

INSPECTION REPORT

First Rung Limited

03 November 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
- **learnndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

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

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

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

Overall effectiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grading

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

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

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. First Rung Limited (First Rung) is a registered charity which since 1983 has provided work-based learning for young people. First Rung contracts with the London North Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide training in preparation for life and work and operates from Edmonton and Colindale. Both centres are based in areas recognised for their urban deprivation and are serving young people who have particularly low levels of literacy, numeracy and language skills. According to the 2001 census, the two boroughs have approximately 26 per cent of their populations from minority ethnic groups.
2. Learners are recruited from a geographical area that includes the London boroughs of Enfield, Barnet, Brent, Haringey, Harrow and Waltham Forest. First Rung has 110 learners on an Entry to Employment (E2E) programme and a further 11 learners following level 2 national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes. Over half of First Rung's learners are from minority ethnic groups.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, First Rung's leadership and management and arrangements for quality improvement are good. Its arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory, and E2E provision is good.
4. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report includes learners' and employers' feedback. It is a critical document which reflects many of the judgements made by inspectors.
5. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** First Rung has a good focus on quality improvement. It makes good use of the development plan to bring about change. Observation of teaching and learning and feedback from learners are used effectively to develop the provision.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR FIRST RUNG LIMITED:

- further integrate enrichment activities into learners' personal development
- maximise opportunities to develop understanding of equality of opportunity and health and safety during workplace visits
- improve arrangements for covering absences

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		2

Preparation for life and work			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Employability training</i>		2	
Entry to Employment	110	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. The inspection was carried out by the three inspectors over three days. The main area of learning, E2E, was inspected and graded. Some learners were taking level 2 NVQs in different areas of learning such as retail and care. These were not graded because of very low numbers of learners.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	9
Number of learners interviewed	19
Number of staff interviewed	10
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	4

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

7. The rate of learners' progression into employment or further training is satisfactory. Learners' development of personal skills is good and the increase in their levels of confidence helps prepare them for future employment. More learners progress into employment than into further education or training.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Preparation for life and work	1	2	4	0	7
Total	1	2	4	0	7

8. Arrangements for developing the confidence of learners are very comprehensive.

Different types of review with learners ensure all aspects of learners' progress and welfare are fully covered.

9. First Rung offers a wide range of enrichment activities including educational, sporting, and social visits and outings. These are effective in helping learners relate to staff and their peers.

10. Learners receive good support in their work placement from a welfare officer. Work placements are of a high quality. Communication between employers and First Rung is good and ensures any issues are rapidly dealt with.

11. **Arrangements to prepare learners for work placements are particularly good**, often involving short work-experience tasters before learners decide on a vocational route. Learners are well matched to their final placement.

12. No observed lessons were unsatisfactory and some are very good. However, not all tutors are able to maintain the attention of learners for long periods.

Leadership and management

13. The E2E programme is well managed, with staff at each centre meeting regularly with their colleagues to discuss learners' progress. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. **Their performance is managed well and they have good opportunities to take part in further relevant training specific to their roles.**

14. **First Rung monitors equality of opportunity closely.** Managers make good use of data to identify trends in rates of achievement, retention and progression by different groups. The company has a satisfactory equal opportunities policy and induction appropriately covers equality.

15. **First Rung focuses well on improving the quality of provision across the organisation.** Managers make good use of the improvement plan to rectify weaknesses. Staff are encouraged continuously to adapt procedures to improve the learners' experience.

16. Communication across the organisation is satisfactory. Each centre has regular monthly meetings of all staff. However, staff with similar roles across centres do not have enough opportunity to meet and share practice.

17. The provision of literacy, numeracy and language skills support is satisfactory. All learners undergo appropriate initial assessment and have access to additional support if required.

18. Resources are satisfactory. Training sessions use appropriate materials and equipment. Accommodation at Edmonton is spacious, although the Colindale Centre does not have enough room for larger groups of learners. **Access for people with restricted mobility is not satisfactory at the Edmonton centre.**

19. **Arrangements for covering staff absences are unsatisfactory.** First Rung has not yet replaced a tutor who left some months ago and has not made sufficient provision for learners in the meantime.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good performance management and development of staff
- good monitoring of equality of opportunity
- good focus on quality improvement

Weaknesses

- poor access to main centre

Preparation for life and work

Employability training

Grade 2

Strengths

- very comprehensive arrangements develop learners' confidence
- particularly effective arrangements for work placements

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory arrangements for covering staff absences

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT FIRST RUNG LIMITED:

