

INSPECTION REPORT

Northamptonshire LEA

03 March 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

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

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

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

Overall effectiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grading

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

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

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The adult learning service (the service) of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) has undergone some radical changes since September 2004. The service is now located in NCC's community services division as part of the learning and leisure subgroup. The service has a senior management team made up of the head of service and three adult learning managers with responsibilities for the first steps programme, the personal and community development programme (PCDL) and quality improvement. The first steps provision consists of family learning and preparation for life and work courses, while PCDL provision is the remainder of the service's offering. There are also five curriculum specialists and two senior administrators responsible for co-ordinating curriculum areas and support functions.
2. Adult learning in the county is funded by Northamptonshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In addition, the service receives funding from NCC to pay for the use of schools and village halls as learning venues. In 2004-05, 12,202 learners were enrolled on courses. All the provision is directly delivered with an even split between further education, accredited courses and non-accredited adult and community education courses.
3. Northamptonshire has a population of 629,676. According to the 2001 census, 5 per cent of the county's population is from a minority ethnic group, compared with 9.1 per cent nationally.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 4

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is inadequate.** Leadership and management are inadequate, as are the arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. Provision is good in family learning and in community development and satisfactory in preparation for life and work. Provision is inadequate in leisure, travel and tourism, in arts media and publishing and in languages, literature and culture.
5. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment is critical but identifies as strengths some areas which are no more than normal practice. Some weaknesses identified by inspectors were recognised in the self-assessment report. Some key staff had little involvement in the self-assessment process.
6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a poor position to make improvements.** Quality improvement arrangements are incomplete and are not systematically monitored to promote continuous improvement. Two areas of learning are good but good practice is not being adequately shared. Current staffing resources are not adequate to bring about quality improvement.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE LEA:

- sustain and extend the good partnerships
- establish rigorous quality improvement
- improve teaching and learning
- ensure adequate resources to support PCDL provision
- ensure better promotion of equality and diversity
- establish a clear rationale for the programme offer
- improve the collection and use of data
- improve communication and support for sessional staff

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management		4
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		4
Quality improvement		4

Leisure, travel and tourism			4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Sport, leisure and recreation</i>		4	
Adult and community learning	1,942	4	

Arts, media and publishing			4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Dance</i>			
Adult and community learning	187	4	
<i>Music</i>			
Adult and community learning	50	4	
<i>Fine arts</i>			
Adult and community learning	450	4	
<i>Crafts</i>			
Adult and community learning	220	4	

Languages, literature and culture		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Other languages, literature and culture</i> Adult and community learning	690	4 4

Preparation for life and work		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Adult and community learning	241	4 4
<i>Independent living and leisure skills</i> Adult and community learning	336	3 3

Family learning		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i> Adult and community learning	415	2 2

Community development		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i> Adult and community learning	680	2 2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The inspection took place over one week and involved 14 inspectors. The six areas of learning inspected were leisure, travel and tourism, arts, media and publishing, languages, literature and culture, preparation for life and work, family learning and community development. Provision in social science, health and social care and information and communications technology (ICT) was not inspected.

Number of inspectors	14
Number of inspection days	70
Number of learners interviewed	283
Number of staff interviewed	120
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	87

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **In arts, media and publishing, learners demonstrate good levels of skills.** Their skills development is particularly good in dance, music and bobbin lace-making.
9. **Learners on family learning programmes and literacy and numeracy courses develop good confidence and personal skills.** The skills that learners gain in community development are used to benefit the local community. **Learners in independent living and leisure achieve their individual targets well. In family learning, there is good achievement of national qualifications.**
10. The standard of most learners' work in other areas of learning is generally satisfactory.
11. **In-year retention is poor on languages courses.** Attendance in classes observed was generally satisfactory.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Leisure, travel and tourism	0	5	11	7	23
Arts, media and publishing	2	5	12	2	21
Languages, literature and culture	0	5	6	3	14
Preparation for life and work	2	5	10	3	20
Family learning	2	4	3	0	9
Community development	0	4	3	0	7
Total	6	28	45	15	94

12. **In family learning there is much good teaching and learning.** Learning activities are imaginative, differentiated and contextualised. **In community development, teaching and learning is well adapted to the needs of marginalised community groups and individuals.**
13. **In much of the provision, too much teaching is inadequate.** In sports and leisure, learners receive insufficient correction and little direct individual guidance. In arts, media and publishing, lessons are not well planned. Ineffective teaching techniques are used in many language lessons, and in literacy and numeracy lessons insufficient attention is given to learners' goals.
14. **In literacy and numeracy, learners receive good progress reviews.** However, initial assessment and monitoring and recording of learners' progress is inadequate in sports.
15. Accommodation is generally satisfactory. **However, many language classes and some community development courses are held in inappropriate and unsuitable accommodation.** Access to ICT is generally satisfactory in most provision, **but is poor in independent living and leisure skills.**
16. **The range of courses offered in sports is good.** Courses are offered in 12 subject areas and some offer progression opportunities. **The service offers good opportunities for**

learning in rural areas in arts, media and publishing. Many courses are held in remote areas, and venues include schools, village halls and a bowling club. **However, the range of provision is inadequate in languages and literacy and numeracy.**

