop a good standard of practical skills. Learners apply a range of skills and techniques appropriately in individual and group projects. Those with no previous experience develop basic skills and work on complex tasks. Confidence in their ability develops quickly as they apply newly learnt skills to creative tasks. In card-making and jewellery classes, learners reach a professional standard of work quickly. Tutors encourage learners to create, and successfully incorporate, computer-generated images into their work. In some art classes, learners experiment confidently with a wide range of media. In a sewing class, learners inexperienced in the use of sewing machines or hand-sewing techniques made wall hangings based on their children's designs. The finished work will be hung in the school, further motivating the learners. In the best lessons, tutors harness the learners' energy and enthusiasm and encourage the development of personal and artistic skills. Learners offer each other support and encouragement in lessons which helps to build their confidence and pride in their achievements. Many learners identify the

beneficial social and health benefits of attending their courses. One learner recovering from surgery found her manual dexterity improving as a result of attending a class. Others learn how to overcome loneliness and bereavement through meeting new friends with similar interests.

68. At 86 per cent in 2003-04, retention and achievement rates on non-accredited courses are satisfactory. In 2004-05, the accredited provision accounts for 4 per cent of the course offer.

69. All lessons start punctually. At 78 per cent, learners' attendance was satisfactory during the week of inspection. Learners' work is occasionally celebrated through public exhibitions and displays.

The quality of provision

70. The ACLS's local provision is good and responsive to community needs. It ensures that learners have access to a range of subjects delivered within their area, at church halls, community centres and primary school locations, which benefits learners who have difficulty travelling to main centres. These venues are friendly and offer appropriate accommodation for practical classes. The ACLS readily provides crèches wherever necessary to enable more learners to attend. Staff are suitably qualified in their subject area, and some are practising artists. Consumable resources are adequate. Many of the courses set up in the primary schools are targeted at parents, but other learners in the area are welcomed. A range of short courses, taster sessions and one-day workshops offered in these local venues widens the participation of those who find the main centres intimidating. The ACLS offers new courses whenever possible or whenever a tutor or a group of learners express a need for a locally delivered course. Where large numbers enrol, it sometimes offers two sessions. Next Stage, the arts section within NCC's culture and community department, identifies and meets local needs, as part of its funding agreement with ACLS.

71. Support and guidance for the learners is satisfactory. Tutors give effective, discrete support for learners in practical lessons. One tutor effectively accommodates learners with hearing and sight problems. In most sessions, learners receive information about literacy and numeracy support. Some tutors refer learners to support services, where needs are identified during the sessions, but other learners are insufficiently aware of what is available. Courses are well advertised in a range of publications and venues, such as shopping arcades and supermarkets. Tutors provide appropriate guidance during taught sessions. In the better sessions, learners have opportunities to progress the level and range of skills within the same course. However, few opportunities are available for them to progress to higher-level courses and few opportunities to progress to other courses are promoted.

72. Much of the teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. Of those sessions that the inspectors observed, 18 per cent were unsatisfactory, with poor planning and structure. Some do not focus adequately on the development of skills and understanding. Many sessions place little emphasis on the creative application of learnt skills and learners are not encouraged to compile portfolios of work. An over-reliance on the use of secondary source material and insufficient access to reference material characterises many classes. Tutors do not test understanding and involve learners in developing their own critical abilities and knowledge sufficiently. In weaker classes, initial assessment, recording of progress, and planning for individual learning needs are not in place. The use of individual learning plans is inconsistent and these plans often record tasks, rather than evaluate

learning and achievement and plan the next step. In some sessions, the learners work on inappropriate projects which they cannot complete. Learners have insufficient individual learning goals, which do not challenge them appropriately, particularly in more experienced groups. Not all tutors find appropriate ways to use the forms to benefit all of the learners. In some sessions, learners' progress is identified through a series of tick boxes for skills achieved. In other sessions, learners briefly record their learning outcomes in the form of a diary. However, where this is done effectively, tutors and learners find it a useful prompt to remind them of their progress.

Leadership and management

73. The ACLS's leadership and management of this area of learning does not sufficiently ensure that all learners receive a satisfactory learning experience. Part-time tutors are well supported through an effective communication system. Most tutors have teaching qualifications at level 1 and are appropriately qualified and experienced in their specialist areas. Some professional development activities are offered. A recent Saturday workshop focused on the sharing of good practice, and how to create a flexible learning environment. Of the tutors invited, approximately half attended this course. The ACLS encourages tutors to attend by paying them for their attendance.

