REINSPECTION REPORT

Hertfordshire LEA Reinspection

23 February 2006

ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.
- 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.

REINSPECTION REPORT

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Hertfordshire County Council (the council) is contracted by Hertfordshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide adult and community learning. The provision is the responsibility of the council's children, schools and families department and is managed within the department by the adult family and community learning group (the service). The service also has responsibility for out-of-school hours learning, extended schools and counselling provision.

2. All of the adult and community learning provision is subcontracted, with the exception of some classes in family learning. There are contracts with the four general further education colleges and the university in Hertfordshire, the libraries service and a range of other providers including community and voluntary organisations and schools.

3. The service has been reorganised since the previous inspection. The head of service reports to the head of access and participation in the council's learning and school effectiveness area. Staff include the skills for life and family learning manager, the quality and development manager, the commissioning officer, the equalities co-ordinator and the traveller co-ordinator. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. The skills for life and family learning manager reports to the head of service and the team includes two part-time co-ordinators for family literacy and numeracy and four full-time lead teachers. In addition, there is a newly appointed adult and community learning data analyst supported by a consultant. The service contributes to the cost of four community learning organisers located in each of the four general further education colleges. The community learning organisers work alongside the council's four community education development officers, who operate in four geographical regions of the county.

4. Most of the programmes are non-accredited, primarily first-step courses for widening participation and courses for personal development, with some more advanced programmes for skills updating. Courses are offered in all areas of learning, but some have very few enrolments.

5. In 2004-05, there were 13,036 enrolments by 10,981 learners on 1,208 courses. Some 360 tutors are employed by the subcontractors. Courses take place in over 200 locations across the county.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Information & communications technology

6. Provision in information and communications technology (ICT) is subcontracted to three colleges of further education, a local university and the council's community

information service. In 2004-05 there were 1,277 learners enrolled on over 500 courses across 26 venues. Since August 2005, 698 learners have enrolled on 313 courses. Over two-thirds of these were women, 42 per cent were aged over 65 and 11 per cent were from a minority ethnic group. At the time of reinspection, 149 learners were attending 39 courses, delivered by 22 tutors in 19 venues. Most courses are non-accredited and at beginners' level. Courses range in length from one-hour drop-in sessions to programmes of 15 weeks' duration. Most courses take place in the daytime, with some evening and weekend provision.

Visual & performing arts & media

7. The service subcontracts with the four further education colleges and a local university for this area of learning. In 2004-05 there were 3,037 learners enrolled on over 400 courses. At the time of inspection, 207 learners were attending 31 courses. All courses are non-accredited and typically run from one to three hours a week. Courses include sculpture, jewellery, ceramics, drawing, oil painting, textiles, printmaking, guitar playing, dancing and drama. In 2004-05, 47 venues were used, including main college centres, community centres, secondary schools, a district council leisure centre, an arts centre and a university faculty centre. Seventy-three per cent of the current learners are women, 16 per cent are aged over 65 and 7 per cent are from a minority ethnic group. There are currently 122 tutors.

Family learning

8. The service provides family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) and wider family learning programmes. Courses are offered during the day and in the evening, mostly in schools but also in community centres. Courses range from tasters lasting two hour to intensive courses lasting 30 hours. Wider family learning includes courses in healthy living and crafts. FLLN programmes are for learners who wish to develop entry level or level 1 and 2 skills in literacy, numeracy or language. Learners can take the national literacy and numeracy tests on FLLN courses and gain Open College Network (OCN) accreditation. In 2004-05 there were 1,539 learners on family learning courses, of whom 14 per cent were men and 26 per cent were from minority ethnic groups. There are currently 131 learners attending 16 courses at 16 different venues. The service has a full-time manager, two part-time co-ordinators and a direct delivery team of four full-time tutors. Four community officers manage wider family learning provision in the community.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learners interviewed	121
Number of staff interviewed	56
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	20
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	14

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

9. At the previous inspection in December 2004, the service's leadership and management were unsatisfactory and its quality assurance was very weak. Arrangements for equality of opportunity were satisfactory. Provision was good in foundation programmes and satisfactory in ICT, visual and performing arts and media, and English, languages and communications. Family learning was unsatisfactory and the provision in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel was very weak. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision which were reinspected were found to be satisfactory, with the exception of quality assurance which was unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at previous inspection

Leadership and management	4
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	5

Information & communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT		
⁻ Adult and community learning	198	3

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel		5
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Leisure, sport and recreation		
- Adult and community learning	1577	5

Visual & performing arts & media		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Arts		
- Adult and community learning	1034	3
Other contributory areas		
- Adult and community learning	287	3

English, languages & communications		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Languages		
- Adult and community learning	1551	3

Foundation programmes		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Independent living and leisure skills		
- Adult and community learning	305	2

Family learning		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
- Adult and community learning	103	4

Grades awarded at reinspection

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

Information & communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT ⁻ Adult and community learning	149	3

Visual & performing arts & media		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Arts ⁻ Adult and community learning	207	3

Family learning		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
⁻ Adult and community learning	131	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

10. **Learners achieve a wide range of personal learning goals.** They increase their confidence, recognise their own needs and develop new interests in learning. **In ICT, learners gain social and personal confidence** while increasing their ability to use new skills in the workplace or at home.

