

INSPECTION REPORT

Luton Borough Council

10 February 2006



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.
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**)

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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DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Luton Borough Council (LBC) is a unitary local authority and has supported youth training initiatives since 1983. Since April 2001, LBC has contracted directly with Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide work-based learning. The contract is managed by the Prospects Training Scheme (PTU) which falls within the human resource division of the LBC's corporate and customer services department. The off-the-job training for business administration is subcontracted to Barnfield College.

2. An annual average of 42 learners a year take apprenticeships with LBC in the areas of engineering, construction, information and communications technology (ICT) sports and business administration. All learners who commence training with LBC have 'trainee status' and are placed in one of LBC's many service units. LBC's aim is to help young people find suitable permanent employment and economic wellbeing by providing them with the skills to compete in the local job market. Learners are recruited through a variety of means including open evenings, careers fairs, referral from Connexions, advertisements in the local press and information packs sent to careers advisers in local schools.

3. Luton is one of the largest towns in southeast England, with a population of 185,200. The number of residents aged under 19 is 53,300 and 39.6 per cent of this age group are from a minority ethnic background, with a significant number from Pakistani, Kashmiri, Bangladeshi, Indian, and African-Caribbean communities. In recent years, asylum seekers have increased the diversity of the population, and there are now small communities of Albanian, Russian and Turkish speakers. Twenty per cent of the population of Luton were born outside the UK, and 44 per cent of children in Luton's schools speak English as an additional language.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** All aspects of leadership and management and the provision in business administration are good.

5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment report is appropriately inclusive and involves all key parties. The report identifies most of the key strengths and weakness identified by inspectors. However, the report does not include enough evidence to support some of its judgements.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** The PTU has rectified the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. All key quality processes, including the self-assessment report, give rise to well-monitored action plans.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL:

- maintain and improve achievement rates across the provision

LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

- maintain the culture of continuous improvement
- increase the flexibility of assessment in the workplace
- improve key skills provision
- set challenging equality targets

GRADES

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

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		2
Quality improvement		2

Business administration and law			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Administration</i>			2
Apprenticeships for young people	11		2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. This inspection graded business administration as it was the area of learning with the most learners. The inspection did not grade construction, engineering, ICT or hospitality, sports and leisure as these areas had insufficient learners to be inspected separately.

Number of inspectors	2
Number of inspection days	6
Number of learners interviewed	13
Number of staff interviewed	3
Number of employers interviewed	3
Number of subcontractors interviewed	4
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	3
Number of visits	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **The retention rate is high.** Ninety-two per cent of the 40 learners recruited in the four years to 2004-05 were retained. Of the 12 learners recruited in 2005-06, 11 are still in

learning.

9. **The achievement rate is good.** Two-thirds of the learners starting in 2004-05 completed their full framework. This shows an improving trend. Of the learners starting in the three years to 2005, only 59 per cent completed their full framework. However, the national vocational qualification (NVQ) achievement rate in this period has been consistently higher, averaging 85 per cent, and technical certificate pass rates were 100 per cent.

10. **The key skills qualification achievement rate is relatively poor.** In 2004-05, all learners achieved their NVQ and their technical certificate but about one-third did not pass the level 2 key skills test in communication. This reflected the performance in the previous two years. This weakness is recognised by LBC which, in partnership with the subcontractor, has taken remedial action through better initial assessment, additional workshops and increased key skills qualification expertise. Key skills evidence is generated mostly through classroom assignments, although a well-planned outdoor activity week at the start of the programme is used effectively to meet some evidence requirements.

The quality of provision

11. **Learners develop good work skills and increase their confidence during the programme.** Learners and their supervisors remark on their significant improvement in attitude, technical knowledge and appropriate skills, such as minute-taking and dealing with difficult customers. Many learners are given additional responsibilities because of their increased capability. Most learners gain employment at LBC following the apprenticeship.

12. **Learners make use of a good range of additional training opportunities,** many of which are accredited. These include good personal development, technical training and general training in areas such as health and safety and equality of opportunity. Training is well planned and documented. All learners take up significant additional training that is both relevant to their main programme and often used to supply evidence towards their qualification.