74. Quality improvement arrangements are incomplete. Next Stage is facilitating and co-ordinating some of the area's activities. The focus is on curriculum and quality development. However, this arrangement has yet to have any effect on the quality of the programmes. An external organisation has carried out the main cycle of teaching and learning observations and the ACLS has carried out a limited number of observations. The observation process does not always identify clearly the support needed to improve the quality of delivery. However, revised observation forms are now being used which contain a section to provide details of follow-up action required to support the tutor. Tutors have limited opportunities to share good practice. Tutors' meetings, where new initiatives are discussed, are regularly held at the beginning and end of the year. However, the use of individual learning plans and the recording of learners' progress is inconsistent. Insufficient sharing of good practice takes place. However, the self-assessment report identifies most of the weaknesses in the area, although the assessment of the standard of teaching and learning does not match that of the inspectors.

75. Recent equality of opportunity training has not yet had a significant effect on the content of the curriculum. However, venues and accessibility of classes are effective in bringing provision to new learners in remote communities.

Foundation programmes

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas Adult and community learning	97	3

76. The ACLS subcontracts all provision within the foundation area to a range of organisations, including colleges, private not-for-profit companies, and voluntary and community organisations. During 2004-05, the ACLS has, to date, issued 44 separate contracts to a total of 18 different providers. This has resulted in 127 courses, 10 per cent of which are accredited. Activity takes place across the county, but is concentrated in areas of social deprivation and focuses on those with particular needs. Thirty-three per cent of learners on foundation programmes have a disability, accounting for 40 per cent of all learners with a disability on programmes funded by the ACLS. During 2004-05, up to the time of the inspection, the ACLS has received 1,357 enrolments for learners on foundation programmes, of which 28 per cent were for accredited programmes.

77. At the time of the inspection, 97 learners were on 14 foundation programmes. These include individual literacy and numeracy support for offenders, non-accredited programmes to develop communication, employability and coping skills, and a range of programmes to support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, including one leading to accreditation. Most of the provision takes place during the day, and is short, First Step provision.

Other contributory areas

Grade 3

Strengths

- good achievement rates
- well-designed programmes to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups
- well-designed learning activities promote good response and engagement by learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient information and advice to support learners' progress into further learning
- insufficient sharing of good practice
- insufficient use of observations to contribute to improvements in teaching and learning

Achievement and standards

78. The learners' achievement rates on accredited programmes are good. In 2003-04, 90 per cent of these learners achieved accreditation, while on completed courses during 2004-05, 81 per cent of learners have currently achieved. Achievement on non-accredited programmes over the same periods are 85 per cent for 2003-04, and 64 per cent so far this academic year. However, the ACLS does not monitor sufficiently the thoroughness and consistency with which learning goals are set and their achievement verified to be able to regard these figures as a reliable indicator of achievement.

79. Learners have good achievement of new skills, and they are able to apply the skills learnt to other areas of their lives. Learners attending a programme for those with learning difficulties and disabilities are learning how to make presentations and be active in meetings, and are using these skills effectively in the wider community. Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities are entered for a group award and an individual award in this year's adult learners' week. Learners on an anger management course are applying their newly acquired knowledge and understanding, and practising the techniques acquired on the course in relevant areas of their lives.

The quality of provision

80. Learners respond well to their learning programmes, and successfully engage with them. They maintain their focus well within learning sessions, are enthusiastic, and enjoy their learning. In one instance, a learner maintained a very high level of concentration despite the session taking place in an environment that was not conducive to learning and which was subject to repeated interruptions. Learners respond well to the balance of support and challenge that tutors provide, and overcome barriers both to learning and those they face in other areas of their lives. Their relationships with their tutors are good and in group sessions they establish supportive relationships with their colleagues. Learners respond well to the encouragement to take responsibility for their own learning.

81. The ACLS has well-designed programmes to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups. This is in accordance with its priority as a service to reach the most disadvantaged and to encourage participation through First-Step provision. It offers a good range of programmes for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, and is developing a strategy for its work with these learners. The ACLS also supports provision for learners from a range of backgrounds who need to build or rebuild their employability skills. Some are re-building their lives after illness. Much of the provision is for offenders and ex-offenders to build their employability and life skills, as well as their self-esteem. The programmes are based across the county, but concentrated in the areas of greater deprivation. Local venues are well used to increase accessibility, and the use of a number of non-threatening community venues encourages First-Step learners. Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported with transport arrangements.