- 'we are treated like adults'
- making new friends
- 'that staff take an interest in you'
- gaining a job
- building up confidence
- being given a lot of chances

WHAT LEARNERS THINK FIRST RUNG LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the work - it could be harder!
- the provision of a learners' common room
- the publicity for First Rung, including the material available from Connexions

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good performance management and development of staff
- good monitoring of equality of opportunity
- good focus on quality improvement

Weaknesses

- poor access to main centre

20. First Rung has good arrangements to manage staff performance and staff development. This was a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. First Rung has a staff learning plan which is well linked to the business plan and spells out the company's annual priorities clearly. Line managers appraise staff twice a year. This effective process is based on self-assessment where staff are asked to comment and grade themselves on eight aspects of work. The outcome leads to each staff member having a personal development plan and personal action plan with targets. Line managers meet with staff three months after the appraisal for a supervisory meeting to check on progress against the personal targets. Supervisory meetings are more informal and not all staff have them with the same frequency. Staff have good development opportunities. They are encouraged to acquire qualifications and are rewarded for this through the company's pay scales. All training staff either have or are working towards a teaching qualification.

21. Business-planning arrangements at First Rung are satisfactory. The company has an active board which is kept well informed through the bimonthly board meetings. Board members meet with all staff twice a year. The company has a clear and concise mission statement, which is well understood by staff. Its three-year development plan and business plans set out the company's aims and objectives, taking appropriate account of local, national and LSC priorities.

22. Communication across the organisation is satisfactory. First Rung's communication with external partners is good. All key policies and documents are on the company's intranet, to which staff have good access. Each centre has regular fortnightly meetings of their staff, and occasional meetings are held for all E2E staff from both centres. Nevertheless, staff with a similar role across centres do not have enough formal opportunities to meet and share practice.

23. First Rung's management of health and safety is satisfactory. The quality manager is the company's health and safety officer. Placement development officers carry out risk assessments of employers' premises. The health and safety officer audits the risk-assessment files to ensure that actions are fully carried out.

24. Resources are satisfactory. Tutors are appropriately qualified, and accommodation is satisfactory. The Edmonton centre is spacious and has satisfactory facilities. However, the Colindale centre is cramped, with limited training facilities. This is recognised as a weakness in the self-assessment report and is being managed by the careful timetabling of

classes. New, larger premises have been identified as a permanent solution.

25. The management of literacy, numeracy and language skills support is satisfactory. All learners undergo appropriate initial assessment and have access to additional support if required.

26. First Rung makes appropriate use of management information. It has a new management information system which is able to generate a range of reports. The management team uses data to make sense of trends at its monthly team meetings. Performance against LSC targets is closely monitored. The team is beginning to determine and measure its own performance indicators.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

27. First Rung closely monitors equality of opportunity. Managers use data well to identify trends in achievement, retention and progression rates by different groups. Equality of opportunity is a standing item on management team meetings. Minutes show managers analysing and attempting to understand the trends underlying the data. Analysis of the current data suggests that minority ethnic groups are not achieving as well as other groups. Managers are aware of this and are attempting to identify actions that will ensure all groups achieve as well as each other.

28. First Rung has a satisfactory equality of opportunity policy. The policy is comprehensive and makes good reference to all recent legislation. It explains terminology and defines harassment and discrimination appropriately. Staff receive satisfactory annual training in equality and diversity. This year all staff worked through an equality and diversity workbook and then took an online or telephone test. Most of the staff found it useful in raising their awareness of equality issues.

29. Equality of opportunity is appropriately covered during learners' induction but its reinforcement through reviews is limited. The recently revised personal development plan covers a number of equality of opportunity themes usefully in four of its 12 sessions.

30. The company's complaints and harassment procedures are satisfactory. Only three formal complaints have been made since 2002. Centre managers deal with and record other complaints adequately.

31. First Rung has set its own targets for equality and diversity. It aims for 60 per cent of its learner intake to be from minority ethnic groups, which is above the representation of minority ethnic group members in the local population. In 2004-05, 56 per cent of First Rung's learners were from minority ethnic groups. The staff profile reflects the diversity of the locality well. Currently, 46 per cent of staff members are from minority ethnic groups, which are represented at every level of the organisation.