11. **In visual and performing arts, learners develop good painting, craft and dance skills.** They develop observational skills, a better understanding of the quality of their materials and achieve good standards of work. **Learners make significant personal and social gains.** Those with severe learning disabilities work co-operatively and learn to further develop their independent living skills.

12. **In family learning, learners achieve a better understanding of their children's needs and gain confidence to support their children's learning.** Since the previous inspection, there is a much improved focus on meeting the needs of parents as adult learners and, in particular, the development of their own literacy and numeracy skills.

13. Most courses are still non-accredited, and although accreditation is now available for literacy and numeracy in family learning, only a very small number of learners have gained qualifications.

14. The availability of achievement and retention data has improved since the previous inspection. However, data is not used sufficiently to raise standards.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Information & communications technology	0	1	6	1	8
Visual & performing arts & media	3	4	5	0	12
Family learning	0	3	1	1	5
Total	**3**	**8**	**12**	**2**	**25**

15. Overall, 44 per cent of the teaching and learning sessions observed by inspectors were judged to be good or better and 48 per cent were satisfactory. The remaining 8 per cent were judged to be unsatisfactory.

16. ICT classes are small and tutors provide good individual support for learners. Tutors draw on learners' interests for internet research. Individual taster sessions in the libraries provide learners with good opportunities to sample a variety of applications.

17. In visual and performing arts, the best sessions are lively and challenging and learners produce confident work with evidence of experimentation. In some less successful lessons for learners with disabilities, there is insufficient integration of support workers in lesson planning.

18. Family learning tutors provide well-structured learning activities. Content is relevant, challenging and inclusive.

19. **The service provides good support to encourage participation by learners not traditionally involved in learning.** In some family learning classes, the minority ethnic curriculum support service provides language support for learners who speak English as an additional language.

20. Learning materials are generally satisfactory, and some good use is made of specialist facilities within subcontracted college provision for the visual arts. However, some community centres lack sufficient space for their class sizes and few family learning classes have access to ICT.

21. The recording of progress and achievement is now satisfactory, having been identified as a weakness in the previous inspection. Quality assurance arrangements have been put into place to support monitoring and evaluation. In family learning, an initial assessment provides evidence for individual learning plans, and most tutors in visual and performing arts now complete learning plans in partnership with learners. However, **weaknesses remain in the recognition and recording of progress and achievement within ICT** and, overall, inconsistencies remain in the completion and quality of learning plans.

Leadership and management

22. **Many good improvements to develop a more coherent service have been made since the previous inspection.** All the provision offered by the service is now satisfactory. Although quality improvement remains unsatisfactory, this area has also significantly improved. The council has taken a greater interest in the role of the service, its role in community regeneration and in the delivery of a coherent range of provision to support lifelong learning across the county. The profile of the service is now much higher across the county.

23. The capacity of the service has been strengthened. Key appointments to manage quality improvement, equality of opportunity, and family learning and skills for life have been made. Good use of staff expertise from within the council has improved the management of data and the commissioning of subcontractors.

24. The use of partnerships and provider networks has been strengthened since the previous inspection. Arrangements for information, advice and guidance have improved. The provider networks have provided good opportunities to discuss the curriculum and stimulate an improved focus on adult and community learning, particularly within the colleges.

25. **The service has provided good support for subcontractors to develop provision.** The tendering process is thorough, and new voluntary and community providers particularly value the support they receive from the service to submit funding bids. The tendering process now includes clear criteria which reflect the service and the council's strategic objectives. Subcontractors take part in a comprehensive induction and receive a range of useful resources, policies and procedures to support the development and quality of provision.

26. A well-planned programme of staff development is in place for subcontractors. This has included training on literacy and numeracy support and on carrying out lesson observations. Subcontractors have frequent opportunities to meet within providers' networks and share practice, and the service has provided additional funding for subcontractors to purchase teaching resources.

27. Staff development and training within the service are satisfactory. A good mentoring and induction programme is in place for new staff.

28. The analysis and use of data has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. Data is now generally reliable and accurate and many subcontractors have access to the service's management information system. Subcontractors have started to use data to assess the quality of their provision and the participation rates for different groups of learners.

