

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Developing Initiatives for Support in the Community**

**27 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*

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## Developing Initiatives for Support in the Community

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Developing Initiatives for Support in the Community (DISC) is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Its head office is in Spennymoor and there are 32 training centres and premises throughout the north of England and in North and West Yorkshire. DISC has a board of trustees which meets frequently to determine strategy for the organisation. Directors are drawn from senior positions in the voluntary sector, local government and the private sector. DISC is a specialist agency and works with disadvantaged individuals and groups. Government-funded training and preparation for employment accounts for around 45 per cent of DISC's current activities. Other activities include support for the homeless and supported living, alcohol and drug misuse services and community support services.

2. Current training programmes include Entry to Employment (E2E) funded by North Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC), which includes direct literacy, numeracy and language provision for 157 young people who are not ready for work, and an E2E brokerage for all level 1 provision which is subcontracted to 12 training providers and colleges. E2E is also funded by Durham LSC at centres in Durham and Newton Aycliffe, where there are 23 learners, and Cumbria LSC at centres in Carlisle and Kendal with 22 learners. An intensive support programme pre-E2E is also provided for 21 young people with social, learning and personal problems. For the Probation Service, DISC provides preparation for employment courses, and a 'first rung' skills for life project which aims to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of offenders and ex offenders. The 160 learners on these programmes in North and West Yorkshire are funded through franchise arrangements by the respective LSCs. Jobcentre Plus-funded New Deal voluntary sector training is provided in Middlesbrough and Durham where there are currently 21 participants. As part of this option, DISC provides work placements and training in a wide range of voluntary sector organisations in a variety of occupational areas.

3. The overall management of DISC is through a chief executive who is accountable to the chair of the board of trustees. Day-to-day management is provided by three executive directors and a team of six operations directors. There are a number of service delivery units (SDUs) through which the provision is delivered. These include E2E, work-based learning for New Deal, 'first rung' for Probation Service provision and 'connect' for advice, guidance and mentoring services. The latter has been badly affected by the termination of contracts by Jobcentre Plus and is not included in this inspection. DISC currently employs 293 staff, of whom 91 are directly involved in employment and training activities.

### OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 2**

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** DISC's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity. Its arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. Training in preparation for life and work is good.

5. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** Several self-assessment reports are produced as each SDU produces their own

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for the provision it covers. In most of the reports, some of the strengths are no more than normal practice. The reports are mostly suitably evaluative but some are insufficiently critical and do not cover all the key questions in the Common Inspection Framework. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment process involved the board of trustees and staff at all levels, but not all subcontractors were involved.

### 6. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.

The board of directors and senior managers at DISC provide good strategic direction and sound business planning. DISC's corporate objectives strongly reflect its core values of inclusiveness and continuous improvement for learners and these are evident across the provision. The commitment to staff training and support is improving the skills and experience of staff and the teaching and learning provided for learners. The quality assurance system has improved the retention and achievement rates on most courses.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR DEVELOPING INITIATIVES FOR SUPPORT IN THE COMMUNITY:

- ensure learners gain accreditation for the skills they are developing
- implement improvements in the management of New Deal on-the-job training
- increase the number of skills for life learners who complete programmes
- improve the range of target-setting for learners
- increase attendance rates on Probation Service programmes
- improve the use of data
- improve the monitoring of key quality activities

## GRADES

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

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

Preparation for life and work			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<b>Literacy and numeracy</b>			
Other government-funded provision	160	2	
<b>Employability training</b>			
New Deal for young people	18	3	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2	3	
Entry to Employment	202	2	

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. DISC currently only offers preparation for life and work. This area of learning was inspected under the contributory areas of employability training and literacy and numeracy. Jobcentre Plus provision in advice, guidance and mentoring and the Probation Service provision in education, training and employment were not inspected. Evidence was examined during two, one-day visits when inspectors looked at staff development in the E2E programme and leadership and management of the level one subcontracted provision. All other inspection took place during the inspection week.

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	28
Number of learners interviewed	114
Number of staff interviewed	70
Number of employers interviewed	5
Number of subcontractors interviewed	9
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	34
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	3
Number of visits	34

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievements and standards

8. **The development of personal, social and vocational skills on E2E and New Deal is good.** Learners develop good transferable skills. Many learners have significantly improved their self-confidence and problem-solving skills during their training.

9. **Some learners on the Probation Service provision develop their literacy and numeracy skills well.** Learners who become motivated while attending courses at DISC make good progress towards developing specific skills that have previously been a barrier to learning and employment. Many learners also develop good personal and employability skills. However, DISC does not record these achievements sufficiently.

10. Progression rates into work-based learning, further education or employment are satisfactory on E2E. In 2003-04, progression into these outcomes was 38 per cent, and for 2004-05 it is 23 per cent with 26 per cent still in learning. Job outcomes on New Deal for young people are also satisfactory and have improved from 22 per cent in 2003-04 to 32 per cent for 2004-05.

11. Most learners who stay on their Probation Service programme achieve at least one qualification in literacy or numeracy. Since April 2005 in West Yorkshire, learners on these programmes have achieved 237 certificates. This is very good progress towards DISC's contractual agreement of 420 qualifications up to March 2006. However in the North

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Yorkshire area during 2004-05, there was a significant underachievement, with only 26 certificates gained against a target of 183.

**12. Achievement of job outcomes on New Deal for adults is poor at 8 per cent for 2004-05.** Of the 37 starts, only three participants gained a job.

