

INSPECTION REPORT

The Friends Centre

21 October 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*

INSPECTION REPORT

The Friends Centre

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Overall effectiveness	1
Key challenges for The Friends Centre	2
Grades	2
About the inspection	3
Key Findings	3
What learners like about The Friends Centre	10
What learners think The Friends Centre could improve	10

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	14
Equality of opportunity	15
Quality improvement	16
Information and communications technology	18
Arts, media and publishing	21
Preparation for life and work	24

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Friends Centre is an independent adult education centre, formally established by the Society of Friends in 1945 to provide adult learning in Brighton and Hove. The Society of Friends has a history of providing for adult learning needs which dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. There are now no legal or operational connections between the Society of Friends and The Friends Centre, though historical and personal links still exist between the two organisations. The Friends Centre moved from the Society of Friends' premises in Brighton to new premises in July 2005.

2. The Friends Centre offers a range of provision funded by Sussex Learning and Skills Council (LSC), with courses in eight areas of learning. In recent years most of the provision has shifted from general adult education courses to literacy and numeracy programmes, and courses in English for Speakers of other languages (ESOL). In addition to LSC-funded programmes, The Friends Centre also hosts courses run by the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Sussex. Additional support for The Friends Centre's literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes comes from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), and local Sure Start and neighbourhood renewal funding. The centre runs a number of courses in accredited tutor and volunteer training, initially supported by the Capacity for Learning in Communities (CliC) programme, funded by the LSC and the SRB. CliC courses are now provided for staff and volunteers in other organisations on a fee-paying basis.

3. The Friends Centre currently subcontracts with one voluntary sector organisation, the Sussex Community Internet Project. It also has extensive partnership arrangements in place to provide community-based learning. Formal partnerships across the community include the UK online project, an ESOL outreach project, East Brighton Adult Learning Consortium and the Adult and Community Learning Consortium.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

4. **The overall effectiveness of provision is satisfactory.** The Friends Centre's leadership and management are good, and its arrangements for quality improvement and equality of opportunity are satisfactory. In information and communication technology (ICT), and arts, media and publishing, provision is satisfactory, while in preparation for life and work it is good.

5. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is inclusive, has been developed to cover all aspects of provision, and is suitably self-critical. Most of the weaknesses in areas of learning and leadership and management were identified by the self-assessment process. The self-assessment process is regarded as helpful by staff and managers across the organisation.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Senior managers have been responsive to identified weaknesses, and developed an

effective culture of self-assessment and reflection. Quality improvement measures have brought about change and improvement.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE FRIENDS CENTRE:

- implement ways of recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning across the organisation
- involve more staff in self-assessment
- develop more systematic procedures for monitoring performance
- maintain the high retention rates
- secure long-term appropriate accommodation
- continue to expand the use of e-learning

GRADES

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

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

Information and communications technology			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>ICT for users</i>		3	
Adult and community learning	85	3	

Arts, media and publishing			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Crafts</i>		3	
Adult and community learning	59	3	

Preparation for life and work			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>ESOL</i>		2	
Adult and community learning	444	2	
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i>		2	
Adult and community learning	89	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. ICT, arts, media and publishing, and preparation for life and work, were reported on and graded. Provision in business administration and law, education and training, health, public services and care, history, philosophy and theology, and in languages, literature and culture were not included in the inspection because they had too few learners. Inspectors visited The Friends Centre on five consecutive days to carry out the inspection.

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	30
Number of learners interviewed	89
Number of staff interviewed	47
Number of employers interviewed	14
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	27
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	14
Number of visits	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **The retention rate on most courses is good or very good.** For example, during 2004-05 on 10-week courses in ICT, the overall retention rate was 98 per cent. In arts, media and publishing, the retention rate over the past five years has ranged from 75 to 99 per cent, and in 2004-05 it was 88 per cent. For preparation for life and work courses, the retention rate has improved over the past three years to reach 89 per cent. Monitoring of attendance is also good.

9. **ICT learners make good progress.** Learners with no previous experience of computers often improve their confidence in using aspects of ICT, and on the more advanced courses learners develop their skills further and are motivated well. Many learners are pleased with their progress and most clearly enjoy their learning.

10. **Arts, media and publishing courses provide good development of learners' technical skills.** Learners are introduced to, and encouraged to explore, a wide range of techniques to enable them to develop their visual language. A variety of tasks is set to help them practise their skills and gain confidence in their abilities before working on more complex individual projects.

11. **The language and literacy skills of literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners are very effectively developed.** In both literacy and ESOL a strong emphasis is placed on the development of speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. There is good development of functional writing skills such as filling in forms, writing letters and improving learners' curriculum vitae. The focus on the development of these skills enables learners to become more confident, improves their self-esteem and helps them move toward independence.

Learners develop their vocabulary which improves their opportunities to gain employment.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Information and communications technology	1	5	2	0	8
Arts, media and publishing	2	2	2	0	6
Preparation for life and work	3	8	7	1	19
Total	6	15	11	1	33

12. There is **some good teaching in arts, media and publishing**. Over 65 per cent of the teaching sessions observed were graded good or better, and several sessions were outstanding. Courses are well planned and structured. Good-quality handouts are used to reinforce learning, and many of them have been designed and produced by the tutors. The handouts provide a useful source of information on background knowledge and practice and are successfully used in classes and outside. Much of the visual arts teaching is contextualised, with examples of major artists' work available for reference.