29. **Insufficient focus is placed on curriculum planning.** The allocation of funding is not sufficiently linked to an overall strategy for the development of the different curriculum areas. The curriculum offer is fragmented, with often a small amount of provision in a

wide range of subject areas. The service has not carried out sufficient county-wide analysis of learners' needs. Monitoring of progression rates is poor and the development of progression routes is weak in family learning and ICT.

30. **The service has good strategies to widen participation and promote equality and diversity.**   Since the previous inspection, the service has more clearly positioned itself to widen participation. It has strengthened the use of partnerships and projects to reach under-represented groups. Projects with travellers and carers across the county have been further developed and participation in family learning provision continues to increase.

31. The new tendering process for potential subcontractors more closely reflects the service's commitment to widening participation. An increasing number of voluntary and community providers now provide learning opportunities closely aimed at the council's target groups.

32. The equalities co-ordinator provides effective leadership and support within the service. The service has introduced a number of initiatives to support equality and diversity within classroom practice. These include support materials for tutors, staff training and the monitoring of equality within the provider monitoring process. Reports arising from these visits are not yet sufficiently detailed and evaluative.

33. The service's response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 has improved since the previous inspection. Equality and diversity impact measures support target-setting and recruitment strategies and a black and minority ethnic learner strategy has been developed. The service has improved its use of data to evaluate equality of opportunity, although it does not yet use data fully to plan the curriculum. Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of different groups of learners now takes place at the level of each provider, but has yet to be used to support curriculum analysis.

34. **The service has been slow to implement arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support.** This weakness was recognised during the previous inspection and, although some improvements have been made, progress has been slow. Variations exist in the arrangements for initial assessment and the provision of referral and support for literacy, numeracy and language. A new policy has been developed for the integration of skills for life, and the monitoring of support is now included in provider visits. However, it is too early to assess the effect of this work.

35. The arrangements for quality assurance have improved since the previous inspection but are still unsatisfactory. The service recognises the need for further development. The new quality development manager has worked hard to develop a quality management framework, policies and procedures. **However, insufficient attention is paid to monitoring the quality of provision.**

36. Lesson observations have significantly increased and many lesson observations are now carried out by staff who are curriculum specialists. Although many improvements have been made in the observation system, the standard of lesson observations varies

considerably. In many observations, insufficient focus is placed on learning and the grades given do not accurately reflect the written feedback. Actions following lesson observations are not always clearly identified.

37. The collection of feedback from learners has improved and the service has recently started to carry out interviews with learners to identify their concerns more accurately. However, the service still carries out insufficient monitoring to check that subcontractors are collecting and using feedback effectively. Questionnaires are not evaluated sufficiently to identify any key improvement required.

38. **Insufficient monitoring of performance takes place.** This weakness was identified in the previous inspection. Improved monitoring arrangements are not used thoroughly to evaluate how well providers are raising standards. Achievement and retention data is not used sufficiently to evaluate the quality of provision. Key priorities identified during visits are not always followed up. Senior managers do not have sufficient knowledge about the overall performance of the service. A more thorough system for the monitoring of key performance indicators is being developed.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good improvements to develop a more coherent service
- good support for subcontractors to develop the provision
- good strategies to widen participation and promote equality and diversity

Weaknesses

- insufficient focus on curriculum planning
- insufficient monitoring of performance
- slow implementation of arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support

Information & communications technology

Using IT

Strengths

- good progress towards achieving personal learning goals
- good support for learners not traditionally involved in learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient recognition and recording of progress and achievement
- insufficient identification of literacy and numeracy skills support needs

Visual & performing arts & media

Arts

Strengths

- significant personal and social gains
- good development of skills in painting, crafts and dance classes

Weaknesses

- insufficient specialist support for curriculum development and quality improvement

Family learning

Strengths

- good development of skills and confidence
- good use of partnerships to attract learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient emphasis on progression
- insufficient curriculum management

Language of the Adult and Community Learning Sector

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

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

Other terms used in Adult and Community Learning

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

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

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDING

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT   Grade 3

Strengths
- good improvements to develop a more coherent service
- good support for subcontractors to develop the provision
- good strategies to widen participation and promote equality and diversity

Weaknesses
- insufficient focus on curriculum planning
- insufficient monitoring of performance
- slow implementation of arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support

39. Since the previous inspection, there have been good improvements to develop a more coherent service. Provision in the areas of learning found to be unsatisfactory and very weak at the previous inspection has improved and is now satisfactory. Key appointments have been made to manage quality improvement, equality of opportunity and family learning. The service has used the expertise of staff from other areas of the council well to assist in improving the management of data and the commissioning of subcontractors. Senior managers within the council have taken a greater interest in the role of adult and community learning and, in particular, its influence on community regeneration and the development of extended schools. They now receive regular reports on the progress of the service to resolve the key challenges identified at the previous inspection.