17. The service has effective arrangements for advice and guidance on progression and learning opportunities in literacy and numeracy. Advice and guidance staff visit each group in every venue. **However in arts, sports, independent living and family learning, the information, advice and guidance given at entry and during the course are inadequate.**

Leadership and management

18. NCC is managing change actively. It has a clear strategic vision which is bringing about radical changes to the structure of the service.

19. NCC has productive and effective partnerships with a wide range of community organisations leading to positive outcomes for learners. The partnerships in family learning and community development in particular are effective in widening participation by learners not traditionally involved in learning.

20. The curriculum is managed well in family learning. Teaching staff are experienced and receive good support. Co-ordinators are encouraged to use their specialist skills for the benefit of the whole team. **Team-working is also very effective in community development.** Staff network well and support their colleagues in different parts of the country. However, **across the PCDL provision there is generally weak curriculum management. Appraisal and staff development for most PCDL staff is not well managed.**

21. NCC's collection and use of data is inadequate. Little reliable data has been available until very recently.

22. Some aspects of resource management are poor, particularly for the PCDL provision. In some areas of learning, tutors provide their own resources to support learning.

23. The promotion of equality of opportunity is weak in the PCDL provision. It is not well promoted to learners in induction or in lessons. **Equal opportunities policies and procedures have only recently been written and are not well established.**

24. Quality improvement arrangements are inadequate. In sports, arts, languages, literacy and numeracy the arrangements are not effective. They are not well implemented or monitored. The observation of teaching and learning is not used sufficiently to guide training, and feedback from learners is not sufficiently used to support developments.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- active management of change
- productive partnerships
- good initiatives to widen participation through neighbourhood provision

Weaknesses

- poor appraisal and staff development for most PCDL staff
- weak curriculum management in PCDL provision
- inadequate data
- poor aspects of resource management
- weak promotion of equality of opportunity in PCDL provision
- insufficiently established equal opportunities policies and procedures
- inadequate quality improvement

Leisure, travel and tourism

Sport, leisure and recreation

Strengths

- good range of courses

Weaknesses

- much inadequate teaching
- inadequate initial assessment and monitoring and recording of learners' progress
- inadequate initial advice and guidance
- weak curriculum management
- insufficient quality improvement arrangements

Arts, media and publishing

Strengths

- good skills development
- good opportunities for learning in rural areas

Weaknesses

- poor formal planning of lessons
- ineffective quality improvement methods
- poor curriculum management
- insufficient advice and information for learners

Languages, literature and culture

Other languages, literature and culture

Strengths

- no significant strengths identified

Weaknesses

- poor in-year retention
- ineffective teaching techniques in many language lessons
- inadequate range of provision
- unsuitable accommodation for many classes
- insufficient monitoring of the quality of provision
- inadequate resources to support the curriculum area
- poor promotion of equality and diversity

Preparation for life and work

Literacy and numeracy

Strengths

- good development of confidence and personal skills in literacy and numeracy
- good reviews of learners' progress
- effective arrangements for advice and guidance on progression and learning opportunities

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to learners' contexts and goals in most lessons
- inadequate planning of provision to meet the needs of communities and learners
- weak quality improvement

Independent living and leisure skills

Strengths

- good achievement of individual learning targets
- effective partnerships to provide a wide range of accessible learning opportunities

Weaknesses

- poor ICT resources
- insufficient information, advice and guidance for learners

Family learning

Adult and community learning

Strengths

- good targeting and partnerships to widen participation
- good achievement in national qualifications
- good development by parents of confidence, skills and ability to help children learn
- much good teaching and learning
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- poor information, advice and guidance and admissions processes on some courses

Community development

Adult and community learning

Strengths

- productive partnerships with a wide range of community organisations
- very effective team-working
- good teaching and learning reaching marginalised community groups and individuals

Weaknesses

- some inappropriate accommodation

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NORTHAMPTONSHIRE LEA:

- the friendly, supportive and helpful tutors
- learning and developing new skills
- the specialist tuition - 'I travel a long distance for this class'
- making new friends
- 'the language skills to talk to my children's teacher'
- the local classes
- 'it's given me more confidence - it's opened up my life'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK NORTHAMPTONSHIRE LEA COULD IMPROVE:

- the course information and the amount of choice of courses
- the advice on programme selection
- the provision of appropriate venues and facilities for adults
- the opportunities for progression
- the procedures for re-enrolment
- the equipment for practical classes

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

Strengths

- active management of change
- productive partnerships
- good initiatives to widen participation through neighbourhood provision

Weaknesses

- poor appraisal and staff development for most PCDL staff
- weak curriculum management in PCDL provision
- inadequate data
- poor aspects of resource management
- weak promotion of equality of opportunity in PCDL provision
- insufficiently established equal opportunities policies and procedures
- inadequate quality improvement

25. NCC is managing change actively. Strategic vision and direction are clear. The revised mission statement reflects changed circumstances. A detailed development plan links well to government and NCC's priorities. The pace of change is good and reflects a sense of urgency in the very difficult circumstances of NCC's reorganisation. Teams have restructured under functional teams for first steps into learning and PCDL provision. Some first steps provision shows particularly good improvement already. The effective introduction of new full-cost courses, intended to help subsidise other provision, shows early signs of success. For example, some imaginative courses use new models of delivery and unusual locations, such as the premises of a major retailer. The significant emphasis on performance management over the past year is valued by most managers, who report significant improvements in their independence, balanced by greater accountability.

26. Staff members' involvement in partnerships at a strategic and local level is productive. Joint-working produces many positive outcomes, such as recruitment from marginalised groups, joint activities, community and individual capacity building, and support for learners. Some partnerships are beginning to support curriculum development. For example, NCC's work with the primary care trust to promote learning in a health context is supported by good links with a wide range of healthcare experts and representatives from voluntary sector agencies. Partnership work is particularly effective in first steps provision but is at an early stage of development in PCDL. The Northamptonshire learning partnership is supporting literacy, numeracy and language skills awareness training for tutors, administrative staff and volunteers in the early stages of promoting skills for life across the wider curriculum. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. NCC recognises that some relationships are insufficiently formalised. This has sometimes led to confusion in the past. Recent partnership work includes different levels of agreement. These agreements include clear statements of remit, terms of reference, letters stating the responsibility of each partner and

record-keeping of contact made and actions agreed. Anticipated outcomes from partnerships are not always expressed in sufficiently specific terms.

27. Governance is satisfactory. Lines of accountability within NCC are clear. Detailed briefings about key aspects of change are provided for NCC's cabinet members. Minutes indicate detailed discussion and support for proposed changes. However, it is not clear what training took place for elected members when responsibility for the provision changed from the remit of the education subcommittee to the cabinet for community services.

28. NCC arranges support from other information, advice and guidance providers when required. This facility is not understood or used consistently across the provision. Most first steps learners are well informed and have good access to support, but there is little or no signposting in other provision. NCC plans to gain the matrix standard for information, advice and guidance in the next 12 months.

29. A skills for life policy is in place, but there is no written strategy for skills for life across the curriculum. Training has begun for tutors, administrative staff and support staff, but there is no systematic initial assessment in PCDL provision.

30. Lines of communication at management level are clear. Meetings are regular. Generally well-written records indicate full and detailed discussions. Action points are clearly identified and followed up, but some timescales are not specific enough. Some meetings have too many important items of discussion under 'any other business'. The first steps team is small and communications are generally satisfactory, but aspects of communication are poor in PCDL.

31. Financial management is satisfactory. The restructure has ensured greater transparency in the financial management process and ensures a clear audit trail. Managers' delegated budgets are monitored regularly each month. Managers, the head of service and the finance team work well together.

32. Appraisal, staff development and induction for substantive staff follow NCC's procedures and are satisfactory. Staff development targets link clearly to appraisal. Managers and permanent staff have participated in a wide range of staff development over the past 12 to 18 months. Training sessions planned for spring and summer terms have a strong focus on strategies for skills for life. However, there is no overall staff development plan following reorganisation.

33. Appraisal and staff development for PCDL sessional staff are poor. NCC employs more than 300 sessional staff. Despite best efforts, typically only about 30 per cent of these regularly attend staff development. Attendance at staff development is a contractual requirement and is included in job descriptions. Staff contracts were late out for 2005-06. Some staff do not understand their contractual requirements. Many have not attended the September update at the start of the autumn term or the training on recognising and recording progress and achievement. Group induction for new staff has been replaced with individual induction. There is no system of appraisal for hourly paid staff. The draft staff development policy provides a good framework for all staff but is not complete.