### The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Preparation for life and work	0	8	4	0	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>

**13. DISC offers a wide range of training activities to engage and motivate learners.** E2E learners have a good range of programme options and can choose from many accredited qualifications. The curriculum covers personal and social development, vocational skills development, literacy, numeracy and information technology (IT). Enrichment activities include community projects, visits to animal sanctuaries and teambuilding activities such as bowling and football. Many of these activities re-engage learners into learning.

**14. Many of the Probation Service learners are taught well.** Learning sessions are well planned. A good variety of appropriate teaching strategies is used to engage learners and improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Tutors build a very good working relationship with learners and successfully encourage them to discuss their barriers to learning and progress.

**15. Progress reviews for New Deal participants are very effective.** Individual learning plans are used to focus discussion with employers, advisers and participants and to agree outcomes. Regular and detailed monitoring of progress against individual targets is completed through effective progress reviews. Participants are encouraged to analyse their own progress and to set realistic targets for development.

**16. There is a good range of carefully selected work placements** which effectively contribute to the learners' development. There are work placements in a range of occupational areas, to match learners' needs. Placements are carefully selected to ensure that the managers and supervisors are fully committed to supporting and developing E2E learners and New Deal participants.

**17. DISC provides Probation Service learners with particularly effective individual support.** Many learners have multiple barriers to learning and lack confidence in their ability. Tutors skilfully create an appropriate atmosphere during learning sessions to make learners feel secure. The high level of support provided enables learners to engage fully in learning and to achieve their potential. Staff provide particularly good and sensitive guidance on how to disclose an offence to potential employers.

**18. Support to meet E2E learners' and New Deal participants' diverse needs is good.** Advisers from DISC visit learners in the workplace regularly and are in frequent contact by telephone, often on a daily basis. All learners are required to put numbers into their mobile telephones so that they have instant access to help out of normal working hours. Learners make good use of this support. DISC also pays for learners' interview clothes, for clothes to



start work, and alarm clocks and watches to ensure they arrive on time.

19. The arrangements for the initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactory. All learners have an initial assessment and a diagnostic assessment to determine their support needs.

20. Learning resources are satisfactory. Some of the accommodation provides a good learning environment. However, some of the rooms at Probation Service offices are too small and have no natural light. Tutors use a satisfactory range of learning materials, but some learners do not have sufficient opportunities to use computers.

21. Teaching and learning on E2E and New Deal are satisfactory. Of the nine sessions observed during inspection, most were good, and all were satisfactory or better. All sessions are well planned and maintain the learners' interest.

22. Resources are satisfactory. DISC provides appropriate equipment and training rooms in all of its centres.

23. **The learners' skills are not sufficiently accredited.** Learners develop and extend vocational and personal skills, but these are not accredited on New Deal, and not consistently accredited on E2E programmes. On E2E, learners' communication, teamworking and vocational abilities are not externally accredited as key skills that are recognised on apprenticeship programmes. New Deal participants leave with references from their placement employers, but in most cases they have no vocational qualifications or credits towards them.

24. **Induction is inadequate for some Probation Service learners.** Some initial interviews are poorly managed. Following induction or initial assessment, some learners leave with insufficient information on how and when the provision will take place and what it will involve.

25. **Targets on individual learning plans are too narrow.** Most targets identify the level of qualification the learner hopes to achieve. Tutors do not help learners to identify medium- or long-term goals to provide a wider context for learning and additional motivation. Although some learners work on skills such as writing letters and completing job application forms, the targets in their learning plans do not include the communication and number skills needed to help them meet the requirements in their probation order. Target-setting at reviews is also weak.

### **Leadership and management**

26. **Business planning is particularly thorough** and the senior managers and board of trustees provide good strategic direction. All SDUs complete their own business plans which are submitted to, and monitored by, the executive team. Corporate objectives are set for the year and most of the staff are fully aware of the objectives. Within the corporate objectives and business planning there is a strong emphasis on improving retention and achievement and learners' experience. Progress is effectively monitored against the objectives by the senior management team and by all staff in relevant team meetings.

27. **There is a clearly articulated staff training and development policy** and a strong

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commitment from DISC to help staff improve and develop their performance. Staff are encouraged to gain qualifications for their future roles, career and personal development. All staff speak highly of the training opportunities offered them and most staff are currently training and many are improving their qualifications.

**28. Internal and external communications are very good.** There is an extensive range of meetings which involve all staff. The process ensures all staff have access to important business information. The minutes of most meetings are well recorded, with clear timescales and actions identified. DISC makes very good use of electronic communications, all staff have access to a computer, and managers and staff make good use of e-mail. DISC has established strong partnerships with a wide range of external agencies and organisations. There are numerous examples of individuals who have benefited from the effective approach to multi-agency working.

**29. DISC has a wide range of particularly effective strategies for promoting social inclusion and widening participation.** It has targeted and recruited a wide range of specialist staff, including previous service users. Staff are drawn from a range of black and minority ethnic groups, ex-offenders and reformed drugs, substance and alcohol users. Some have disabilities and learning difficulties. All staff have relevant experience and great empathy with learners they are dealing with. Establishing a team of specialist staff has proved effective in widening participation and providing more effective learning and development.

**30. Equality of opportunity and diversity is very well promoted.** DISC's core values are strongly reflected in day-to-day operation and equality of opportunity is effectively incorporated into corporate objectives. Service users are effectively involved in promoting the provision to their peers. Most learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity. This is well developed by tutors at induction, progress reviews and in other parts of the programmes.

**31. Internal verifiers systematically carry out very effective and comprehensive checks on the quality of assessments.** This aspect of the skills for life provision is given a high profile. Internal verifiers use the process very well to develop tutors' skills in teaching and assessment. They set appropriately high standards in assessment and provide tutors with detailed and constructive feedback on the quality of their work.