40. Staff have been honest, self-critical and realistic about the difficulties facing the service to bring about continuous improvement. The service has a much higher profile across the county than at the previous inspection. Key systems and procedures have been introduced to bring about consistency in the way in which important information is gathered. Good use has been made of external consultants to improve the service. Subcontractors and partner organisations collaborate well with the service. For example, good partnership working with nextstep has improved the arrangements for information, advice and guidance.

41. The subcontracted general further education colleges value the frequent opportunities to meet and to discuss curriculum issues. The increased activity of the service has instigated an improved focus on adult and community learning within the colleges. There is greater clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the service and the colleges' curriculum managers.

42. The service gives good support to subcontractors to develop the provision. The tendering process that subcontractors have to go through to gain funding is thorough

and impartial. New voluntary and community providers, in particular, value the support they receive from the service to submit funding bids. The criteria against which bids are judged accurately reflect the service's strategic objectives and ensure that providers' capacity to offer their planned provision is assessed carefully. A number of providers have not retained their contracts in 2005-06 where the provision does not meet the service's contracting specifications, or where alternative funding is available. New subcontractors take part in a comprehensive induction and receive a useful resources CD, which includes all the service's paperwork and example policies for complaints, child protection and equal opportunities. The service has helped some providers to write their own policies and procedures.

43. The service's staff have carried out a well-planned programme of staff development for subcontractors, including training on literacy and numeracy support and on carrying out lesson observations. Where training needs are identified during monitoring visits to subcontractors, the service responds quickly to ensure that providers are given the necessary support. The service's staff have supported libraries to develop the teaching skills of librarians involved in the delivery of ICT taster courses. Subcontractors value the frequent opportunities to meet at providers' network meetings and to share good practice. The service has provided additional funding for subcontractors to purchase teaching resources, such as digital cameras for use in recording learners' progress and achievements, and to put on staff development sessions on providers' premises for their own staff.

44. Staff development and training opportunities for the service's staff are satisfactory. Staff who have been appointed since the previous inspection have been mentored well to develop their areas of expertise. The induction for service employees is good. They have benefited from many of the training events arranged for subcontractors' staff. Teamwork is good and staff support each other well.

45. The analysis and use of data has improved since the previous inspection and is now generally satisfactory. The reliability and accuracy of data have improved. Service employees and subcontractors' staff have attended training on the use of the management information system. Subcontractors are issued with a useful data toolkit and many now have access to the service's management information system. They have started to use data to make judgements about the quality of their provision and on participation rates for different groups of learners.

46. The service places insufficient focus on curriculum planning. The annual contracting process to approve bids from subcontractors for funding is not linked sufficiently to an overall strategy for the development of the different areas of learning. The service does not have a strategy for the delivery of the curriculum in most subjects. For example, the monitoring of progression rates is poor in family learning and ICT, as is the development of progression routes, and curriculum planning is weak in sport and leisure. The curriculum offer is fragmented, with often small amounts of provision provided in a wide range of subject areas. The service has not carried out sufficient county-wide analysis of learners' needs. Area of learning leads have recently been appointed from the existing subcontractors to co-ordinate the curriculum in a number of subject areas. They have

provided useful reports on the quality of the provision in some subcontractors. However, some leads are not sufficiently clear about their roles and responsibilities and have varying amounts of experience.

Equality of opportunity   Contributory grade 3

47. The service has maintained the satisfactory promotion of equality of opportunity. While the strengths identified at the time of the previous inspection have been better integrated with the service, it is too early to judge the effect of new initiatives and, in particular, activities to support skills for life across the county.

48. The service has implemented good strategies to widen participation and promote equality and diversity. These strategies have strengthened the good use of partnerships and projects to reach under-represented groups, which were identified during the previous inspection. The service has now clearly positioned itself to widen participation in adult and family learning, work with learners who experience significant barriers to participation and support the broader aims of the council's lifelong learning strategy.

49. Effective projects identified during the previous inspection have continued and become better integrated with the service. The travellers' project has increased course provision in the current year. For many travellers, classes provide a new experience of formal learning. Introductory beauty courses have supported some 20 travellers into a college environment for the first time and helped them identify progression into accredited courses. Successful work with carers has continued and the development of partnerships with the adult care and social services has widened participation by what are often unrepresented members of the community. Extensive marketing of a growing range of courses, including a new accredited programme, attracts increasing numbers of carers into provision. The family learning service continues to increase participation and promote equality of opportunity by working closely with parents to increase their involvement in their children's education and to improve their own learning and skills.

50. The new tendering process for potential subcontractors now more closely reflects the service's commitment to widening participation by under-represented learners. Identified learners are targeted in the funding prospectus and an increasing number of voluntary and community providers are now providing learning opportunities which more closely fit the council's target groups.