34. Curriculum management in PCDL provision is weak. Much good practice has been

lost following centralisation. Funding cuts have significantly reduced wider aspects of curriculum support. Curriculum specialists work hard to maintain contact with tutors and offer support, but communication is difficult. There is not enough administrative support. Some managers spend too much time on routine administration. Some curriculum specialists work outside their job descriptions to reduce the effect of cuts. This reduces management time. Many historical aspects of the programme planning base remain and are not expected to change until 2006-07. There is no clear rationale for programme planning in some areas. For example, courses from arts, media and publishing are to be found in sport and leisure, languages and humanities. There is not enough connection between first steps provision and PCDL. A tutors' handbook, designed to establish consistent record-keeping and planning, is not sufficiently well established. Arrangements for recognising and recording progress and achievement are at very early stages. Many PCDL tutors do not understand the purpose or benefits of these processes.

35. Data is inadequate. NCC had no reliable data until relatively recently. Management information is now centralised and data reports are beginning to be used regularly in management meetings. However, target-setting is at a very early stage. Managers monitor against the LSC's targets but not for other performance measures. Retention and achievement rates can be monitored, but the current system is very cumbersome. Achievement data is not based on a reliable system of measuring and recording achievement. NCC has made improvements, but recognises that there is still much to do.

36. Aspects of resource management are poor. Most first steps provision has a clear budget allocation which is used well. However, the budget for PCDL is currently under-used and not all curriculum specialists are aware of it. In some areas, tutors provide their own resources and pay for them out of their own pockets. In skills for life, resource allocation is well understood, but some resources in supported learning are poor. Not enough assistive technologies are available. Systems for resource management are inadequately developed. NCC is slowly centralising its allocation system, but many resources are currently in store during the reorganisation. Some poor practice was noted, with resources temporarily stored in a tutor's home. Current record-keeping for resources is insufficient. For example, tutors' loans of valuable items, such as laptop computers and digital audio recorders, are recorded in an exercise book or on loose paper. Inspectors identified some inadequate accommodation. Venues are vetted for access only.

37. The implementation of the NCC's arrangements for health and safety is weak. Many expected activities such as six-weekly reports, risk assessments and portable appliance testing have not taken place during reorganisation. No central records of health and safety are kept. It is not clear that all tutors meet their responsibilities for visual safety checks and reporting any problems at each session. The annual building check is almost six months overdue. This is planned shortly when the move to new accommodation is complete.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

38. The adult learning service has good initiatives to reach new learners through its neighbourhood learning project. The project has strong collaborative partnerships with an extensive range of community groups and organisations. The provision successfully engages learners from the most deprived areas in the county and those traditionally involved in learning. Twenty-four per cent of learners on neighbourhood learning programmes are from minority ethnic groups and a third of the learners are unemployed in a county of high employment.

39. NCC's response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 is satisfactory. Overall, NCC has a race equality scheme that encompasses all of its services, including the adult learning service. The adult learning service has recently completed an impact assessment exercise, which has highlighted some under-representation of black and minority ethnic groups in the adult and community learning provision. The service is responding appropriately to the demands of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and has audited its premises. None of its premises are owned and many are in remote areas with few other facilities available. Nevertheless, the audit has identified some premises as posing potential difficulties for wheelchair users or learners with mobility difficulties. The service is aware of this and is currently taking reasonable steps to ensure learners' needs are met.

40. The promotion of equality of opportunity is weak in the adult and community learning provision. Equality and diversity targets are not currently set for programmes and there is little analysis of the progress of different groups. Induction for learners does not routinely include equality of opportunity, learners' entitlement or a clear statement of procedures to deal with bullying and harassment. In some curriculum areas, learners' understanding of equality and diversity and of their entitlement is poor. Little active promotion of equality and diversity takes place in the classroom. The current observation of teaching and learning refers to equality but it is not clear how this is used to improve the curriculum. In some areas of learning, materials do not reflect equality and diversity. In contrast to the first steps programme, black and minority ethnic groups are under-represented in the PCDL provision. The provision has been slow to build on the good links made with community groups in first steps part of the programme.

41. The service's equal opportunities policies and procedures are not sufficiently established. The service has only very recently written a number of policies which affect equality and diversity. It has written a new equal opportunities policy that falls under NCC's overall policy. The service's policy states staff responsibilities at different levels but does not have action plans or monitoring arrangements. Similarly, the service has only recently written a policy on bullying and harassment. A related procedure to ensure that complaints are collated and analysed has recently been agreed but not yet implemented. The service has recently produced a learners' charter that has yet to be fully disseminated. A new additional learning policy aims to standardise the procedures for meeting learners' identified needs. However, resources have yet to be allocated to implement the policy.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 4

42. Quality improvements arrangements are inadequate. NCC has started work on a system, but this is incomplete. There is no comprehensive system to ensure that quality is systematically monitored and promotes continuous improvement. Most policy documents are at a draft stage. There are no fully documented quality procedures, or a systematic annual calendar of quality improvement activities. Aspects of an embryonic system are in place, but they do not clearly link to ensure that each aspect effectively guides improvement. The project brief for quality improvement and the developing calendar of performance make little specific reference to key activities such as self-assessment, the collection and analysis of learners' feedback or end-of-programme review and evaluation. The quality improvement group meets regularly to monitor improvements. Little accredited provision is offered. Internal verification arrangements, where required, are satisfactory.