**32.** DISC has dealt with the weakness in quality improvement from the previous inspection. The quality improvement system is now complete and has a satisfactory range of procedures. The quality assurance system has improved retention and achievement rates on most programmes.

**33. Extensive feedback is gathered from learners.** DISC takes learners' feedback very seriously and acts on suggestions that are made. Feedback comes from a variety of sources including questionnaires, learner focus meetings, learner celebration days, have your say days, suggestion noticeboards and telephone surveys. A service-user influence group carries out regular audits. As part of the audit they require teams to produce evidence of implementing at least three suggestions made by learners through learner feedback.

**34. Observation of training is weak across the organisation.** After the member of staff who did the observations left, there has been no systematic observation of the delivery of

training for the current year. The observations previously carried out were not graded and there was no evidence to confirm that information gained from the observations had been used to improve and share good practice.

35. Management of the subcontracted level 1 E2E provision is satisfactory. Take up of this provision is very low in the 12 subcontracted providers in North Yorkshire. The LSC's area strategy for E2E is not working effectively.

36. Health and safety is satisfactory. There is a detailed policy and extensive procedures. A satisfactory staff appraisal system is in place which is regularly monitored for compliance. Management of resources and financial management are satisfactory.

37. DISC's staff have developed a good working relationship with Probation Service staff. **Communications are good and information is effectively shared.**

38. DISC has satisfactory policies for equality of opportunity and related issues.

39. **Implementation of the strategy to improve attendance for Probation Service learners is slow.** Poor attendance is identified in the self-assessment report and managers have identified appropriate strategies to improve this. Current attendance is poor at 50 per cent. Many learners do not attend their first appointment with the skills for life team following their referral from the Probation Service.

40. **Management of New Deal on-the-job training is poor.** The time spent on placement with employers is not sufficiently planned and co-ordinated to ensure participants achieve maximum benefit from the experience. Many participants produce industry-standard work but these skills are not accredited.

41. **Some of DISC's centres do not provide access for wheelchair users.** Of the 32 centres, six do not have full access and a further two are partly inaccessible. Several centres do not have adapted toilets. DISC is a tenant in most of the centres and some discussions have been held with landlords, but little work has been carried out to deal with these problems.

42. **There is insufficient recording and monitoring of criminal records bureau (CRB) disclosure checks.** In one particular area of learning there has been insufficient monitoring of the procedures. Some CRB applications have been outstanding for some considerable time. Within the CRB records sampled, it was not clear from the audit documents who had verified the checks.

## Leadership and management

### Strengths

- particularly good business planning and clear strategic direction
- good development and training of staff
- particularly good internal and external communications
- extensive feedback from learners for improvements
- particularly effective strategies for promoting inclusion and widening participation

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- good promotion of equality of opportunity

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient use of data to improve the provision
- weak observation of training process
- insufficient recording and monitoring of CRB disclosure checks
- insufficient access to some DISC centres for learners with restricted mobility

### **Preparation for life and work**

#### ***Literacy and numeracy***

##### *Strengths*

- good development of literacy and numeracy skills by some learners
- good teaching
- very effective individual support
- good internal verification feedback to improve assessment

##### *Weaknesses*

- weak induction for some learners
- narrow range of targets in individual learning plans and progress reviews
- slow implementation of strategies to improve attendance

#### ***Employability training***

##### *Strengths*

- good development of personal and vocational skills
- wide range of training activities to engage and motivate learners
- very effective progress reviews for New Deal participants
- good range of well-selected work placements
- good support to meet learners' diverse needs

##### *Weaknesses*

- poor job outcomes on New Deal for adults programmes
- insufficient accreditation of skills
- poor management of New Deal on-the-job training

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT DEVELOPING INITIATIVES FOR SUPPORT IN THE COMMUNITY:**

- 'DISC was the turning point in my life'
- 'see me as a person and take time out for me'
- 'helped me overcome my personal difficulties by providing excellent support'
- 'I am treated as an adult for the first time'
- 'I would never have gone to college if it wasn't for this programme'
- meeting new people
- 'I have gained confidence and understanding'
- 'I can now walk into a room with my head held up'
- help with finding jobs
- staff are nice and very helpful teachers
- 'getting rid of my gremlins'

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK DEVELOPING INITIATIVES FOR SUPPORT IN THE COMMUNITY COULD IMPROVE:**

- 'provide bus passes to help me attend regularly'
- the facilities in the DISC centres
- 'would like a smoking room'
- fewer handouts
- more opportunities for writing
- 'more group work because that's how I learn'

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

#### Strengths

- particularly good business planning and clear strategic direction
- good development and training of staff
- particularly good internal and external communications
- extensive feedback from learners for improvements
- particularly effective strategies for promoting inclusion and widening participation
- good promotion of equality of opportunity

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data to improve the provision
- weak observation of training process
- insufficient recording and monitoring of CRB disclosure checks
- insufficient access to some DISC centres for learners with restricted mobility

43. Business planning is particularly thorough and the senior managers and board of trustees provide good strategic direction. There is a comprehensive range of policies covering all aspects of the business and these are reviewed every three years. All SDUs complete their own business plans which are submitted to, and monitored by, the executive team. Corporate objectives are set for the year and most staff are fully aware of the objectives. Within the corporate objectives and business planning there is a strong emphasis on improving retention and achievement and the learners' experience. Progress is effectively monitored against the objectives by the senior management team and by all staff in relevant team meetings. There are 10 areas covered by the strategic objectives for 2005-06 and each area identifies actions, outcomes, the person responsible for monitoring, and timescale for completion. DISC is successful in securing a wide range of externally funded projects which adds value to the learners' experience. The board of voluntary directors takes an active role in the development of DISC. Board members are fully involved in strategic planning and in determining the business direction of DISC. The board meets monthly, meetings are purposeful and focus on relevant issues and minutes are adequately recorded. Board members receive detailed reports on a range of issues including reports on finance, business development and analysis of learner feedback. The board has been instrumental in several key developments such as the new pay structure, which has introduced levels of practitioners to promote training and reward experience. This has been effective in retaining staff.