13. **Support for learners is particularly effective.** Induction is thorough and informative and gives learners a good base from which to commence their training. Initial assessment effectively identifies additional learning needs and good additional support is given. PTU's staff, supervisors and tutors all give good learning support. Learners and supervisors remarked on the great support given by PTU's staff, who are passionate about learners' success. Inspectors identified several examples where staff have gone out of their way to ensure problems are resolved quickly and effectively. Learners are given good encouragement and success is celebrated well.

14. **The review process is very strong.** Regular formal reviews are supplemented by informal reviews or monitoring visits as required. Thorough and systematic reviews of progress take place and challenging targets are set in co-operation with learners and supervisors. College reports on technical certificate and key skills qualification progress are included in the review process. Learners' work and training are discussed in detail and well recorded. Additional work experience is carefully planned to meet qualification criteria. Reviews establish clear links between the various elements of the programme and keep all participants well informed on progress and requirements.

15. Internal verification and assessment are satisfactory and meet the awarding body's standards. However, PTU relies on college staff to assess learners in their workplaces. Assessment observation is not carried out in the workplace for the first six months of the programme. Assessment for some learners making particularly good progress is brought forward by arrangement with the college. PTU recognises the need to increase the flexibility of assessment and is introducing work-based assessors.

Leadership and management

16. **Leadership and management of the provision are good.** PTU has good strategic planning processes. Clear links exist between national, local and LSC priorities and PTU's development plan. PTU continues to monitor its subcontractors well. It has close and good collaborative working relations with its subcontractors. Recently a new performance management component of the contract has been usefully added to ensure learners' needs are fully met. PTU has a good range of internal links with other departments within LBC, which are supported by detailed service level agreements. There are good examples of learners benefiting from the network of arrangements. PTU has recently developed external partnerships and networks to share good practice with local work-based learning providers and providers of education and training for 14 to 19 year olds.

17. **PTU's development of staff is good.** Staff development and appraisal were key strengths at the previous inspection and in the self-assessment report. LBC has a comprehensive staff development policy and appraisal scheme, which covers staff and learners. Training staff have and make good use of the good opportunities available to update their skills. Workplace supervisors have a good induction programme. They hold biannual network meetings to update their skills and share good practice in working with apprentices. Training team staff have taken a good range of courses, many related to the health, safety and wellbeing of learners. Learners also have access to and benefit from some of the wider training offered by LBC.

18. **Equality of opportunity is now good, having been judged as outstanding at the previous inspection and in the self-assessment report.** PTU still promotes equality and diversity well. All staff and learners receive a full induction in equality of opportunity covering a day and a half. The main full-day course on rights and responsibilities is very detailed and thorough and gives a good grounding in equality and diversity. Learners have a good understanding of equality issues, which is appropriately reinforced through reviews and in other contexts, such as the apprentices' newsletter. PTU draws on LBC's comprehensive range of policies and procedures which have been updated since the previous inspection to include reference to sexuality and religious tolerance. The legal requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 are fulfilled. There is a race equality scheme, which PTU reports to as part of the human resources department. The proportion of black and minority ethnic learners has declined since the previous inspection and does not meet the target of 40 per cent, based on the school-age black and minority ethnic population of Luton. PTU recently halved the target to 20 per cent. Despite a relatively wide range of provision, most learners are based in occupational areas which reflect gender stereotypes. Publicity materials for the provision make little attempt to challenge the stereotypes. PTU recognises these weaknesses and is in the process of rectifying them.

19. **PTU has a good culture of quality improvement**, which is set by the management team. Quality improvement practices cover most key aspects of training, and produce reports which include action plans and which are monitored well. The insufficient reporting which was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection has been fully rectified. However, lesson observations which are carried out are not always recorded. This is recognised and being rectified. The key findings of the self-assessment report are summarised in a comprehensive development plan, which is used to monitor the provision closely by the management team. There are examples of action plans being used to improve continuously aspects of the provision. For instance, the induction process has developed substantially in the past three years through the review and action-planning process.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good management of provision
- good development of staff
- good promotion of equality and diversity
- good culture of continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- some weak targets for equality of opportunity

Business administration and law

Administration

Grade 2

Strengths

- high retention rate
- good achievement rate
- good development of work skills
- good additional training
- very effective support for learners
- particularly effective review process

Weaknesses

- insufficient achievement of key skills qualifications