32. Access for learners with restricted mobility is poor at one of First Rung's main sites. The company cannot fully meet the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 code of practice, which is also part of its current equality action plan. First Rung recognises this weakness in its self-assessment report and is currently attempting to rectify it.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

33. First Rung has a good focus on improving the quality of provision across the

organisation. The senior management team nurtures a culture which aims to identify ways of improving any aspect of training which may benefit learners. Staff are encouraged to develop and adapt procedures continuously to meet the needs of learners more effectively. For example, one member of staff devised a form to identify the welfare needs of learners on placement. The form has been adopted across the organisation. The senior management team makes good use of the improvement plan to deal with weaknesses. At the end of senior management team meetings, the members monitor all actions that are near to completion. The senior management team members are continuously updating and changing the quality assurance policies in the light of their experience. The company is making good use of a Department for Education and Skills project to ensure that a member of staff is able to share and disseminate national good practice. This is a recent initiative aimed at improving the quality of teaching and assessment.

34. Feedback from learners and employers is effective. The company seeks feedback from learners monthly and has made some changes in response to the views collected. For example, the personal development programme was recently revised after learners indicated that sessions were dull. An external agency surveys employers through telephone interviews that yield a high response rate of nearly 100 per cent. Following these surveys, First Rung has made improvements to the information employers receive on learners' training and also made changes to the employers' handbook.

35. Observation of teaching and learning is effective and accurate. Members of the senior management team carry out observations of training and other learning processes such as inductions, reviews, interviews and assessment. Observations are graded and appropriately guide staff appraisal and staff development.

36. First Rung has been producing self-assessment reports for the past seven years. All members of staff contribute individually and in teams to the report to identify strengths and weaknesses. Senior managers collate and compile a draft report which incorporates learners' feedback and employers' surveys for further consultation. The self-assessment report is a critical document that reflects many of the judgements made by inspectors. First Rung has successfully resolved some of the weaknesses identified in the report.

37. First Rung's quality assurance policies and procedures are satisfactory. The company's quality manual contains an annual quality assurance cycle which clearly outlines what actions staff are to carry each month. The procedures cover key aspects of training such as induction, assessment, progress reviews and training.

38. Internal verification is satisfactory. The quality manager is the lead internal verifier who oversees the process. The lead verifier has satisfactory sampling plans and chairs quarterly standardisation meetings for assessors. First Rung uses peripatetic internal verifiers for areas where there is no internal expertise.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Preparation for life and work

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability training</i> Entry to Employment	110	2 2

39. On the E2E programme, there are 110 learners divided evenly between the two centres, which are 14 miles apart. Most learners are referred to First Rung by Connexions, with the Youth Offending Team referring a few. Most learners have poor literacy, numeracy and language skills and are working towards entry level 3 or key skills level 1 qualifications in at least one key skill area. During the six-week induction period, First Rung helps learners to identify the most suitable vocational programme. This may include short work tasters. First Rung provides specialist programmes in the vocational areas of childcare, which has 19 learners, business administration with 19 learners, and retailing with nine learners. If an alternative vocational area is more appropriate, First Rung either transfers learners to another provider or offers special provision to meet their vocational needs. Learners are working towards level 1 or 2 NVQs. Following an initial period in training in one of the centres, learners are placed with appropriate employers where they will get work experience. These learners normally attend work experience for three days a week and attend First Rung for one day a week.

Employability training

Grade 2

Strengths

- very comprehensive arrangements develop learners' confidence
- particularly effective arrangements for work placements

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory arrangements for covering staff absences

Achievement and standards

40. The rate of learners' progression into employment or further training is satisfactory, averaging about 40 per cent. The proportion of learners progressing varies from year to year, between the two centres and between different groups of learners. Learners take qualifications in literacy, numeracy and key skills and in other skills such as first aid. Of those starting in 2004-05, 46 per cent have achieved at least one qualification, with a further 39 per cent still in learning and progressing well. Of those learners progressing, consistently more move into employment than into further education or training.

41. Learners frequently have a range of personal and social barriers to achievement. First Rung places good emphasis on developing personal skills needed in the workplace. Development of learners' personal skills is particularly good at the Colindale centre. Learners frequently comment that their experience on E2E has increased their level of confidence and helped prepare them for future employment. Learners working towards

NVQs have well-structured portfolios which contain a satisfactory range of evidence of an appropriate standard.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Entry to Employment	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	35		161		197	100										
Progression ¹	0		43		82	42										
Achieved objectives ²	0		46		97	49										
Still in learning	34		63		13	7										