13. **The staff in arts, media and publishing are particularly well qualified and experienced**. Eighty-three per cent of staff have teaching qualifications, 23 per cent higher than the government's national target for part-time teaching staff. All staff are encouraged to gain teaching qualifications, and receive financial support to do so. An effective observation scheme supports the continuous improvement of teaching skills.

14. There is **some outstanding teaching in ESOL**. Many lessons are lively and well planned, with speaking skills being developed through a variety of successful strategies such as group discussion, working in pairs, question and answer activities and quizzes. In an outstanding ESOL class, the tutor used a game with paired learners which created a lot of fun and laughter while greatly extending learners' oral descriptive skills. A variety of resources such as ICT, pictures, photographs, tape recordings, newspaper articles, word searches and games are used effectively in literacy, numeracy and ESOL sessions to promote and stimulate learning.

15. **The Friends Centre responds well to local needs in literacy, numeracy and ESOL**. Its good links in the local community involve partnership working with a variety of local and national organisations. The centre is also an active member of the local learning partnership, ensuring that provision is not duplicated, and improving learner referrals from one organisation to another.

16. The centre provides **good support for literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners with additional learning needs**. Additional learning tutors and volunteers are used well in lessons to support learners with specific learning difficulties and enable them to take part in all the class activities.

17. In ICT 75 per cent of observed lessons were good or better and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. Tutors are experienced in their subject areas and in teaching adults in the community. They plan lessons satisfactorily and use well-prepared handouts to support their lessons. Many learners are very satisfied with their classes and appreciate the confidence that they acquire. However, a small number of learners found their lessons

difficult and felt that the pace was too fast.

18. **In ICT, most initial assessment is not sufficiently informative** to be useful in planning learning for individuals. Too little attention is paid to learners' individual needs and prior skills and experience. In one class on how to format a document there were two learners who had never used a mouse before. There was volunteer support available in the class for those learners who were inexperienced in using the mouse. However, they were unable to gain full benefit from the teaching as they did not have the required skills to deal with the primary activity for the class.

19. There is **insufficient monitoring of ICT learners' progress in some sessions**. These sessions are planned for the whole group of learners and all the learners have the same planned learning goal. There is little focus on individual needs and there are no learning plans recording individual progress. Any records of learners' progress are based on the shared goals of the group. At the end of one such observed session, all learners were recorded as having achieved the goal simply by attending the session. There were no checks on learning. Most learners do not have routine reviews of their learning.

20. There is **insufficient monitoring of arts, media and publishing learners' progress**. Learners complete one of the centre's 'shared outcome' forms, but these are seldom detailed enough to allow accurate monitoring of progress. The generic outcomes are completed by the tutor, and learners' comments are limited and unspecific. Tutors evaluate in-class progress and have used the evaluation for planning of future classes.

21. **The courses offered in visual and performing arts are narrow and traditional**. The programme and course content fail to reflect the cultural diversity of the area, apart from a class in belly dancing. The Friends Centre has attempted, without success, to offer some courses with a wider cultural point of relevance. The references used in visual arts courses are, in the main, to western art movements, and fail to explore other cultural forms or movements. Learners are not familiarised with the culture of other groups living in the community.

22. There is **insufficient use of initial assessment in some areas of the ESOL, and literacy and numeracy curriculum**. Initial interviews are used to identify each learner's literacy, numeracy and language level. All ESOL learners are given a very thorough initial assessment by a well-qualified guidance tutor at interview, which should be used to devise their individual learning plans. However, communication between the recruitment advisers and the class tutors is not always effective, and some tutors do not have the results of the initial assessment to use when planning their lessons.

Leadership and management

23. **ICT tutors receive good development and support** from The Friends Centre, and a good programme of staff development is planned for each member of staff through discussions with the co-ordinator. Communication with part-time tutors is good. They have induction meetings at the start of the year and regular visits from the area co-ordinator during the year. Most tutors meet at staff development days and those who work at the same centres share their resources, but the opportunities for sharing good practice are limited at some centres.

24. **ICT resource centres are very well equipped with up-to-date computers and laptop computers.** Tutors demonstrate techniques to their learners, by using either interactive whiteboards or software which enables them to take over the learners' screens. Both these techniques are used effectively. E-learning specialists have developed web-based interactive learning resources which are used by tutors and learners. A range of equipment is available to assist learners who have a specific need.

25. There is **ineffective use of data for quality monitoring in arts, media and publishing.** There is no analysis of the achievement of intakes at course or subject-area level. Specific data on equal opportunities is not used in the review process or target-setting. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is significantly lower than that in the local community. Managers have not set a specific target to deal with this. The self-assessment report is not detailed enough and does not refer to reliable data.

26. **Some accommodation is inappropriate for literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners.** There are access difficulties with one venue in the Old Steine area, and learners often have to wait outside the building until it is unlocked, even during wet weather. The training room used at this venue is crowded and untidy. Access to the photocopier is limited at this venue and there is also only one toilet for use by all learners. In another venue the lift only works intermittently, and the training rooms used are on the second floor. Some of the classrooms are very hot and on occasion a lot of noise from outside prevented windows being opened.