44. There is a clearly articulated staff training and development policy, and a strong commitment from DISC to help staff improve and develop their performance. Staff are encouraged to gain qualifications for future roles, career and personal development. All staff speak highly of the training opportunities offered to them. Most staff are currently in training and many are improving their qualifications. All the management team have either gained, or are working towards, a level 4 qualification in management. Other staff are

working towards level 3 management qualifications. Many delivery staff are taking teaching qualifications, and assessor and internal verifier awards. Staff also have the opportunity to specialise. For example, one member of staff is training in information, advice and guidance and another is taking a course in benefit advice. These staff will then be a key source of information for other staff. Staff have access to five volunteer support officers who are experienced employees of the company. Staff also have access to an external counsellor provided by DISC. All contact with the support officers and counsellor are completely confidential. Another part of the support offered is the supervision. All staff have a meeting with their immediate manager at least every 13 weeks. These have two functions, one of which is performance management which ensures targets are set and monitored at subsequent meetings. The other function is a supportive one. Staff regard the process as very supportive and are able to share their concerns.

45. Internal and external communications are very good. There is an extensive range of meetings which involve all staff. Formal meetings take place every fortnight at executive and senior management level. Operational management teams meet every month and include project managers and team leaders. Delivery teams also meet monthly. All staff are involved in team meetings and have access to important business information. The meetings also enable staff to offer their views to ensure that senior managers are kept well informed about what is happening operationally. The minutes of most meetings are well recorded, with clear timescales and actions identified. DISC makes very good use of electronic communications. All staff have access to a computer, and managers and staff make good use of e-mail. This is particularly important as DISC's staff are dispersed among its local training centres. Throughout the year there is also a programme of team days where teams spend time together to focus on the issues relevant to their SDU. There is a range of DISC newsletters and noticeboards in each centre. Good communication and networking across the SDUs provides a comprehensive range of support services for E2E learners, New Deal participants and Probation Service clients. This enables their needs to be met effectively by using specialist staff. DISC has established strong partnerships with a wide range of external agencies and organisations. These include government departments, voluntary organisations and specialist support groups. There are numerous examples of individuals who have benefited from the very effective approach to multi-agency working.

46. Management of subcontracted level 1 E2E provision is satisfactory. Thorough audits take place regularly and the details are well recorded. Take up of the level 1 E2E provision is very low in the 12 subcontracted providers in North Yorkshire. Some providers have failed to recruit and others have withdrawn as subcontractors. Progression from DISC's E2E programme to the level 1 providers' E2E programme is poor. The area strategy for E2E is not working effectively.

47. Health and safety is satisfactory. There is a detailed policy and extensive procedures covering all aspects of health and safety for the organisation and for learners.

48. A satisfactory staff appraisal system is in place and it is regularly monitored for compliance. Records are detailed and cover all aspects of each role. Targets are set and training needs are identified. DISC's management of resources and financial management are satisfactory.

49. Data is used extensively to monitor compliance with contracts. Staff know exactly how

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many learners have started in any period and how many have left. However, the data does not enable managers to calculate readily the proportion of learners who achieve and progress. The data is not sufficiently analysed to evaluate the quality of provision and to make management decisions. There are some isolated examples of managers using the data to identify trends and patterns in training, and using the knowledge gained to improve aspects of the training. However, data is not used systematically across all SDUs to improve the provision.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 2**

50. DISC has a wide range of particularly effective strategies for promoting social inclusion and widening participation. Many young people on DISC programmes have multiple disadvantage, complex social, emotional and personal difficulties, drugs, substance and alcohol misuse problems, and many are ex-offenders or are in danger of offending or re-offending. DISC has targeted and recruited a wide range of specialist staff, including previous service users. Staff at DISC are drawn from a range of black and minority ethnic groups, ex-offenders, and reformed drugs, substance and alcohol users. Some have disabilities and learning difficulties. All staff have relevant experience and great empathy with the learners they are dealing with. Establishing a team of specialist staff has proved effective in widening participation and providing more effective support and development. For example, a Muslim tutor has been recruited to teach literacy, numeracy and language skills to Probation Service learners in Bradford. The tutor is fluent in a number of Asian languages and has good links with community groups. Similar links have been developed with the traveller community in York. There are also effective strategies to gain access to drug and substance-dependent communities, and those currently homeless, through peer engagement and other community development activities. This approach has effectively removed cultural and social barriers, and the support and learning is delivered in an effective and sensitive way. Meeting these complex needs has provided life-changing experiences and enabled many young people to effectively re-engage in the community and in learning.

51. Equality and diversity is very well promoted. DISC's core values are strongly reflected in the day-to-day operation, and equality of opportunity is effectively incorporated into the corporate objectives. Service users are effectively involved in promoting the provision to their peers. For example, young people who have not participated in education or training for some considerable time bring their friends to the DISC centres in North Yorkshire. Many young people have joined the E2E programme this way. Most learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity. This is well developed by tutors at induction, progress reviews and in other parts of the programmes. All learners have an equality and diversity workbook and on the E2E programme all learners work on a range of modules which are relevant to equality of opportunity. In a lesson which was observed, the teacher made good use of audiovisual and other visual aids to reinforce the learners' understanding of equality. The learners were involved throughout and were able to talk confidently about discrimination, stereotyping and harassment. On E2E programmes, learners' understanding of environmental issues, community awareness and social responsibilities have been effectively developed through community-based voluntary projects in partnership with voluntary groups, local councils and businesses.