43. The observation of teaching and learning has been improved from an earlier system but the process is reactive rather than active. Some tutors have been observed in recent months, but there is no planned schedule of activity over time. Observers' understanding of targets varies. The target to observe each of the 300-plus tutors each year is unrealistic. Many observation records are completed in good detail, but grades given do not always reflect judgements. Some observations are not graded. Tutors graded as inadequate are reobserved, but it is not clear how action points from sessions graded as satisfactory or better are followed up. Tutors receive prompt verbal and written feedback but do not sign documents to confirm this. The embryonic moderation system does not always identify weak aspects of the process, for example where there are no comments on key aspects of teaching or where grades are inappropriate. Outcomes of observations are recorded on a potentially very useful spreadsheet. This is not used to identify common areas of weakness to inform staff of development planning, or to record and share good practice. Sessional tutors do not have opportunities to share good practice. The purpose of the colour-coding system used is unclear and inhibits the clarity of records in some cases.

44. The use of feedback is insufficient. The sample and response rate for the 2004-05 learners' survey are high, with nearly 50 per cent of the 1,200 learner sample responding. Analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data is detailed, but there is no indication about how feedback has guided improvement. Many examples of feedback raise significant concerns, for example on the quality of accommodation, availability of equipment, the effective use of teaching time, and a lack of administrative support. One area of strong response was recognised as an indicator of staff development need, but it is not clear if this was acted upon. Written responses to complaints are generally prompt, but their analysis and the identification of trends is very recent.

45. Self-assessment is not well established as an integral part of quality improvement. The self-assessment report produced for inspection is NCC's second. It is detailed and critical, but some areas it identifies as strengths are no more than normal practice, or are different aspects of the same point. Some weaknesses identified by inspectors are recognised in the report. Most grades in the report are the same as those given by inspectors, apart from in most aspects of first steps provision, where they were lower. Self-assessment in the areas of learning is too generic, too repetitive and too focused on leadership and management. These area of learning reports do not sufficiently reflect the individual context of each area. Very little data is available to support key judgements. Some key staff do not have enough involvement in the self-assessment process. The quality improvement action plan links clearly to areas for development and is regularly monitored. There is steady progress in many areas. However, some areas for development are recorded as completed when actions do not show enough improvement. For example, the target to 'implement information, advice and guidance across the service' is recorded as completed, but inspectors identified weakness in information, advice and guidance in much of the provision.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Leisure, travel and tourism

Grade 4

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Sport, leisure and recreation</i> Adult and community learning	1,942	4 4

46. At the time of inspection there were 1,942 enrolments in sport and leisure. During the 2004-05 academic year, 4,499 learners took courses. At the time of the inspection, 129 courses were running, which is fewer than the number offered in the previous year. This area of learning accounts for 47 per cent of the service's total provision.

47. Seventeen per cent of the intake are men. Less than 1 per cent of the learners come from black and minority ethnic groups. Just under 2 per cent have declared a disability.

48. Most courses are non-accredited. The range of courses includes yoga, keep fit, swimming, tai chi, bridge, Pilates and badminton. A subaqua course and a sailing course are accredited. Most courses are mixed ability and some are offered specifically for beginners, improvers or advanced learners. Courses are offered during the mornings, afternoons, evenings and weekends. Twenty-nine per cent of classes are offered during the day on weekdays, and 50 per cent of learners attend during the daytime. Courses run for eight to 30 weeks, with most running for 10 to 15 weeks. Classes last mainly for one to two hours, with some swimming classes running for 45 minutes.

49. There are 59 part-time tutors. Half of them teach one session a week and the others teach between two and nine sessions a week. Courses are offered in over 80 venues, including school premises, community centres and village halls.

Sport, leisure and recreation

Strengths

- good range of courses

Weaknesses

- much inadequate teaching
- inadequate initial assessment and monitoring and recording of learners' progress
- inadequate initial advice and guidance
- weak curriculum management
- insufficient quality improvement arrangements

Achievement and standards

50. Learners' understanding and attainment are generally satisfactory. Learners demonstrate appropriate skills in sports such as badminton and golf, and in yoga and

fitness activities. Learners demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge. In yoga, many learners demonstrate a good understanding of body alignment and the postures performed. In addition, learners achieve a satisfactory range of benefits to their health and wellbeing from participation in exercise, including improved cardiovascular function, muscle strength and endurance and flexibility and joint mobility. Learners in a bridge class have acquired sufficient skills and knowledge to take part successfully in a local charity tournament.