27. The Friends Centre has a **particularly effective board of directors.** The board has a very good range of expertise and experience. Its members includes people with senior posts in the local learning partnership, the Connexions service, local council's children's services and development services, and the principal of a local sixth-form college, which has its own large programme of adult learning. A centre manager and a tutor attend board meetings to represent the staff of The Friends Centre.

28. **Staff receive good development and training.** A wide range of training days and courses has been provided for staff, and tutors are paid to attend training. Each term all staff take part in development days, the mornings of which are used to provide training in statutory and other generic areas, the afternoons for course and area of learning teams. Staff are paid to attend these sessions. There is good support for staff who want to take teaching, professional development and other qualifications.

29. **Senior managers at The Friends Centre maintain an open and consultative management style.** The principal and vice principal have very good relationships with staff across the organisation and have made a number of adjustments to working patterns to accommodate personal or domestic commitments. Staff across the organisation feel valued, and are unusually well informed about and strongly identify with the core aims and values of the organisation.

30. The Friends Centre has developed a **very good range of partnership links** which are effective in bringing provision to the communities of Brighton and Hove. There are very good links with large national and small local voluntary sector organisations, and these have allowed the centre to offer courses at a number of venues in economically deprived areas with many hard-to-reach learners.

31. There is **insufficient routine use of data to manage performance** across the organisation. Managers have a good, well-run management information system that can produce reports on learners', tutors' and curriculum performance, but the system is not routinely used in decision-making about matters such as organisational performance.
32. **The Friends Centre has very effective strategies for attracting learners from under-represented groups.** Through partnership working it has increased the number of learning venues from one to 20 in the past five years. There is good consultation with local community groups about their specific needs and how The Friends Centre can meet them. A recently established centre offers a good joint facility for children and adults with the aim of bringing in new people, particularly from a very deprived area. Staff work productively with an Asian women's group, the Chinese community and the care sector to increase participation from within these groups. The Friends Centre has exceeded its targets to increase participation by younger learners, learners with disabilities and learners from minority ethnic groups.
33. **Most learners and a few staff have a poor understanding of equality of opportunity,** and of their rights and responsibilities. Learners are not given details of the complaints procedures. Many ESOL learners do not understand or appreciate what they have the right to complain about. When learners have complained, however, their complaints are fully and quickly investigated, and the agreed outcomes are recorded.
34. The Friends Centre's **well-established system for observing teaching and learning** is particularly effective in improving the quality of teaching. The observation system is well planned, thorough and includes subcontractors. The grades awarded in observations have improved, and last year, all observed sessions were graded as satisfactory or better. Where tutors are identified as having development needs, these are acted upon and there are close links with supervisors and staff organising training.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- particularly effective board of directors
- good staff development and training
- open and consultative management
- very good partnership links
- good strategies to attract learners from some under-represented groups
- very effective systems for observing teaching and learning
- good quality improvement initiatives

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data to manage performance
- some low awareness of equality of opportunity among learners
- unsystematic arrangements for collecting and using learners' feedback

Information and communications technology

ICT for users

Grade 3

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good progress in class by many learners
- good support and development for tutors
- well-equipped ICT resource centres

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of initial assessment to plan individual learning
- insufficient monitoring of learners' progress in some classes

Arts, media and publishing

Crafts

Grade 3

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good development of learners' technical skills
- some good teaching
- particularly well-qualified and experienced staff

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of learners' progress
- narrow course offer and course content
- ineffective use of data for quality monitoring

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- good retention rates
- very effective development of language and literacy skills
- some outstanding teaching in ESOL classes
- good response to local needs
- good support to meet individual learners' needs

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of initial assessment in some areas
- some inappropriate accommodation

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT THE FRIENDS CENTRE:

- the general feeling of well being at The Friends Centre
- the small group sessions
- the approachable and encouraging staff
- the low fee rates
- the variety of topics and subjects studied

WHAT LEARNERS THINK THE FRIENDS CENTRE COULD IMPROVE:

- the space available for classes
- the crèche provision in some centres
- the number of classes available
- the clarity of introductions to some courses

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.
---------------------------	--

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- particularly effective board of directors
- good staff development and training
- open and consultative management
- very good partnership links
- good strategies to attract learners from some under-represented groups
- very effective systems for observing teaching and learning
- good quality improvement initiatives

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data to manage performance
- some low awareness of equality of opportunity among learners
- unsystematic arrangements for collecting and using learners' feedback

35. The Friends Centre has a particularly effective board of directors, made up of individuals with a very good range of expertise and experience. Its members include people with senior posts in the local learning partnership, the Connexions service, local council children's services and development services, and the principal of a local sixth-form college, which has its own large programme of adult learning. The staff of The Friends Centre are also effectively represented on the board through a centre manager and a tutor. Directors are very knowledgeable about government, regional and local skills and development strategies, and bring this knowledge to bear on their work for The Friends Centre. They have a very detailed knowledge of the operational activities of the centre, meet staff frequently, and attend social and celebratory events and presentation evenings. The directors play a significant part in the self-assessment process. There is one annual awayday, and this is used to develop strategies for the coming year and to formulate the self-assessment report. The centre's principal has received good support from the board in meeting LSC priorities and government strategies. The board also provided particularly effective support for the principal during the centre's move to new premises and during the development of a new senior and curriculum management structure.