51. The previous inspection identified particularly effective provision for learners with profound learning difficulties or disabilities. This area was not within the scope of the reinspection as it was part a college inspection in October 2005. Provision was judged to be good within this inspection. The previous inspection identified as a key challenge, the need to find alternative funding routes for the provision at the college's Springfield site. A project management group has been formed and discussions have placed funding within a wider strategic planning process for developing provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the county.

52. The council has a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that provide a

good framework for the adult and community learning service. Policies are regularly updated and the council's priorities are reflected and well developed within the objectives for the adult learning service. The equalities co-ordinator for the service provides effective leadership and support within the service. The service recognises that classroom practice does not yet adequately reflect diversity and equality principles and it has introduced a number of support materials to rectify this weakness. These include a section on equality and diversity within the providers' induction pack and an extremely informative section on the service's website to support tutor practice. The first issue of the new tutors' newsletter focused on equality issues in teaching and learning and helped tutors to think about how to ensure fairness and equality in the classroom. The providers' monitoring process includes an appraisal of how providers integrate equality into their provision, although evaluations are not sufficiently detailed to support improvements. Staff development, including disability awareness training, is offered to providers and the service has developed disability guidance for all providers. The service has yet to develop an adequate range of progression opportunities within curriculum areas or to provide courses leading to qualifications to help learners access further training and employment.

53. The service has improved its response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 since the previous inspection. Equality and diversity impact measures are drawn up at council level and have supported the assessment and identification of priorities within the service. This supports target-setting and recruitment strategies at local service levels. Profiling data indicates that the service is already exceeding targets. Participation by minority ethnic groups has increased. In 2004-05, participation was 12.7 per cent, well above the service's target of 4.6 per cent. In the current year, participation is already at 9.1 per cent. The minority ethnic support group for the service has been reconvened and, alongside a range of initiatives, it has developed a black and minority ethnic learners' strategy. An effective consultative process has been established and reflects the service's increasingly active approach to equality and diversity.

54. The service has made progress since the previous inspection on the use of data to evaluate equality of opportunity. Equal opportunities data is available for each provider but is not yet used fully to plan the curriculum. Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of different groups of learners now takes place at the level of each provider but this has not yet been translated to the curriculum level to support curriculum analysis. The service does not analyse the performance of different groups within different curriculum areas. There is no overview of how each area is performing in relation to the equal opportunities profile in its location.

55. The service has been slow to implement arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support. Careful attention is given to the individual needs of learners, but arrangements still vary for initial assessment and the provision of literacy, numeracy and language skills support and referral. The self-assessment report recognises the insufficient monitoring and evaluation of support for learners across all providers. A new literacy, numeracy and language policy and an individual planning framework have been implemented and a programme of support has been offered to providers to integrate skills for life into programmes where appropriate. Monitoring of support is now included

within monitoring visits. It is too early to assess the effect of this work. Responsibility for leading the development of a whole organisation strategy for skills for life, which encompasses both adult and community learning and the council's workforce development, lies within the service.

Quality assurance   Contributory grade 4

56. The arrangements for quality assurance have improved since the previous inspection, but are still unsatisfactory. The service appointed a quality and development manager just before the previous inspection. This manager has worked hard to develop a quality management framework and a wide range of quality assurance policies and procedures. The service clearly recognises the need to improve its quality assurance arrangements. However, too much focus has been placed on the development of new paperwork to monitor subcontractors' provision, and not enough attention is given to the monitoring of the quality of provision. Some of the paperwork is too complex and there is some duplication of information and evidence. The quality assurance steering group, which was reformed just before the previous inspection, has continued to meet and includes representatives from many of the subcontractors and the LSC. The group's remit has widened since the previous inspection to include the moderation of the service's overall self-assessment report and the monitoring of progress against the key challenges identified in the inspection report. All subcontractors attend business development meetings, which are used effectively for training and the sharing of good practice.

57. The service has significantly increased the number of lesson observations carried out since the previous inspection. It has fully implemented a lesson observation scheme and held useful training sessions for staff. Experienced providers value the opportunity to use their own paperwork and staff to carry out classroom observations of teaching and learning. Many lesson observations are now carried out by staff who are specialists in the area of learning being observed. The service has produced useful written reports of the lesson observation scheme, which identify the key strengths and weaknesses of the classes observed as well as summaries of each subcontractor's lesson observation grade profile. However, the standard of lesson observations carried out varies considerably. The observations carried out in the general further education colleges by their own staff are more detailed and evaluative than those in the smaller subcontractors. In many cases, the service's observations place insufficient focus on learning and learners' attainment and the grade does not accurately reflect the written feedback. The written reports contain too many judgements about paperwork of the provider in question. The actions required by the tutor following lesson observations are not always clearly identified. The grading criteria written by the service for lesson observations do not focus sufficiently on learning and attainment.