The quality of provision

51. The programme offers a good range of courses catering for a broad range of individuals. Courses are offered in 12 different subject areas and some offer progression from beginner to intermediate levels. A high percentage of courses are sports-related, such as subaqua, trampoline, badminton and golf. Two-thirds of courses are health and fitness-based, such as keep fit, Pilates, yoga and tai chi, with a small number of bridge classes. Courses are provided particularly for women, people aged 50 or over and the less active, including the recently retired. Accredited provision is offered in subaqua and sailing. Learners express satisfaction in the courses offered. There is a satisfactory balance between daytime, evening and weekend provision. The activities provided are highly appropriate to the needs of the participants.

52. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Most sessions are held in venues which are appropriate for the activity taking place. A small number of venues are dirty, and in one swimming pool session the quality of pool water was poor. A small number of venues, such as that used for golf, are of a very good standard.

53. Much teaching is inadequate. Almost one-third of the teaching sessions observed during the inspection were graded as inadequate. The characteristics of such sessions included an instructional and directive approach by tutors, with insufficient emphasis on learning. Learners are told what to do and how, but are rarely told why they are performing a posture in a given way or what effect a particular move would have. There is limited dialogue with and involvement of the learners, and little use of questioning by the tutor to check or facilitate the development of understanding. There is insufficient correction of poor posture or performance and little direct individual guidance. In some classes, learners are doing exercises that pose a potential risk to their health. There is often insufficient differentiation in the range or intensity of exercises or activities to meet learners' individual needs. In some yoga sessions, learners perform postures at a level too advanced for their ability, and therefore perform them ineffectively. In some classes, learners were not given alternative activities when they were unable to participate due to medical constraints. In addition, lesson plans and schemes of work were poor.

54. Initial assessment and the monitoring and recording of learners' progress are inadequate. The system for collecting health and medical information, prior exercise history and other significant information is inadequate. Tutors do not collect the information they need to ensure the safety of individuals and are not required to maintain records of health and medical conditions. Learners who indicate, on their enrolment form, that they have some form of medical or health problem are sent a health questionnaire. However, it is not clear under what circumstances learners are to bring matters to the tutors' attention. The initial assessment process does not sufficiently identify starting points against which learners' progress can be measured. Tutors do not collect information such as learners' body weight, stress levels and current capability in specific skills. Individual

learning goals, where identified, are insufficiently specific, such as 'get fit' and 'improve mobility'. There is little target-setting, and progress is not monitored effectively throughout courses. Tutors and learners do not understand the need to monitor progress. Learners see little value in completing the documents, and do so in a perfunctory manner or not at all.

55. Information, advice and guidance for learners is inadequate. The course brochure is the principal source of information for learners and has significant inaccuracies. Some classes are running that are not in the brochure. Others have changed days or times. There is no information about classes starting in the spring and summer terms, and the information is not sent out to prospective learners. Tutors change start times of classes and, in some cases, the days of the week when sessions will run, and managers are not always informed. Learners do not receive sufficient information at enrolment about their entitlements, policies and procedures. Many learners are unaware of the procedure for making complaints. For example, they do not get information about complaints procedures, their rights and responsibilities or appropriate equal opportunities information. The quality of course information sheets varies considerably. Some very clearly identify what learners will achieve, while others are extremely vague.

Leadership and management

56. Curriculum management is weak. Some tutors are unaware of who their line manager is and others find it difficult to contact the service. Many tutors do not get the information they need, including confirmation that classes they teach are running. Tutors do not get sufficient training and support to implement initiatives such as initial assessment and progress recording. There has also been no training on identifying and meeting learners' learning support needs. Tutors' response to offers of training is poor. Targets are not set for retention, achievement or other significant performance indicators. Data is not used to support the planning or evaluation of the provision. Managers do not have a complete understanding of which courses are running, where and when. There is no overall evaluation of the course reviews to identify themes and trends.

57. Insufficient quality improvement arrangements are in place. There is no formal sharing of good practice among tutors, and no collaboration on the development of subject-relevant approaches to initial assessment and reviewing progress. The process for observing teaching and learning is not rigorous enough. Although the process has recently been improved, few reports have judgements about learning or attainment, and the judgemental statements are often very generic. Some reports place too much emphasis on the completion of paperwork and include insufficient evidence of how effective teaching is. The moderation process does not pick up these deficiencies. Until relatively recently, few observations have been conducted. The profile of the service's grades does not correspond with grades given by inspectors. There is no direct checking of tutors' qualifications and maintenance of their licence to practise. Staff members' qualifications records are inadequate. They currently indicate that only a third of staff have appropriate qualifications. The self-assessment report only covers provision in one geographic area and does not constitute a fair representation of the performance of the area of learning as a whole. Although fairly critical, the report identifies as strengths many areas that are no more than normal practice, and a number of the weaknesses identified by inspectors were not clearly identified by the service.