36. Staff receive good development and training. A wide range of training days and courses has been provided for staff, and tutors are paid to attend training. At the close of each term all staff take part in development days, the mornings of which are used to provide all-staff training in statutory and other generic areas, and the afternoons for training in course and area of learning activity. Staff are paid to attend these sessions. There is good support for staff to take teaching, professional development and other qualifications. Teaching staff are well qualified, with 93 per cent holding a recognised teaching qualification. Administrative staff are given support to pursue management and other related qualifications, for example one administrator is studying for a certificate in managing voluntary organisations. Staff are able to adjust their working hours to attend courses. Through the CliC programme, staff have participated in a range of training courses on

meeting the needs of adult learners, basic skills, and supporting learning in the community. Staff of partner organisations have also been able to attend these programmes. In addition, a range of continuing development and awareness-raising workshops have been provided for staff by CliC trainers.

37. Senior managers at The Friends Centre maintain an open and consultative management style. There is a good range of minuted staff meetings, occasional briefings and consultations, in addition to a strong culture of open and informal communication from managers. The principal and vice principal have very good relationships with staff across the organisation and have made a number of adjustments to the working patterns of staff to accommodate personal or domestic commitments. Staff across the organisation feel valued, and are unusually well-informed about and strongly identify with the core aims and values of the organisation. In addition, the managers and staff of partner organisations are given a good level of information about The Friends Centre's plans and priorities.

38. The Friends Centre has developed a very good range of partnership links which are effective in bringing provision to the communities of Brighton and Hove. There are very good links with large national and small local voluntary sector organisations, and these have allowed the centre to offer courses at a number of venues in economically deprived areas with many hard-to-reach learners. Strong links with the local authority and very effective links with local sixth-form, community and further education colleges allow each organisation to provide courses without competition or overlap. In addition, the centre has many less formal, but highly effective links with community, faith and minority ethnic groups in the city. There are also good links with national health service trusts, Sure Start, and other health and care bodies and agencies.

39. There is insufficient routine use of data to manage performance across the organisation. Managers have a good, well-run management information system which can produce reports on learners', tutors' and curriculum performance, but the system is not routinely used in decision-making about topics such as organisational performance. In addition, the performance of tutors and curriculum areas is insufficiently monitored. There are few targets to improve individual performance and raise standards.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

40. The Friends Centre has very effective strategies to attract learners from under-represented groups. Through partnership working, it has increased the number of learning venues from one to 20 in the past five years. There is good consultation with local community groups about their specific needs and how The Friends Centre can meet them. A recently established centre offers a good joint facility for children and adults with the aim of bringing in new people, particularly from a very deprived area. Staff work productively with an Asian women's group, the Chinese community and the care sector to increase participation by their members. The Friends Centre has exceeded its targets for increasing participation by younger learners, learners with disabilities and learners from minority ethnic groups. In 2004-05, 21 per cent of learners were from minority ethnic groups, compared with the 5.7 per cent of the population in the Brighton and Hove Unitary Authority. Eleven per cent of learners declared they had a disability in 2004-05.

41. The Friends Centre has a strong ethos of inclusion, and at the core of its mission is a commitment to removing barriers to learning. There is good use of volunteers to enable individual learners to participate, and a variety of specialist agencies are involved in

THE FRIENDS CENTRE

supporting learners. All except one of the centres are fully accessible to learners with disabilities. The Friends Centre has some good adaptive technologies for learners with disabilities. Learners who declare a disability are interviewed by the assistant principal to discuss their individual needs. Many learning venues also have crèche or childcare facilities. Equality of opportunity features strongly in the strategic plan and is monitored at board meetings.

42. Data is used effectively to monitor overall participation. However, targets are set at organisation level, rather than by programme or area of learning. Some targets for new learners and men have not been achieved. In the general adult education provision there are few learners from minority ethnic groups, with most of these learners being on ESOL and CLiC courses. Although a couple of general courses have been offered to attract specific target groups, much of the curriculum is very traditional. For example in visual arts, the focus is very much on western art forms and movements. In ICT, there is insufficient differentiation to meet individual learners' needs. On preparation for life and work courses, diversity is celebrated well in the learning materials. Some course and enrolment information is produced in community languages, but all publicity material is in English.

43. The Friends Centre's equal opportunities policy is appropriate and is displayed in learning venues. Most learners and a few staff in one area have a poor understanding of equality of opportunity, and their rights and responsibilities. Learners are not given details of the complaints procedures. Many ESOL learners do not understand or appreciate why or about what they have the right to complain. However, when learners have complained, the complaints are fully and quickly investigated, and the agreed outcomes recorded. Staff have had insufficient formal training on equality of opportunity and diversity. There are few men and people from minority ethnic groups among the teaching and administrative staff. Members of the board of directors adequately reflect the make up of learners in terms of gender and disability, but do not reflect the ethnic diversity of the local population. The Friends Centre has recently become a member of a black and minority ethnic forum, and a representative from the group has spoken at a staff meeting.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

44. The Friends Centre's well-established system for observing teaching and learning is particularly effective in improving the quality of the provision. The observation system is well-planned, thorough and includes subcontractors. Grades awarded at observations have improved, and last year all observed sessions were graded satisfactory or better. Where tutors are identified as having development needs, these are acted upon, and there are close links with supervisors and staff organising training. The quality co-ordinator follows up the results of teaching and learning observations well at an annual meeting with each tutor. The system is evaluated, and there are very positive comments from tutors. Managers produce an informative and realistic annual report, containing grade profile and strengths and weaknesses for each area of learning. A large proportion of the tutors are observed each year, and this has increased over the past three years. External benchmarking and moderation are used well to make the process very thorough and reliable. Peer observation has further strengthened the observation system, often using observers who are subject specialists.