52. DISC has satisfactory policies for equality of opportunity and related issues. All relevant legislation is covered, including the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The policy hasn't been revised for two years but it is



currently being rewritten. Provision, use and analysis of data on equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Data is available to identify recruitment by gender, ethnic group, disability, learning difficulty and postcode. Data which demonstrates differences in learner performance by the same groups is less well developed. All staff receive training in equality of opportunity at induction and most staff have a very good understanding of equality and diversity. However, a few have not had any specific training since induction. A two-day training workshop on diversity is currently being planned.

53. Some of DISC's centres do not provide access for wheelchair users. Of the 32 centres, six do not have full access and a further two are partly inaccessible. While some are located on ground floors or have lifts or chair lifts installed with ramps and accessible doors, others are located on upper floors with inaccessible stairs. Several centres do not have adapted toilets. Only one centre is equipped with a system to help those with a hearing impairment. A few centres are equipped with adjustable workstations. All computers have access to software for the visually impaired. DISC makes arrangements for learners with restricted mobility to attend other centres, although there are currently no learners with these needs. DISC has carried out accessibility surveys on each of its centres. These are costed and priorities for action have been identified. DISC is a tenant in most of the centres and some discussions have been held with landlords, but little work has been completed to date to deal with these problems.

### Quality improvement

### Contributory grade 3

54. DISC gathers extensive feedback from learners. The feedback is taken very seriously and positive actions are taken on the suggestions which are made. Feedback comes from a variety of sources including entry, mid-course and exit questionnaires. All questionnaires are analysed in team meetings and suggestions for improvement are acted upon and the results are fed back to learners. Other means of collecting views includes the learner focus meetings which are chaired by learners. The results are fed back to staff who then have the responsibility of responding and implementing improvements. Particularly notable is the service-user influence group. This team carries out an audit of every project over a two-year period. As part of the audit they require teams to produce evidence of implementing at least three suggestions made by learners. The results of these audits are recorded on the intranet and effective use is made of sharing the good practice identified. Other effective ways of gaining feedback from learners include learner celebration days, have your say days, suggestion noticeboards and telephone surveys.

55. DISC has dealt with the weakness in quality improvement from the previous inspection. The quality improvement system is now complete and has a satisfactory range of procedures. There is a 'charter of service standards' which sets out the principles and standards to which staff are expected to work. The procedures are monitored through team meetings and through project manager meetings. The level of monitoring varies between SDUs. The quality assurance system has improved the retention and achievement rates on the New Deal for young people programme. There has been a 10 per cent increase in retention and planned learning completed over the past three years, and an increase in the number of learners gaining jobs from 14 per cent to 32 per cent. On the E2E programme, progression was 38 per cent in 2003-04 and there is a potential for this to improve to 49 per cent for 2004-05.

56. The internal verification system is good in skills for life and satisfactory overall. Internal verifiers use satisfactory sampling plans and appropriate paperwork is used. Observation of

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assessors and assessment is carried out and appropriate feedback and records are kept. Regular standardisation meetings are held and all assessors attend.

57. Observation of training is weak across the organisation. Extensive and thorough audits of training take place but these mainly focus on compliance with contractual obligations rather than quality of provision. Some observations of training did take place during 2004 in some of the E2E provision. However, after the member of staff who did the observations left, there has been no systematic observation of the delivery of training for the current year. The observations previously carried out were not graded and there was no evidence to confirm that information gained from the observations had been used to improve and share good practice. Some peer observations have taken place during September and October this year in the E2E provision. There are plans to introduce observations, but at the time of the inspection none had taken place.

58. There is insufficient recording and monitoring of CRB disclosure checks. In one particular area of learning there has been insufficient monitoring of the procedures. Checks on some learners had been outstanding for some considerable time and had not been followed up. Other learners claimed they had CRB checks completed before coming on the training but it was not clear from the audit documents sampled who had verified the checks. Some staff at DISC were slow to return CRB applications and had to be reminded to do so by management. Before receiving a CRB disclosure, staff or learners who are working with children or vulnerable adults are always supervised.

59. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. The process is inclusive and involves the board of trustees and staff at all levels, but not all subcontractors were involved. Several self-assessment reports are produced as each SDU produces their own for the provision it covers. The information is drawn into an overall summary report but it did not have any commentary and did not give an overall grade for leadership and management, quality improvement and equality of opportunity. In most of the reports the strengths were no more than normal practice. The reports are mostly evaluative but some were insufficiently critical and did not cover all the key questions in the Common Inspection Framework. Inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Preparation for life and work

### Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Literacy and numeracy</b> Other government-funded provision	160	2
<b>Employability training</b> New Deal for young people	18	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2	3
Entry to Employment	202	2

60. DISC's training programmes in preparation for life and work cover E2E, New Deal for young people, New Deal for adults, and skills for life for the Probation Service.

61. DISC provides training for 202 learners on the E2E programme across three LSC areas of County Durham, Cumbria and North Yorkshire. These learners are referred to the programme by Connexions, other agencies or are self-referred. The programme is designed for learners who are not yet ready to enter mainstream education, training and/or employment. Learners follow a range of programme options including personal and social development, IT, literacy and numeracy, and vocational training. Attendance on the programme is for a minimum of 16 hours each week with an average length of stay of 19 to 23 weeks, dependent on the LSC area. There are 18 participants on the New Deal for young people and two on the New Deal for adults. Participants are referred by Jobcentre Plus. The New Deal is for adults and young people who have significant barriers which prevent them gaining employment, including no significant experience of employment, health and social problems, and literacy and numeracy needs. Participants attend the programme for up to 30 hours each week for 13 weeks. Participants are provided with jobsearch advice, literacy and numeracy and IT training during their programme. Both E2E and New Deal programmes include a work placement when appropriate. Opportunities are available for E2E learners to gain externally accredited certificates in literacy, numeracy and IT.