58. Until recently, the service has not directly collected feedback from learners, but has relied on each subcontractor's systems and procedures. The service does not carry out sufficient monitoring to check that subcontractors are collecting and using feedback effectively to improve provision. The service's records of learners' feedback are incomplete and the questionnaires it does hold are not analysed or evaluated sufficiently

to identify any key improvements required. However, the service has started recently to carry out its own interviews with learners to identify their concerns more accurately. Four subcontractors had been visited at the time of the inspection, but it is too early to judge the outcomes of this new process on the quality of provision.

59. There is insufficient monitoring of performance. This weakness was identified at the previous inspection. The monitoring team has been expanded to increase the capacity of the service to carry out the required number of monitoring visits to all providers. However, too much reliance is placed on the auditing of subcontractors' paperwork, policies and procedures during the visits. Staff do not use the improved monitoring arrangements to evaluate thoroughly learners' achievements, the standards of teaching and learning, and leadership and management. Important data is not reviewed sufficiently during monitoring visits, such as achievement rates, retention rates, learners' progress and attendance rates. Learners and tutors are not involved sufficiently during visits in providing evidence for the service to evaluate accurately the quality of subcontractors' provision. Key priorities identified during monitoring visits are not always followed up during subsequent visits. Senior managers are not sufficiently aware of the main issues which arise overall from the monitoring of individual subcontractors. The overall performance of the service is not monitored closely enough at management meetings within the service or the council. This weakness has been identified by managers who are now developing a more thorough system for the monitoring of important performance indicators.

60. The service's self-assessment process has improved since the previous inspection, but it is still not a sufficiently effective tool for improvement. The most recent self-assessment report was written for the 2004-05 academic year. The report is detailed, but the influence of many of the strengths and weaknesses on the quality of the provision is not accurately identified. There is insufficient evidence to support some of the judgements. Individual subcontractors' self-assessment reports are not sufficiently evaluative or critical. Some of the strengths identified in the area of learning reports are no more than normal practice and a number of strengths and weaknesses identified in individual curriculum areas are contradictory. In some areas of learning, the grade given by the service does not accurately reflect the balance of strengths and weaknesses. There is insufficient involvement by all the service's staff in the production of the overall self-assessment report. The grades given by inspectors for leadership and management and the areas of learning inspected during this visit matched those given by the service.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Information & communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT - Adult and community learning	149	3

Using IT

Strengths

- good progress towards achieving personal learning goals
- good support for learners not traditionally involved in learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient recognition and recording of progress and achievement
- insufficient identification of literacy and numeracy skills support needs

Achievement and standards

61. Learners make good progress towards achieving their personal learning goals. They gain significant skills in basic computer applications including word processing, spreadsheets, databases, use of the internet and e-mail. Learners value the development of social and personal confidence and their growing ability to use skills in the workplace or at home. One learner was attending a computer presentation application class to help them in giving presentations at work in a voluntary organisation. Some learners are now able to help their children with schoolwork and many hope to gain employment. Standards have been maintained and learners' work is generally satisfactory. During the inspection, attendance was satisfactory at 82 per cent. The retention rate remains very good at 96 per cent, although the provision continues to largely consist of short or very short courses

Quality of education and training

62. The service provides good support to encourage participation by learners not traditionally involved in learning. Learners who experience significant barriers to learning are supported by sensitive tutors, who provide guidance in non-threatening environments. Tutors conduct initial information and guidance interviews in a manner which does not overwhelm learners. For example, in a women-only centre, initial guidance is aimed at making the learner comfortable with the process and carefully avoids excessive form filling which could deter vulnerable learners. Some tutors give additional time in guided learning sessions to enable learners to progress further.

63. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Classes are small and allow for individual support from tutors. In better sessions, tutors draw on learners' personal interests as examples for internet research and use probing question and answer techniques to confirm learning.

64. The service has maintained its individual taster sessions in local libraries. These enable learners to sample various applications in a non-threatening environment. Learners acquire the skills needed, for example, to set up and maintain e-mail accounts or use the internet to shop or to carry out research for family history projects. Many learners attend these courses who may not otherwise continue with their learning.

65. There is insufficient recognition and recording of learners' progress and achievement. This weakness was recognised in the previous inspection and in the current self-assessment report. Since the previous inspection, the service has put quality assurance measures in place to ensure that initial assessment supports the individual learning plan. However, in many cases the paperwork has not been fully completed, sometimes weeks after the start of the programme. A support programme to make improvements has been devised but it is too early to judge the effect of this programme on the learners.

66. Insufficient identification of learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills support needs takes place. This weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report. There is little provision for learners to undergo initial assessment of their needs, and opportunities for reinforcement of skills are not established in schemes of work or lesson plans. Some tutors provide informal support, while others encourage learners to contact referral agencies.