45. Retention rates have improved significantly over the past three years, and in many areas of learning they are now good. The Friends Centre has commissioned or initiated a wide range of research projects to identify solutions to quality issues, and it uses this

information well. For example, there are now more taster and intensive language courses, and personal tutors have been successfully introduced. The buildings, resources and crèche facilities have been developed and improved extensively. More staff now have teaching qualifications, as a result of various incentives, initiatives and monitoring. Internal communication and the roles of the management committee members were self-assessed as weaknesses three years ago but are now strong. The Friends Centre has made good progress with its self-assessment development plans and has rectified many self-assessed weaknesses.

46. The Friends Centre has an appropriate quality improvement system, supported by staff training events. Workshops have been held to share and develop good practice, but these are not yet fully effective. Although course files have been introduced, there are still some inconsistencies between tutors and courses in initial assessment, individual learning plans, target-setting and monitoring. Staff observing teaching and learning identified these issues last year, but have not yet identified any improvement. There is satisfactory monitoring of the subcontractor. Managers identified problems with a previous subcontractor and took appropriate action. Systems for internal moderation and verification on the CLiC programmes appear to be adequate, but there is little interim internal verification.

47. The Friends Centre has a range of mechanisms for collecting learners' feedback, some of which are more successful than others. Response rates for some questionnaires and attendance at a focus group have been very low. The completed questionnaires are analysed but provide insufficient useful information for quality improvement. There has been some improvement to course information leaflets and resources following learners' feedback, and satisfaction rates are used in the self-assessment process. A suggestion box has been introduced in learning venues to allow learners to post comments, but this is too recent for its effectiveness to be evaluated. Some partner organisations carry out their own evaluations of the training and learning venues, but The Friends Centre does not request or use this information.

48. The self-assessment process is well established with good involvement of board members and some managers. However, in areas of learning there is insufficient recognition of key weaknesses, and information on achievement and progress is not used effectively to make reliable or appropriate judgements. The development plan does not include targets for improvement in achievement. The self-assessment process takes too little account of staff and learners' views or evidence from the area of learning. In arts, publishing and media, no significant weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment process, yet the area is graded as satisfactory.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information and communications technology

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>ICT for users</i> Adult and community learning	85	3 3

49. In 2004-05, there were 48 courses in ICT with 107 enrolments for 85 learners. Forty-five per cent of these learners are new to learning, and 33 per cent are men. Thirty-four per cent of learners are over 65 years of age, 43 per cent are under 55, and 16 per cent have declared a disability. In 2005-06, at the time of inspection, seven courses are running, with 85 learners. The courses are offered in four community locations and include computers for beginners and webpage design. Courses are held during the day and evening, and typically last for 20 hours over 10 weeks.

ICT for users

Grade 3

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good progress in class by many learners
- good support and development for tutors
- well-equipped ICT resource centres

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of initial assessment to plan individual learning
- insufficient monitoring of learners' progress in some classes

Achievement and standards

50. Retention rates on most courses are good. For example, the overall retention rate during 2004-05 was 98 per cent on 10-week courses. Retention rates have risen on all courses during the past two years. Data is only available for 2003 onwards.

51. Many learners make good progress. Learners with no previous experience of computers often improve their confidence in using aspects of IT, for example starting to gain the skills for word processing. On the more advanced courses, learners develop their skills further and are motivated well. For instance on a video-editing course, the learners were able to copy a track of music from a compact disc and import still images for a title sequence. The learners used these files, with their moving images, to produce videos with movie-making software. Many learners are pleased with their progress and most clearly enjoy their learning.

52. The centre does not routinely record achievement in this area by intakes, and the self-assessment report does not make a judgement on achievement.

53. Attendance at the classes observed was good, at 93 per cent.

The quality of provision

54. Teaching and learning are satisfactory with 75 per cent of lessons being good or better. Inspectors saw no unsatisfactory teaching. Tutors are experienced in their subject areas and in teaching adults in the community. They plan lessons satisfactorily and use well-prepared handouts to support their lessons. Many learners are very satisfied with their classes and appreciate the confidence that they acquire. In one three-hour class the learners, who were all working for charitable organisations, were learning how to use the internet to find information to help them with fundraising. There was a useful group discussion about their aims and planned fundraising activities. The tutor showed the learners several types of website, some of which gave advice for strategic planning for fundraising organisations, and others showed sources of funding or listed organisations that would provide or loan equipment for events. Learners then researched sites and compiled a list of those that would be useful for their particular needs. However, a small number of learners found the lessons difficult and felt that the pace was too fast.

55. The Friends Centre has been involved, with partners, in a satisfactory range of projects to develop e-learning to support learners, particularly in ESOL and literacy programmes. An e-learning working group monitors the planning and implementation of these projects and has a strategy to fully integrate e-learning with other courses over the next three years. The e-learning specialists, called 'e-guides', have developed some useful web-based materials which tutors and learners are sharing on the local area network. Over 70 learners were involved in the project and evaluations show that the effect on the learner has been positive. The centre is extending the use of e-learning and is involved with trialling national learning network materials with ESOL learners. Sets of laptop computers are available for use in classrooms with wireless connectivity, which enables internet access on the tabletop. Tutors involved in the project are very enthusiastic and some staff development has taken place. However, some tutors are nervous about using these resources with their learners.