62. DISC contracts with the West Yorkshire Probation Board to provide the 'first rung' skills for life project. This aims to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of offenders and ex-offenders on a probation order in the community to help them enter further learning, training or work. Probation officers refer learners to DISC when they identify that an improvement in literacy and numeracy may reduce the possibility of re-offending and improve the learners' ability to gain sustained employment, training or continued education. Following an initial assessment, learners attend small groups or hour-long individual learning sessions approximately once a week for about 12 weeks. These are used to develop their skills and review their progress towards a qualification in literacy or numeracy at entry level to level 2. Currently, 120 learners are on the West Yorkshire programmes. About a third of learners are working towards qualifications in literacy and numeracy, just under a third are improving their literacy skills and the remainder are developing their numeracy skills. Nearly half of the learners are working at entry level 3. Training takes place at DISC's premises in Leeds or at the Probation Service's offices in

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Leeds and seven other towns or cities in West Yorkshire. DISC has collaborative arrangements with York College (the college) to provide similar provision at Probation Service offices in Harrogate, York, Northallerton, Whitby, and Selby, and at DISC's offices in Scarborough. Currently, 40 learners are on the North Yorkshire programme, 19 are working towards qualifications in literacy and numeracy, 14 are working towards literacy and seven are working towards numeracy qualifications. The 'first rung' operations director, three managers and 10 skills for life tutors work on these projects, together with members of DISC's staff who provide advice, guidance and training to help offenders and ex-offenders enter employment, training or education.

### ***Literacy and numeracy***

#### *Strengths*

- good development of literacy and numeracy skills by some learners
- good teaching
- very effective individual support
- good internal verification feedback to improve assessment

#### *Weaknesses*

- weak induction for some learners
- narrow range of targets in individual learning plans and progress reviews
- slow implementation of strategies to improve attendance

### **Achievement and standards**

63. Some learners develop their literacy and numeracy skills well. Most learners had poor experiences of education at school and have few or no qualifications. Learners who become motivated while attending courses at DISC make good progress towards developing specific skills that have previously been a barrier to learning and employment. They develop the knowledge and understanding they need to carry out reading and writing tasks more accurately and with increased confidence. Learners who attend regularly quickly improve their accuracy in calculations and broaden their understanding of the use of numerical concepts such as graphs, fractions and percentages. Many learners also develop good personal and employability skills, such as time keeping, following instructions and working with other people. However, DISC does not record these achievements sufficiently. Most learners who stay on their programme achieve at least one qualification in literacy or numeracy. In West Yorkshire, 237 certificates have been achieved since April 2005. This is very good progress towards DISC's contractual agreement of 420 qualifications up to March 2006. However, in North Yorkshire during 2004-05 there was significant under achievement in the franchised subcontract with the college. Only 26 certificates were achieved against a target of 183, and this under performance was mainly to do with a switched emphasis to development funding. Learners are particularly proud of their achievements and some learners have achieved a qualification at more than one level, and in literacy as well as numeracy.

64. DISC has identified that a significant number of learners leave their programmes early. For example, from April to August 2005, only 503 of the 1,273 learners who were referred to DISC's skills for life provision, completed an initial assessment and induction period.

However, retention rates are improving and managers are working with the Probation Service to help ensure that potential learners are referred to DISC at an appropriate stage in their supervision plans. The company has recently received additional external funding to develop this aspect of their work.

### **The quality of provision**

65. Many learners are taught well. Tutors use initial assessments well to identify skills levels and agree appropriate learning plans. They use a good variety of appropriate teaching strategies to engage learners and to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Learners appreciate the attention they receive in individual and small group sessions. Learning sessions are well planned. Tutors provide very good advice on how to approach literacy and numeracy activities that they have been incapable of for many years. They build very good working relationships with learners and encourage them to discuss their barriers to learning and progress. However, some tutors do not have sufficient understanding of dyslexia and do not adequately help learners understand the nature of their difficulties and how these may affect learners' progress.

66. DISC provides very effective individual support. Many learners have multiple barriers to learning, have had poor experiences at school and lack confidence in their ability. Some learners feel that there is a stigma attached to having literacy and numeracy needs. DISC's tutors skilfully create an appropriate atmosphere during learning sessions to ensure learners feel secure. Tutors are aware of the high level of support that many learners need to enable them to engage fully in learning and to enable them to achieve their potential. They carefully adapt times and venues of learning sessions to help learners continue to attend without having to compromise their other commitments. Advice and guidance is well managed. Skills for life learners who use this service receive constructive and realistic advice to help them apply for work, training and education programmes. Staff provide particularly good and sensitive guidance on how to disclose an offence to potential employers. The learning sessions also provide learners with up-to-date and well-researched information on the implications of having a criminal record, when applying for specific jobs. However, some learners on the skills for life programme are referred to the advice and guidance service late, often when they are completing a qualification. Although learners increase their confidence and employability skills, many are unclear about progression routes at the start of their programme.

67. Learning resources are satisfactory. Some of the accommodation provides a good learning environment, with good space for individual and group sessions. However, some rooms at Probation Service offices are too small and have no natural light. Tutors use a satisfactory range of learning materials, but some learners do not have sufficient opportunities to use computers to help them develop literacy and numeracy skills.