67. Resources for ICT remain generally good. Most rooms are well equipped and make good use of information learning technology such as projectors and smartboards. Learners are able to follow clear demonstrations of technique before practising for themselves to develop their skills. Teaching materials are satisfactory overall and some are good. Clear handouts with screen images aid understanding and, where appropriate, font sizes are enlarged and text is kept to a minimum so that beginners can proceed in small steps and consolidate their learning before progressing. There is limited sharing of good practice and teaching materials. Some community venues have poor ventilation and cramped conditions. In one venue, part of the room was being used by an administrator leading to distracting interruptions by telephone calls.

Leadership and management

68. The service has effectively started to shift resources to widen participation and encourage progression. Women-only provision has almost doubled enrolments, compared with the same period in the previous year. The range of courses offered in ICT has improved. Learners can now attend introductory and second-level classes in word processing, spreadsheets, databases, presentational software and desktop

publishing, as well as new courses in digital photography, web page design and digital music production.

69. Observations of teaching and learning now incorporate subject specialists and, recently, an area lead has been nominated from a local college to co-ordinate activities across the service. New systems for information, advice and guidance are being implemented but at the time of inspection it was too early to judge the effect of these initiatives. The service was unable to provide accurate information about progression for a significant number of its learners.

70. The self-assessment report for ICT is too descriptive and some strengths and weaknesses are contradictory.

Visual & performing arts & media

Visual & performing arts & media		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Arts - Adult and community learning	207	3

Arts

Strengths

- significant personal and social gains
- good development of skills in painting, crafts and dance classes

Weaknesses

- insufficient specialist support for curriculum development and quality improvement

Achievement and standards

71. Learners make significant personal and social gains. In dance and drama classes, learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are offered physical activities, work co-operatively in dance formations and learn to better manage their behaviour. Other classes provide opportunities for learners with mental health issues to re-engage and focus on the development of creative skills.

72. There is good development of skills in painting, craft and dance classes. In most classes, learners learn new skills or further develop their existing skills. Standards have been maintained since the previous inspection. In a sculpture class, most learners were working from a life model to make clay figures. This involved the development of observational skills, the preparation of an armature and an understanding of the qualities of clay as a modelling material. In a soft furnishings class, learners with little or no previous experience of laying out and cutting material, and using sewing machines were succeeding in making Roman blinds of a good standard. Learners in a printmaking class were developing their skills in a wide range of printmaking techniques, including woodblock, etching, lino, silk screen and aquatint.

Quality of education and training

73. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In a figure-drawing class, teaching was lively, challenging and rigorous and standards of work were very high. Work was on a large scale, confident and showed evidence of experimentation. In a class for learners with severe physical disabilities, the teaching was stimulating. Support workers effectively helped all learners to progress and achieve their goals. In a soft furnishings class and a dressmaking class for beginners, the tutors effectively combined whole-class

teaching and demonstrations with individual guidance to ensure that all learners could progress and achieve without waiting for help. In less successful classes, there was insufficient integration of support workers into lesson planning. In a dance class, the support worker was not sufficiently involved in encouraging reluctant learners to participate in class activities. Some classes lacked appropriate challenge and inspiration.

74. Planning and recording of learners' progress is now satisfactory in most classes, having been identified as a weakness in the previous inspection. Most tutors complete individual learning plans in partnership with the learners. However, this improvement is very recent and learners sometimes do not complete the initial assessment until the third or fourth week of the programme. Lesson plans do not contain sufficient information about learners' individual needs, including literacy, numeracy and/or language skills support needs when appropriate. Schemes of work are often complex and do not always reflect project activities within art and craft courses.

75. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. Classes make good use of college accommodation with appropriate workshops and specialist facilities, including a well-equipped textile studio and a pottery workshop. Some community centres lack sufficient space for their class size.

76. A satisfactory range of daytime and evening courses is provided across the county. The service's provision, apart from the subcontracted college provision, is limited. Provision for learners with mental health illness or severe learning difficulties provides a valuable contribution to the learners' wellbeing.

77. Guidance and support are satisfactory. The service provides a range of information about courses, fees and course content, and has used a website listing courses to provide information and enrolment information.

Leadership and management

78. Insufficient specialist support is provided for curriculum development and quality improvement. There is no overall strategy for the development of the curriculum. Although subcontracted college providers respond to demand, this is not part of an informed county-wide initiative. This was recognised at the time of the previous inspection.

79. Although the service planned to employ a curriculum lead for the area of learning, there has now been a change to this strategy. Insufficient curriculum support continues and the development of this area is being limited. There is little specialist observation of teaching and learning and the quality and appropriateness of observation comments is variable. Observations do not include enough curriculum-specific comments to support the raising of standards. The self-assessment report accurately identifies the need for an increase in curriculum-specialist observations. Many tutors have difficulty in attending meetings. Meetings do not sufficiently focus on curriculum-specific issues and do not provide opportunities to share good practice. The self-assessment report recognises this

weakness.