56. The Friends Centre is involved in a number of partnerships to provide a satisfactory range of courses in community venues. The partner organisations and venue administrators define the needs of the local area and the centre provides appropriate courses. The course offer is subject to satisfactory review procedures, and most learners indicate on feedback forms that the courses have met their expectations. Many tutors develop activities to directly meet learners' expectations. For example, in one session on web design, each learner discussed their organisation's need for a website with the group and completed a template of their requirements.

57. Most initial assessment does not elicit sufficient information for staff to plan learning for all individuals. Some learners complete a form declaring their expectations but these are often too vague to be used to plan learning. For instance, inexperienced learners often express their expectations in general terms such as 'to be able to use a computer'. Tutors have too little information on learners' individual needs and prior skills and experience from the start of the course. In one class on how to format a document, two of the learners had never used a mouse before. There was volunteer support available in the class for those learners who were inexperienced in using the mouse. However, they were unable to gain full benefit from the teaching as they did not have the required skills to deal with the primary activity for the class.

58. There is insufficient monitoring of learners' progress in some classes. In some lessons, all the learners have the same planned learning goal. There is little focus on learners' needs as there are no learning plans recording individual progress. Any records of learners' progress are based on the shared goals of the group, and when a learner has completed the lesson the record shows that they have achieved the goal. For some classes these goals involve clearly defined sets of skills, but in others, the goals are not measurable or are generic. For instance, for one group of beginners the goal was 'hardware' without any definition of what the learners should be able to do or know. At the end of the lesson, all learners were recorded as having achieved that goal by attending the session without any checks on learning. Most learners do not have routine reviews of their learning.

Leadership and management

59. Tutors receive good development and support from The Friends Centre. A good programme of development is planned for each member of staff during discussions with the co-ordinator. All staff have a teaching qualification appropriate to their work in adult education. There is a comprehensive observation scheme through which all tutors receive support and training as appropriate. A good proportion of staff have been observed, including staff on subcontracted courses. Those staff who needed to improve are re-observed after support and development. Communication with part-time tutors is good. They have induction meetings at the start of the year and regular visits from the area co-ordinator during the year. Most tutors meet at staff development days and those who work at the same centres share their resources, but the opportunities for sharing good practice are limited at some centres.

60. ICT resource centres are very well equipped with up-to-date laptop and desktop computers. Tutors demonstrate activities to their learners, using either interactive whiteboards or software which enables them to take over the learners' screens. Both these techniques are used effectively. E-learning specialists have developed a range of web-based interactive learning resources which are used by tutors and learners. A range of equipment is available to assist learners who have a specific need. In one class, a learner with impaired sight was provided with a large monitor for his laptop computer.

61. The self-assessment report for the area of learning accurately identifies some of the areas for development. However, there is insufficient use of management data to analyse performance and set targets. The most recent self-assessment report makes no judgement about learners' progress or achievement.

62. Some tutors compile useful course files that include schemes of work, lesson plans, learning materials, and forms which record learners' shared outcomes and progress. However, there is often too little information on outcomes and progress to enable individual learners' progress to be measured.

63. Satisfactory learner surveys are carried out at the end of all courses and also mid course in some cases. The subcontracted organisation has effective systems for collecting learners' feedback. Comments are reviewed at meetings and appropriate amendments are made to the course. The tutors use this information with the co-ordinator for self-assessment purposes.

64. Learners and tutors do not always have sufficient understanding of equality of opportunity.

Arts, media and publishing**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Crafts Adult and community learning	59	3 3

65. The Friends' Centre offers nine part-time courses in arts and crafts and one in dance. The courses cover stained glass mosaics, patchwork, pen and wash, drawing and painting, and belly dancing. They range in length from five to 20 weeks and take place in the day and evening. Some taster sessions are offered on Saturdays. Courses take place in the town centre and at two community venues. None of the courses is accredited. There are 59 learners, of whom 93 per cent are women, just over 3 per cent are from black and minority ethnic groups and nearly 7 per cent have a declared disability. In addition to the adult and community learning funded courses, a range of provision is offered in partnership with the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Sussex.

Crafts**Grade 3***Strengths*

- good retention rates
- good development of learners' technical skills
- some good teaching
- particularly well-qualified and experienced staff

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of learners' progress
- narrow course offer and course content
- ineffective use of data for quality monitoring

Achievement and standards

66. Retention rates have been consistently high over a five-year period, ranging from 75 per cent to 99 per cent. Attendance during the inspection was good at 80 per cent.

67. There is good development of learners' technical skills on all courses. Learners are introduced to, and encouraged to explore, a wide range of techniques to enable them to develop their visual language. A variety of tasks is set for them to practise their skills and gain confidence in their abilities before working on more complex individual projects. In a 'drawing with watercolour' class, learners experimented thoroughly with mark making and the application of washes. They then produced bold and confident compositions in variety of different styles reflecting their individual interests and abilities. Learners' work is of at least an appropriate standard for the type of provision.