1. Measured in terms of learners' movement to further training, education or employment, during or after their training

2. These being the key objectives identified for each learner while on E2E

The quality of provision

42. First Rung has very comprehensive arrangements in place for developing the confidence of learners. Four different types of review with learners ensure all aspects of their progress and welfare are discussed. Tutors hold tutorials every two weeks to discuss learners' progress for all aspects of their off-the-job training. A dedicated welfare officer holds further reviews with learners when they begin their work experience. The vocational assessor holds assessment reviews for learners working towards a relevant NVQ. The learner support officer holds a further monthly review of progress to ensure all aspects of progress are fully co-ordinated. Learners receive frequent opportunities to discuss their progress and any concerns they may have, and staff and work supervisors are fully involved. Learners are encouraged to be responsible for their own targets and progress, while benefiting from extensive and frequent staff support. Most learners are aware of their targets, accept their validity and are committed to their achievement. There is a wide range of enrichment activities including educational, sporting, and social visits and outings. These are effective in helping learners relate to their peers and to staff. Some opportunities are not used fully to develop the personal skills of the learners.

43. During work experience, a welfare officer from First Rung visits all learners. These visits are normally fortnightly but are increased if the learner needs more support. For example, one learner with a specific learning difficulty received visits every week to enable targets to be achieved over a shorter time. The learner has almost completed his NVQ after over a year of encouragement and support from First Rung's staff and his work supervisor. In addition to pastoral support, the welfare officer works with First Rung's tutors and the workplace supervisors to ensure that learners gain maximum benefit from the placement. Learners gain security and confidence from this contact and employers are better able to support the learners' training and development.

44. Work placements are of a high quality. Employers are committed to training and are sensitive to the needs of E2E learners. Careful checks on employers' policies and practices are made before learners start work to ensure health, safety and equality of opportunity in the workplace. A helpful employers' handbook contains useful information on health and safety and equality of opportunity, as well as summaries of the role expected of the workplace supervisor, assessor, and others involved in training. First Rung responds rapidly

to any concerns expressed by the employer, relating to their learners.

45. First Rung has developed a particularly good process to prepare learners for work. Most learners initially attend a workplace for a short period, with the aim of developing generic work and personal skills. The welfare officer from First Rung visits them regularly to oversee their development and support them. A learner may experience one or several of these tasters, during which they are encouraged to focus on their career choice and the skills required to be successful. When an appropriate career is agreed, a full work placement in the appropriate vocational area is found and the learner works towards an NVQ to develop their competence. Learners and employers appreciate the support received during the programme and the efforts made to match learners to appropriate workplaces. Learners gain significant generic and specific work skills while on work experience.

46. E2E schemes of work are comprehensive and lesson plans are well structured. Good use is made of nationally available resources to support literacy and numeracy teaching, and imaginative sessions have been developed to support personal development aspects of learners' training. Some observed teaching was very good and no observed lessons were unsatisfactory. However, tutors are not always able to maintain the attention of learners for long periods.

47. The arrangements for meeting learners' literacy, numeracy and language support needs are satisfactory. All learners take appropriate initial assessments, the results of which are used to help agree suitable qualification goals and initiate a level of support towards achievement.

48. Induction is satisfactory. It includes sessions to explore issues relating to equality of opportunity and health and safety. It also features sessions to help develop learners' understanding of rights, responsibilities and appropriate relationships and working practices while on the programme and at work.

Leadership and management

49. The provision is well managed. Staff at each centre meet regularly with their colleagues within the centre to discuss learners' progress. Staff are enthusiastic about their contribution to the training and are committed in their support for learners. Staff have appropriate qualifications and experience and are encouraged to undergo further relevant training specific to their roles.

50. Internal verification is well organised, is ongoing, includes appropriate recording of observation of assessors and meets the requirements of the relevant awarding bodies. Assessment plans have appropriate, specific targets which are understood and accepted by learners.

51. The overall level of resources is satisfactory, with appropriate materials and equipment available and used in training sessions. Accommodation at Edmonton is spacious, although there is insufficient room for larger groups of learners at Colindale. Information relating to learners is kept centrally, with copies of relevant documents such as progress reviews also being given to learners and employers.

52. The self-assessment process identified weaknesses in the standard and consistency of

completion of some documents. However, inspectors judged that First Rung has now sufficiently improved its completion of documents.

53. Arrangements for covering staff absences are not satisfactory. First Rung has not yet replaced a tutor who left some months ago and has not made sufficient provision to ensure learners continue to receive an appropriate standard of training in the meantime. Some tutors have not kept appropriate records of the work they have done with each class and have not recorded amendments to the agreed scheme of work. Tutors covering for these colleagues cannot plan an appropriate lesson. Learners end up repeating work and schemes of work lack continuity. On a few occasions, learners arriving at the training centre for a class have found out that it has been cancelled and no alternative provision has been made.