68. Induction is inadequate for some learners. Some initial interviews are poorly managed. Following induction or initial assessment some learners leave with insufficient information on how and when the provision will take place and what it will involve. Staff do not systematically follow the procedures in the new skills for life manual for tutors. The range of initial assessments is too narrow for some learners who have previously completed the same initial assessment. Some accommodation is unsuitable for initial assessment, where learners are asked for information about their education, background and disabilities in front of other learners. Learners in North Yorkshire who enrol on the college programme are not given information on their entitlement to use college's facilities.

69. Targets on individual learning plans are too narrow. Most targets identify the level of qualification the learner hopes to achieve, but they do not contain sufficient information on medium- or long-term goals. Training in skills for life is planned in isolation. Tutors do not help learners identify medium- or long-term goals to provide a wider context for learning and additional motivation. Although some learners work on skills such as writing letters and completing job application forms, the targets in their learning plans do not include the communication and number skills learners need to help them meet the requirements in their probation order. Similarly, target-setting at reviews is weak. Staff systematically write a summary of activities carried out at the end of each session, but the targets do not adequately relate to learning. Most targets are a list of topics that will be covered during the next learning session. Although a few learners receive worksheets to do at home, most tutors do not identify the practical activities learners can carry out in their daily lives to help consolidate and reinforce their learning.

### **Leadership and management**

70. Internal verifiers systematically carry out very effective and comprehensive checks on the quality of assessments. This aspect of the skills for life provision is given a high profile. Internal verifiers use the process very well to develop tutors' skills in teaching and assessing. They set appropriately high standards in assessment and provide tutors with detailed and constructive feedback on the quality of their work. Initiatives to monitor assessments and improve the feedback learners receive include observations of teaching and assessment activities and frequent meetings for tutors to share good practice and ideas.

71. DISC's staff have developed a good working relationship with Probation Service staff, and information is effectively shared. DISC promotes equality and diversity well in its skills for life provision. Staff receive a good range of training in relevant topics and legislation. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. The report identifies that some staff lack expertise in teaching literacy, numeracy and language, and DISC has taken good action to deal with this. Most of the staff have achieved or are working towards appropriate qualifications. Judgements in the report matched most of the strengths and weaknesses identified during inspection, however some of the strengths were no more than normal practice. Staff keep up to date with the developments in the Probation Service, and also receive good training in other relevant topics such as managing challenging behaviour and health and safety.

72. Implementation of the strategy to improve attendance is slow. Poor attendance is identified in the self-assessment report and managers have identified appropriate strategies to improve this. Current attendance is poor at 50 per cent. Many learners fail to attend their first appointment with the skills for life team following their referral from the Probation Service. Many other learners leave the programme during the first few weeks. Learners who continue to attend regularly generally achieve their objectives. However, while the managers recognise that poor attendance is a weakness of the programme, the requirement for good attendance is not promoted to learners adequately. The use of data is weak. Managers and staff primarily use data to monitor performance against the contracts with the Probation Service and the college.

## ***Employability training***

### *Strengths*

- good development of personal and vocational skills
- wide range of training activities to engage and motivate learners
- very effective progress reviews for New Deal participants
- good range of well-selected work placements
- good support to meet learners' diverse needs

### *Weaknesses*

- poor job outcomes on New Deal for adults programmes
- insufficient accreditation of skills
- poor management of New Deal on-the-job training

## **Achievement and standards**

73. The development of personal, social and vocational skills on E2E and New Deal is good. Learners develop good transferable skills such as team working, communication skills, managing and prioritising workloads, and customer service skills. Many learners have significantly improved their self-confidence and problem-solving skills during their training. Reports from placement employers identify significant improvement in time-keeping, attendance and attitude. Learners on E2E have significantly improved their attitude to learning and work. They are able to work on their own initiative, carry out research and manage projects. Learners can now recognise issues that have held them back in the past and are working hard to remove them. Progression rates into work-based learning, further education or employment are satisfactory on E2E. In 2003-04 progression into these outcomes was 38 per cent, and for 2004-05 it is 23 per cent with 26 per cent still in learning. Job outcomes on New Deal for young people are also satisfactory and have improved from 22 per cent in 2003-04 to 32 per cent for 2004-05. Retention rates on both the New Deal programmes are good at 70 per cent on New Deal for adults and 75 per cent on New Deal for young people. However, the achievement of job outcomes on New Deal for adults is poor at 8 per cent for 2004-05. Of the 37 starts, only three participants gained a job. The main learning goals for the new 13-week programmes is preparation for work and job readiness.

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

<b>LSC funded work-based learning</b>																	
<b>Entry to Employment</b>	<b>2005-06</b>		<b>2004-05</b>		<b>2003-04</b>												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	63		516		602	100											
Progression <sup>1</sup>	5		118		226	38											
Achieved objectives <sup>2</sup>	7		147		288	48											
Still in learning	52		132		18	3											

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

<b>Jobcentre Plus funded programmes</b>																	
<b>New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults</b>	<b>2005-06</b>		<b>2004-05</b>														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	13		37	100													
Retained*	11		26	70													
Planned learning completed	11		26	70													
Gained job	3		3	8													
Still in training	2		0	0													

\*retained participants are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

<b>Jobcentre Plus funded programmes</b>																	
<b>New Deal for Young People</b>	<b>2005-06</b>		<b>2004-05</b>		<b>2003-04</b>		<b>2002-03</b>										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	70		228	100	94	100	147	100									
Retained*	28		171	75	61	65	81	55									
Planned learning completed	28		171	75	61	65	81	55									
Gained job	17		72	32	21	22	20	14									
Still in training	18		0	0	0	0	0	0									