The quality of provision

68. There is some good teaching. Over 60 per cent of the teaching was graded good or better, and several sessions were outstanding. Courses are well planned and structured. The small group sizes enable tutors to successfully accommodate a range of interests and ability levels. Learners respond well to the tasks set, and tutors are encouraging and supportive, and provide learners with high levels of individual support. Learning is reinforced with good-quality handouts, many of which have been designed and produced by the tutors. These provide a useful source of information on both the theory and practice of art and are successfully used in inside and outside classes. Tutors use learners' work effectively as a teaching resource both informally, and more formally when encouraging the group to constructively criticise each others' work. At the end of one class, the learners confidently discussed their work and how effectively they had used negative space in their still-life paintings. They commented on how challenging they had found the task and how much they had learnt about observational drawing from using the approach. Demonstration is used effectively to introduce new techniques and visual effects. Much of the visual arts teaching is contextualised, with examples of major artists' work available for reference. Learners with health problems are successfully integrated with the groups. One learner who was recovering from a serious head injury had received good support to enable her to attend the class. The development of drawing skills was helping her regain her spatial awareness and physical stability. Two other learners recovering from serious illness believed that attending the classes had enabled them to regain their confidence and self-esteem.

69. The staff in the area are particularly well qualified and experienced. A large proportion are qualified teachers and are also arts graduates. Eighty-three per cent of staff have teaching qualifications, 23 per cent more than the government's target for part-time teaching staff. All staff are encouraged to gain teaching qualifications, and receive financial support to do so. An effective observation scheme supports the continuous improvement of teaching skills. The specialist skills of staff are reflected in their high expectations of learners, the challenging tasks they require them to complete, and the progress learners make in developing their skills.

70. Learners' satisfaction is adequately monitored. Learners are positive about the provision, in particular its location and the wider benefits of study. They appreciate the opportunity to study within the local community and the lower fee rates available through the centre.

71. There is insufficient monitoring of learners' progress. Learners complete one of the centre's 'shared outcome' documents, but these are often too vague to allow accurate monitoring of progress. The generic outcomes are completed by the tutor, and learners' comments are limited and unspecific. Tutors evaluate the progress learners make in class but there is little evidence that this is used to plan teaching in future lessons.

72. The programme of courses is narrow and traditional, as is the course content. They fail to reflect the cultural diversity of the area, apart from a class in belly dancing. The references used in visual arts courses, are in the main, to western art movements, and fail to explore of other cultural forms or movements. Tutors do not familiarise learners with the culture of other groups living in the community.

Leadership and management

73. The Friends Centre offers a caring, supportive environment for learners. There are good opportunities for staff development, and all tutors are included in the effective appraisal and review process. Courses are offered in attractive, welcoming centres with pleasant communal areas for socialising. The specialist areas used are suitable for the activities offered with good lighting and opportunities for visual displays. However, the individual work space for visual arts activities is limited in some centres.

74. There is ineffective use of data for quality monitoring. There is no analysis of learners' achievement by intakes at course or subject-area level. A shared outcome document has been introduced to assess individual achievement, but there is no mechanism to capture and evaluate the achievements of groups of learners. Specific data on equal opportunities is not used in the review process and for target-setting. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is significantly lower than that in the local community. Managers have not set a specific target to deal with this. The self-assessment report is vague and omits many of the strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>ESOL</i> Adult and community learning	444	2
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Adult and community learning	89	2

75. The Friends Centre provides literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes at its main site and at community sites in and around Brighton and Hove. The courses offered range from pre-entry to level 1. ESOL provision has grown rapidly over the past four years, and there are 444 learners on ESOL courses and 89 learners on literacy and numeracy programmes. Nineteen per cent of learners who enrolled in 2004 and 2005 had a disability. The programmes are managed by two co-ordinators, one for ESOL provision and one for literacy and numeracy provision. There are two full-time and eight part-time and sessional staff for ESOL, and one full-time and seven part-time staff for literacy and numeracy courses. Most courses run from September until July, although the organisation does offer enrolment opportunities throughout the year.

Strengths

- good retention rates
- very effective development of language and literacy skills
- some outstanding teaching in ESOL classes
- good response to local needs
- good support to meet individual learners' needs

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of initial assessment in some areas
- some inappropriate accommodation

Achievement and standards

76. Retention rates are good, and have improved over the past three years to reach the current rate of 89 per cent. Monitoring of attendance is good and many tutors place a strong emphasis on regular attendance. Learners are contacted if they fail to attend and tutors are generally aware of the reason for learners' absence.

77. Language and literacy skills are developed very effectively. Learners demonstrate their attainment in a variety of ways. In both literacy and ESOL, tutors place a strong emphasis on the development of speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. In ESOL lessons, developing oral fluency at all levels receives high priority. There is good development of functional writing skills such as filling in forms, writing letters and improving learners' curriculum vitae. A creative writing class for literacy learners allows them to extend their writing skills, enabling them to become more confident, improve their self-esteem, and move toward independence. Learners develop their vocabulary which improves their opportunities to gain employment. Most learners produce a good standard of work, and

progress at a satisfactory rate in relation to their skills and ability. Learners enjoy attending lessons, are challenged and well motivated, and speak highly of the quality of provision. They make good progress from one level to the next or on to other learning opportunities at the centre or at further education colleges. Some gain employment.

78. There are a satisfactory number of levels of accreditation offered for ESOL, and literacy and numeracy learners. Overall, learners' progress and achievement on these courses is satisfactory.