82. Teaching is satisfactory. All of the sessions that the inspectors observed were satisfactory, with 57 per cent of sessions observed judged to be good or better. Some sessions are formally and thoroughly planned, and all sessions are focused on the needs of the learners. The formal assessment of learners' needs and the planning and monitoring of individual learning is inconsistent. However, tutors and learners are aware of making progress and meeting learners' needs, including their literacy and numeracy needs. Some imaginative recording of progress for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities takes place, and the ACLS uses photographic evidence well. Tutors create a balance between support and challenge for learners.

83. The ACLS's accommodation and resources for teaching and learning vary but overall they are satisfactory. Some venues are particularly conducive to learning, with welcoming, well-furnished premises of a suitable size for the group. Examples of learners' work are displayed and resources for teaching and learning are good. However, in one instance, the venue was poor, with the room used for teaching and learning being small, used as a thoroughfare, and inadequately separated from an area being used for other work, which

created an unacceptably high level of noise interference. Storage for resources and equipment is insufficient in some centres, and tutors have to transport what is needed for each session. Provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities is well supported with support workers and volunteers.

84. The ACLS has insufficient strategies to support learners' progress. It does not yet have a strategy to ensure that all learners have access to, or receive, adequate information, advice and guidance to progress from the First-Step, predominantly short courses that the service funds. Subcontractors' arrangements to support information and advice for learners on progress opportunities are inconsistent. Some subcontractors have appropriate arrangements while others are unsure as to what steps to take to ensure that progress opportunities are available for learners or that they are aware of such opportunities.

Leadership and management

85. The ACLS's leadership and management are effectively creating partnerships to develop new opportunities for learning, but they are not having sufficient effect on continuous improvement for the learners. The range of programmes that the ACLS supports in this area of learning meets equality of opportunity issues. Tutors support equality of opportunity by setting ground rules, ensuring that they deal with bullying and harassment issues, and that learners are clear as to what to do should they have a problem.

86. The ACLS shares good practice insufficiently and recognises this in its self-assessment report. The ACLS's most recent self-assessment report analysed accurately the issues to be met by the service in this curriculum area, with inspectors confirming much that it had identified. During the inspection, the inspectors observed some good, and some very good, teaching, and several examples of innovative practices to improve provision. Examples include a revised evaluation form for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, which they themselves were instrumental in redesigning. The ACLS has developed a form to monitor learning for a similar learner group. The organisation assesses feedback from learners carefully and takes action to rectify issues in each case. However, there are no opportunities for tutors to share such developments and learn from each other, and there is no procedure within the area of learning to facilitate the sharing of good practice. The ACLS has no curriculum group and its direct communication with delivery staff within the subcontractors is inconsistent.

87. The ACLS's observation of teaching and learning within its foundation programmes is insufficient. The organisation recognises this in its most recent self-assessment report. It has carried out seven observations, which is an insufficient number on which to base sound judgements relating to the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum area, and to contribute to further development of good practice.

Family learning

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning Adult and community learning	273	3

88. So far in 2004-05, there have been 1,031 enrolments in family learning courses, 543 in family literacy and numeracy courses, and 488 in wider family learning. Of these learners, 41 per cent are aged 35 to 44, 85 per cent are women, 11 per cent are from minority ethnic groups and 5 per cent are disabled. Thirty-three subcontracted providers provide most of the family learning programmes, although the ACLS does directly deliver 12 family literacy, language and language (FLLN) courses. In the week of inspection, 273 learners were on 34 courses. During 2004-05, there are family programmes in 81 venues across the county. The majority of the family learning programmes are aimed at families living in areas of greatest economic and social deprivation and social isolation, or who have poor literacy, numeracy or language skills. Most programmes are non-accredited programmes. In 2003-04, the retention rate was 80 per cent and, in 2004 to February 2005, the retention rate on family learning programmes was 84 per cent. A full-time co-ordinator co-ordinates family learning programmes.