58. Tutors have an appropriate level of understanding of equality of opportunity in general.

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However, their understanding of how it affects the design and delivery of learning is limited. There is limited promotion of equality of opportunity and learners have no more than a basic understanding of it.

Arts, media and publishing**Grade 4**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Dance Adult and community learning	187	4
Music Adult and community learning	50	4
Fine arts Adult and community learning	450	4
Crafts Adult and community learning	220	4

59. The service offers 87 non-accredited courses in art, craft, dance and music, and currently has 907 enrolled learners. The courses are provided at 50 school and community venues. Seventy-nine per cent of courses run for 10 weeks and the remainder run for 15 weeks, apart from one 20-week programme. Learners can join courses at any point in the year. The area of learning is supported by 51 part-time tutors, four curriculum specialists and a manager. Seventy-five per cent of learners are women. Twenty-three male learners and 29 female learners have a declared disability. Most of the learners are aged over 65.

Strengths

- good skills development
- good opportunities for learning in rural areas

Weaknesses

- poor formal planning of lessons
- ineffective quality improvement methods
- poor curriculum management
- insufficient advice and information for learners

Achievement and standards

60. Learners achieve good skills development. In line, tap and ballroom dancing, learners demonstrate complex sequences and dances, a good level of technical ability and effective use of a range of dance vocabulary. In folk guitar classes, learners develop good sight-reading skills and perform with technical competence, accuracy and fluency. In bobbin lace-making, learners demonstrate a range of techniques and experiment with Milanese design and colour. They are confident in asking questions and tutors take good account of their views during lessons. In the best lessons, learners work productively, the standard of their work is high and they make good progress over time. In a botanical illustration lesson, learners demonstrate high standards in observational drawing and painting and use of colour in their paintings of succulent plants and spring flowers. In a few art classes, learners show good development and progress in their sketchbooks. Learners enjoy their work and gain in confidence. However, in many classes the standard of learners' work lacks visual awareness and insufficient attention is paid to design or finish. In other classes, much work is unimaginative and lacks excitement or personal expression.

Learners attend regularly and attendance during inspection was satisfactory.

The quality of provision

61. Good opportunities for learning are offered in a range of venues in rural areas. Many classes are held in remote areas at venues which include schools, village halls and a bowling club. Learners value the classes that are held close to their homes because of limited public transport. However, some learners also travel considerable distances to attend specialist sessions in guitar playing, ballroom dancing, painting and drawing, upholstery and cane seating. There is a variety of different modes of attendance throughout the year to meet the needs of learners, including very popular three-day summer school courses. Many classes are targeted at learners with mixed levels of ability. New learners enjoy working with more advanced learners and benefit from their experience and support. However, there is no planning for learners' progression and development beyond the class that they are taking. A weekly social club provides an extended opportunity for learners to practise their ballroom dancing. There is good integration of creative activities into community events. Exhibitions are held locally and tap dancers perform to support local charities. Funds raised bought five wheelchairs for a local rehabilitation unit. Lace-makers demonstrate their skills at the local library.

62. Formal planning of lessons is poor. Very few schemes of work or lesson plans are in place, although some tutors provide useful handouts for learners at different levels. Few lessons incorporate wider goals to challenge and inspire learners to fulfil their potential. There is little historical or contemporary contextualisation in lessons. There is a lack of variety in the teaching strategies employed. Tutors do not systematically evaluate their teaching. In most classes, teaching is unimaginative, methods are insufficiently varied and tutors' expectations of learners are low. Formal monitoring and recording of progress is poor. Although a new system of individual planning for learners is in place, it is ineffective in most sessions. Individual targets are not routinely set and tutors do not review learners' progress at appropriate intervals. Most learners do not reflect upon their learning and achievement or consider the direction of their own learning. Individual learning plans are almost universally regarded as unnecessary paperwork and are dismissed by tutors and learners. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Most lessons meet the immediate needs of learners, and tutors foster warm and positive relationships. New learners are made welcome by tutors and other learners. Learners receive good personal and academic support from their tutors. Individual needs are identified and dealt with, although they are not recorded.

63. Learners are given insufficient advice and information. Information is sent out to learners once they have enrolled or if they specifically request further details. Not all leaflets clarify the level of learning, and some have very little detail regarding course content and enrichment activities such as trips, visits or opportunities for exhibitions and performances. Few leaflets identify the learning outcomes of courses. Information for progression is not sufficiently detailed. A little initial advice and guidance is provided during induction at the start of the programme. Learners are not able to access information on equality of opportunity, their entitlements, finance, key provider contacts or procedures for complaints and harassment. Beyond an annual recruitment campaign, advertising is by word of mouth and learners and tutors are frustrated by the lack of strategic development and promotion of provision. Tutors build good relationships with learners but there is no evidence of the active promotion of equality of opportunity. Learners and tutors are unaware of the resources available centrally to help support learners. A new learner class

profile form to enable tutors to collect more information about learners' needs is not understood by tutors and not used in many classes.