80. The self-assessment report overstates most strengths and does not confirm these with sufficient evidence. Inspectors judged that the area identified as a weakness was now satisfactory but identified a new weakness.

Family learning

Family learning		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
⁻ Adult and community learning	131	3

Strengths

- good development of skills and confidence
- good use of partnerships to attract learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient emphasis on progression
- insufficient curriculum management

Achievement and standards

81. The good development of skills and confidence enhances learners' parenting and personal and social skills. They gain a better understanding of the language used in the literacy and numeracy curriculum and gain the confidence to support their children's learning. They are able to help their children at home. In one session, parents were taught how to count the number of syllables in a word and shown how they could use this to help their children improve their reading and spelling. This much-improved focus on meeting the needs of parents as adult learners rectifies a weakness identified in the previous inspection.

82. A head teacher commented how parents who attend classes now understand the importance of good attendance to improve learning. Children's attendance at school has improved. Teachers also report that Bangladeshi families attending family learning courses are now reducing the number of extended holidays that they take or ensure that these coincide with school holidays.

83. In 2004-05, the retention rate was good at 97 per cent, an increase of 2 per cent on the previous year. However, in 2004-05, the number of learners attending courses leading to national qualifications was low at 10. Of these, nine successfully passed the national literacy test. In the current year, no learner has been entered for the literacy or numeracy national test. The service has recently gained recognition to run national OCN accreditation but to date no learners have been given the opportunity to gain this external accreditation. The availability of data on achievement and retention has improved since the previous inspection, when no reliable data was available.

Quality of education and training

84. The service has developed effective partnerships with a wide variety of organisations from voluntary and statutory sectors, such as the minority ethnic community support service and the travellers unit, that successfully widen participation in its family learning programmes. The service's traveller co-ordinator works with local groups to identify what they hope to achieve and then goes to lessons to encourage attendance. The minority ethnic community support service officer based in a local school makes good use of links with community groups to promote the provision and attendance at courses.

85. Teaching is satisfactory overall. In the better sessions, learning activities are well structured and thoroughly prepared, and the content is relevant and challenging, inclusive and well managed. In some less successful lessons, tutors are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the specific subject and provide inaccurate information to learners.

86. Family learning programmes do not focus sufficiently on helping learners to progress to other learning programmes. In one taster session observed, no information was given about further programmes and learners were unable to make informed decisions about joining further courses. There is space on the individual learning plan to record next steps for learners but this is not always completed. If it is completed, it is frequently used to refer the learner to an initial advice and guidance visit but there is no record of any outcome of the visit. There is no effective monitoring of how well family learning provision motivates parents to pursue further learning opportunities.

87. Learning resources are satisfactory but few classes have access to ICT. Accommodation is generally satisfactory but some classrooms are too small and some lessons are occasionally disrupted by noise from school activities.

88. Support for learners is satisfactory. In some classes, the minority ethnic curriculum support service provides language support for learners who speak English as an additional language. There are crèche facilities for some but not all courses.

89. The recording of progress is now satisfactory, having been identified as unsatisfactory in the previous inspection. Learners undergo an initial assessment and this provides evidence for their individual learning plan. The plans also include group targets, but these are not always appropriate. For example, some more able learners are given group targets that are far too easy and do not sufficiently stimulate new learning. The service is beginning to record progress against the individual targets but it is too early for results to be accumulated or evaluated.

Leadership and management

90. There is insufficient curriculum management. Since the previous inspection, a team of managers and staff have been appointed to deliver family learning. Most tutors are appropriately qualified or are working towards teaching qualifications. However, some staff have been employed with specific expertise in literacy, numeracy or language but

are being asked to teach subjects in which they have no expertise. The quality of teaching and learning within these sessions is limited. Tutors attend regular staff development sessions including training on child protection.

91. The strategy and action plan for family learning 2005-08 are still in draft form. They do not set specific measurable targets and contain a limited focus on how actions will improve the experience of learners. The service is currently struggling to meet its targets for learners. Currently, it has recruited 262 learners on FLLN provision against a target of 1,184 learners, and has recruited 296 learners in wider family learning against a target of 751. Despite this significant shortfall, the service has not identified strategies to meet challenging targets.

92. Quality assurance systems have been introduced since the previous inspection but have not yet been fully established. There is a new internal verification system for direct delivery programmes but this is not fully understood by tutors and it is too early to assess if it has had any effect on improving the quality of teaching and learning. This internal verification system is not extended to provision delivered by subcontractors. Monitoring visits to subcontractors have been introduced but many issues raised during visits are not dealt with and remain in subsequent visits.