The quality of provision

79. Inspectors found a number of examples of outstanding teaching in ESOL. Many lessons are lively and well planned. Various successful strategies are used to promote and develop speaking skills. These include group discussion, working in pairs, question and answer activities and quizzes. They all enable learners to develop very effective speaking skills for everyday life. ESOL learners make significant improvements in their spoken and written English. In an outstanding ESOL class, the tutor used a game with paired learners which created a lot of fun and laughter while greatly extending learners' oral descriptive skills. Resources such as ICT, pictures, photographs, tape recordings, newspaper articles, word searches and games are used effectively in literacy, numeracy and ESOL sessions to promote and stimulate learning. In one particularly good session, inspectors observed an interactive whiteboard being used very effectively to help pre-entry learners develop the skills they needed to visit the doctor and accurately describe their symptoms.

80. Most of the lessons are based around topics that interest learners and improve their vocabulary and spelling skills. In the best sessions, work is carefully differentiated to meet the individual needs of the learners. Numeracy classes form a smaller part of the provision yet still attract learners from pre-entry level through to level 1. In one very good numeracy session, learners at all levels were actively developing number skills through a range of innovative resources including dominoes, playing cards, and tan gram shapes, which entertained and stimulated the learners to greater understanding. In another good session, inspectors were impressed by the degree to which language development was integrated with the teaching of number skills. Learners responded positively to the enthusiasm and energy of the tutor.

81. The organisation responds well to local needs. The Friends Centre has good links in the local community which involve partnership working with a variety of external organisations. It is also an active member of the local learning partnership. Links with the learning partnership ensure that provision is not duplicated wastefully and improves learner referrals from one organisation to another. Good use is made of a variety of funding sources to provide a range of learning opportunities.

82. The learners and the other community service providers interviewed during the inspection all expressed a high level of satisfaction with the service. There is a very strong demand for ESOL courses and currently there is a long waiting list.

83. The Friends Centre provides good support for learners with additional learning needs. Additional learning tutors and volunteers are used well in lessons to support learners who have specific learning difficulties and enable them to take part in all activities in the class. They work collaboratively with tutors and make a very positive contribution. The Friends Centre has a long-standing link with a local centre that supports adults with mental health

THE FRIENDS CENTRE

problems. The literacy tutor is supported in classes by a registered general mental nurse who has gained a basic skills qualification through staff development from The Friends Centre. Tutors, some of whom have specialist dyslexia qualifications, have links with a variety of agencies to provide specialist support for learners. Crèche facilities are provided at one centre so that learners with young children can attend lessons during the day.

84. Learners are given impartial advice and guidance, and are directed to appropriate courses by The Friends Centre's staff.

85. Learners' progress is reviewed at the end of each term, and by some tutors during the term, depending on the needs of the learner. Lesson plans and schemes of work are generally well planned and clear, but best practice is not always shared effectively throughout the team.

86. There is insufficient use of initial assessment in some areas. All learners are interviewed before they are placed on a course. The interview is used to identify their literacy, numeracy and language levels. All ESOL learners are given a very thorough initial assessment by a well-qualified guidance tutor at interview and this should be used to devise learners' individual learning plans. However, communication between the recruitment advisers and the class tutors is sometimes ineffective, and tutors do not always have the results of the initial assessment available when they plan their lessons. Most literacy and numeracy tutors use the Basic Skills Agency's assessment tools and diagnostic assessments, which enable them to identify specific areas for development and plan for individual learning needs. Some tutors, though, use their own assessments. The consistency, validity and reliability of these assessments have not been tested. Several tutors using their own assessment methods did not have individual learning plans in place for their learners. Tutors do not all plan relevant, measurable, specific targets and goals for their learners, or monitor progress towards individual targets.

Leadership and management

87. The Friends Centre has grown significantly over the past three years and the senior management team initiated a number of effective changes to improve programme quality. Two new co-ordinators were appointed in May this year to co-ordinate literacy, numeracy and ESOL teaching, to extend the curriculum offer, to promote quality improvement and line-manage the teaching staff. A number of quality improvement initiatives have subsequently been put into place and these are just beginning to have a positive effect on the quality of provision. Self-assessment for the area is satisfactory, with staff having an adequate understanding of the process and the report. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall, but their understanding of their rights was generally unsatisfactory. Many learners were uncertain of complaints procedures and of what rights they had under legislation. However, learners' complaints and concerns are dealt with swiftly and thoroughly.

88. The information, advice and guidance tutor has evaluated feedback from ESOL learners and written a report with a number of recommendations for improvements. These have yet to be implemented.

89. Teaching staff are well qualified and are supported by access to appropriate staff development. Curriculum meetings are held at the end of each term, and improvements are discussed at a number of other meetings throughout the year. Sessional staff are paid

to attend some meetings and to take part in staff development.

90. Some of the accommodation is inappropriate for learners. There are access difficulties with one venue in the Old Steine area. Learners often have to wait outside the building, even during wet weather, until a member of staff arrives with a key. The training room used at this venue is crowded and untidy. Learning strategies are limited by the restricted space and learners cannot move around the room when doing group work. Access to the photocopier is limited at this venue and there is also only one toilet for use by all learners. In another venue the lift only works intermittently, and the training rooms are on the second floor. Some of the classrooms are very hot and noise from outside sometimes prevents windows being opened. The Friends' Centre has identified the inadequacies of this accommodation, and ways in which improvements could be made have been discussed at staff meetings.