Adult and community learning

Strengths

- good achievement of identified goals
- very effective additional activities that broaden the learners' experience
- good use of resources

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of individual learning plans
- insufficient information and advice to support learners' progress into further learning

Achievement and standards

89. The learners' achievement of their personal learning goals in family learning programmes is good. On wider family programmes they gain confidence in helping and playing with their children. Learners attending an outdoor activities weekend clearly identify what they want to achieve by participating in the activities and how they can use their experiences with their families. Parents learn how to promote language and number development with very young children. They gain useful knowledge of how to help their child with homework and learn what is taught in literacy and numeracy at different stages. They develop a wide range of skills and strategies to assist and support their children's learning. Many learners develop their own skills in literacy and numeracy. For example, in a family numeracy session, parents spent time with the tutor learning about metric units so that they could help their own children weigh the ingredients when they joined them to bake cakes. The learners' standard of work is good. For example, two learners on a programme for parents who want to help their children at home used their portfolios of

work from the course to gain a level 1 certificate. One learner used the portfolio as an example of achievement in a successful job interview.

The quality of provision

90. Tutors provide very effective personal development activities that are planned to broaden the experiences and raise the aspirations of parents as well as their children. Tutors plan a variety of activities to be fun as well as promoting new skills and knowledge and a 'can do' approach. They build confidence for family members to join in new learning activities. For example, during an outdoor-pursuits weekend, fathers are encouraged to try new activities such as caving and high-rope climbing. Participating in such activities clearly illustrates how their child may feel when faced with new and demanding experiences. Parents learn about different approaches to encouraging their children to participate. A group of parents with their babies learn number-singing rhymes and discuss how such activities assist the development of language and number. In a family literacy group learners are introduced to differences between fiction and non-fiction literature and the meaning of genre, which aids their understanding of what is being taught to their own child as well as developing their own literacy skills. The teaching profile overall is satisfactory.

91. Tutors use and have readily available a variety of resources. They use practical activities and games to demonstrate how learning can be fun as well as challenging. Parents are encouraged to make simple games with craft materials that they can use with their children at home. In one course, babies' toys are available for parents to borrow each week. The tutors choose the toys, which are of good and durable quality. Tutors encourage parents to write a short evaluation of the toy, including how their child uses it and what learning they considered took place. The ACLS provides funds for the purchase of specific resources. Most of its accommodation is satisfactory. The ACLS has bought furniture suited to adults, but not all rooms have suitable chairs and tables.

92. The organisation's assessment procedures are satisfactory. Tutors use informal interviews and formal initial assessment tests to meet the needs of learners.

93. Tutors make insufficient use of individual learning plans to record learners' goals. At the time of the inspection, half of the tutors did not use an individual learning plan. The ACLS partly identifies this weakness in the most recent self-assessment report. In the better sessions, tutors use plans to record learners' goals, and learners' and tutors' comments on what they have learnt and achieved. The ACLS has given clear written guidance and examples on the use of individual learning plans and plans to review documents for family learning.

94. Insufficient information and advice is available to learners on family learning programmes. Learners do not always have advice on future learning opportunities, potential careers or relevant qualifications. Some tutors provide information informally on what is available in their local college. Sessions for learners to receive information and advice on new careers, or to consider and discuss personal skills, are not planned in all schemes of work. The ACLS provides learners with information on the information, advice and guidance services in the learners' file with contacts and website details. However, there is little monitoring of how they use this service.

Leadership and management

95. The co-ordination of family learning programmes is satisfactory. One full-time co-ordinator manages the family programmes service. The ACLS disperses funds efficiently to providers that deliver the programmes. It consults and works closely with the advisory and inspection service to target schools for FLLN programmes, and then invites them to host a course within their school. A new steering group for Skills for Families has been established. The group has met on three occasions and has good representation from the subcontracted providers. The ACLS has new initiatives in working with secondary schools and fathers into learning, as well as working with families of offenders. Family learning providers and the SHARE family network, which is a joint project between the ACLS and Continyou, meet each term.

96. The ACLS promotes equality of opportunity in family learning programmes. Tutors take account of the diversity of the learners and their children through the appropriate selection of materials and equipment, such as toys and books. First Step programmes reflect the cultural diversity of learners and promote respect towards each other. For example, on an outdoor-pursuit weekend, learners had to rely on each other and to trust that each one would carry out activities safely.

97. A few observations of teaching and learning take place with external consultants. Ten observations are planned, of which three have been carried out.

98. The organisation's most recent self-assessment report and update identified areas for development and identified a similar weakness to the inspectors. A comprehensive action plan exists for improvements in family learning.

99. The ACLS's staff are appropriately experienced in working with children and adults. Some tutors hold an appropriate professional qualification in working with children and in some cases adults. The ACLS is responsive to funding training and organising training events, such as training tutors to run SHARE programmes and workshops on the developments in Skills for Families national initiatives.