\*retained participants are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

### The quality of provision

74. DISC offers a wide range of training activities to engage and motivate learners. E2E learners have a good range of programme options and can choose from many accredited qualifications, for example profile of achievement, award scheme development accreditation network and skills for life. The curriculum covers personal and social development, vocational skills development, literacy, numeracy and IT. Enrichment activities include community projects, visits to animal sanctuaries and team-building activities such as bowling and football. Many of these activities re-engage learners into



learning. Literacy and numeracy qualifications are achieved from entry level to level 1. Learners' success is celebrated extensively in all DISC's centres. Photographs of learners with details of their achievements are displayed in training rooms. Certificates for achievement recognise individual successes such as attending community projects, applying for an agreed number of jobs, achieving units or qualifications, gaining a work placement or finding a job. Employers are also awarded a certificate to recognise their commitment to helping people gain employability skills.

75. Progress reviews for New Deal participants are very effective. Individual learning plans are used to focus discussion with employers, advisers and participants and to agree outcomes. Regular and detailed monitoring of progress against individual targets is completed through effective progress reviews. Participants are encouraged to analyse their own progress and to set realistic targets for development. However, the effectiveness and quality of reviews for E2E learners is inconsistent across DISC's centres. In the best examples, learners' personal and social development, and acquisition of vocational, literacy and numeracy skills are reviewed. Learners understand the purpose of reviews, reviewers use jargon-free language and agree realistic and achievable targets. In other less effective reviews, the reviewers fill in the boxes on the review form rather than include the learner in the discussions.

76. There is a good range of carefully selected work placements which effectively contribute to the learners and participants' development. There are work placements in a range of occupational areas to match learners' needs. Placements are carefully selected to ensure that the managers and supervisors are fully committed to supporting and developing learners and New Deal participants. DISC's placement officers take time to give prospective placement providers information, guidance and advice about working with people who have barriers to employment. Great care is taken to match learners with placement opportunities which meet their individual aims and needs. New Deal participants are also able to access a range of work placements in different sectors to develop their vocational skills.

77. Support to meet learners' diverse needs is good. Advisers from DISC visit learners in the workplace regularly and are in frequent contact by telephone, often on a daily basis. All learners are required to put numbers into their mobile telephones so that they have instant access to help out of hours. Learners value this and many make good use of this support. DISC's staff also link with a range of organisations if learners have specific problems. Learners are given help to complete forms, to access benefits, to resolve problems related to drugs or alcohol misuse, housing and independent living, bereavement care and debt counselling. Employers are given a clear and reader friendly information pack to help them support learners. Most learners have a "buddy" in the workplace who supports them and gives individual coaching in work routines. DISC also pays for learners' interview clothes, for clothes to start work, and alarm clocks and watches to ensure they arrive at work on time. Placement officers attend interviews to support learners and also stay on the first day of work placement until the learner is confident enough to cope alone. Support in literacy and numeracy for E2E learners is good.

78. Arrangements for initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactory. Learners have an initial assessment and a diagnostic assessment to identify their support needs. Long-term objectives and support needs are effectively recorded in the E2E learners' Passport. Inductions are satisfactory including programme content, health

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and safety, and equality of opportunity. However, the language in the induction packs is too complex for learners who have poor literacy skills.

79. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Of the nine sessions observed during inspection, most was good and all were satisfactory or better. All sessions are well planned and maintain the learners' interest. In the better sessions, learners participate in practical activities. However, in some sessions, tutors use worksheets and learners find it difficult to absorb information. In most sessions learners work on tasks that are appropriate to their varying abilities. Tutors routinely offer praise and encouragement which motivates the learners. Assessment of learners' work is satisfactory. Clear feedback is provided by tutors, including helpful comments to recognise good performance and to enable learners to identify areas for improvement. Resources are satisfactory. DISC provides appropriate equipment and training rooms in all of its centres.

80. The learners' skills are not sufficiently accredited. Learners develop and extend vocational and personal skills but these are not accredited on New Deal, and not consistently accredited on E2E programmes. Most learners declare their main barriers to employment as lack of work experience and qualifications which employers recognise. Many have under-achieved at school and are keen to gain qualifications. During their training on both programmes, learners gain confidence as their skills increase. However, their improved communication, teamworking and vocational abilities are not externally accredited as key skills that are recognised on apprenticeship programmes. New Deal participants leave with references from their placement employers, but in most cases they have no vocational qualifications or credits towards them.

### **Leadership and management**

81. The operational management of the E2E programme is good. DISC's staff have a good understanding of the needs of the participants. Staff work together effectively and good practice is shared among centres. Internal and external communications are good. Regular staff meetings are held and include the planning and organisation of the training programmes. Learners also take part in focus groups that influence improvement in their programmes. Internal verification and arrangements for standardisation of assessment are satisfactory. Staff and learners have a good understanding of equality of opportunity.

82. The self-assessment report is satisfactory. It identified several of the strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection. However, many of the strengths are no more than normal practice. A lack of formal teaching and skills for life qualifications was identified as a weakness, but at the time of inspection all staff are either working towards or have achieved an appropriate qualification.

83. Management of New Deal on-the-job training is poor. The time spent on placement with employers is not sufficiently planned and co-ordinated to ensure participants achieve maximum benefit from the experience. The time that participants have on programme is limited and the learning plan does not identify the vocational skills and experience that are to be developed in placements. There is little formal training or assessment. Many participants produce industry-standard work, but receive no recognition of the skills they have acquired. On completion of the training some participants still feel they have too little to offer a prospective employer.