Leadership and management

64. Curriculum management is inadequate. Operational and strategic curriculum development is ineffective. There is insufficient focus on the future development of the curriculum area. Curriculum development is driven entirely by historical demand and lacks initiatives and partnership working. There is no strategy for building sustainable programmes. Dance and music classes are managed in different curriculum areas and there is no overview of the creative arts provision. Across the area, there is insufficient consistency in approach and there are no opportunities for cross-curricular activities. Methods of communication between tutors and managers are ineffective and unclear for tutors and learners. Some tutors do not willingly comply with NCC's policies. Staff development is offered, but many tutors do not attend. A new system to monitor attendance and the completion of registers has recently been introduced but is not yet established. Registers are submitted monthly but are not always returned promptly and it is not clear whether latecomers are officially enrolled on courses. There is no systematic collection and use of feedback from learners or staff to meet present and future needs.

65. Health and safety is not adequately implemented. The service has no formal procedures to ensure all tutors are properly qualified and monitored in their use of safe working practices with a range of equipment and machinery. Health and safety awareness is poor. Tutors and learners often provide their own tools, materials and resources, but there is insufficient monitoring to ensure tutors' equipment is insured and that electrical items are tested regularly for safety. There is an inadequate system in place for covering health and safety issues with schools. Schools complete their own risk assessments. This system is currently under review.

66. Accommodation and resources are generally satisfactory, with some well-equipped dance spaces.

67. Equality of opportunity is insufficiently promoted. Learners are treated with respect, but the aspirations, particularly of older learners, are not awakened or encouraged. Access for learners with restricted mobility is poor at some centres.

68. Quality improvement methods are ineffective. Data is not systematically analysed and used to guide planning and quality improvement. There is no monitoring of trends to support strategy. Benchmarking data is not used to evaluate success or set targets for improvement. The procedures for monitoring enrolment and attendance are not clear enough, and a recently introduced monitoring system is not yet established. There is a lack of formal monitoring of induction of latecomers and learners on courses that can be started at any point in the year. Course reviews are not systematically analysed and do not contribute to future lesson planning. Observations of teaching and learning do not lead to positive actions for improvement or the sharing of good practice. The service does not sufficiently monitor staff qualifications. There is no ethos of continuous improvement. Staff have insufficient opportunity to update their skills through staff development or by sharing good practice. Learners' feedback is not used to support the self-assessment process.

69. The self-assessment process is relatively new and is not an inclusive process. The self-assessment report is written by managers and focuses on systems and procedures.

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Learners and tutors are not actively involved in producing the report. Action is not taken to sustain strengths or deal with areas for improvement.

70. The service's skills for life strategy is in development. Learners have no access to information on the availability of courses in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

Languages, literature and culture**Grade 4**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Other languages, literature and culture</i> Adult and community learning	690	4 4

71. The service has 690 learners enrolled for the academic year 2005-06, of whom five are from minority ethnic backgrounds and seven have a disability. There were approximately 400 enrolments in 2004-05. Currently, 46 classes are running in subjects including Spanish, French, Italian, German, Portuguese, Greek and an introduction to sign language. Courses are run at beginners', intermediate and advanced levels. Most provision is at beginners' level. Most courses run for two hours a week. No accreditation is offered. All but three classes are held in the evening. There is no provision at the weekend or at holiday time. Most courses run for 20 weeks. There is a curriculum specialist for this area of learning who is contracted to work for three-quarters of the hours of a full-time post. The curriculum specialist is a linguist. This area of learning accounts for approximately 15 per cent of the service's learners. Classes are held in a range of venues including schools and community centres. Approximately 36 per cent of learners are men.

Other languages, literature and culture*Strengths*

- no significant strengths identified

Weaknesses

- poor in-year retention
- ineffective teaching techniques in many language lessons
- inadequate range of provision
- unsuitable accommodation for many classes
- insufficient monitoring of the quality of provision
- inadequate resources to support the curriculum area
- poor promotion of equality and diversity

Achievement and standards

72. There is no accredited language provision. Non-accredited provision is not always recorded well to show what learners are achieving. Most learners remaining in classes have satisfactory levels of attainment for the point that they have reached in the programme. However, many learners are working at the wrong level. Some tutors carry out initial assessment but the results are not used to direct learners to an appropriate level of course. Figures for in-year retention are not reliable. However, the average in-year retention rate for the sample of classes seen on inspection is poor at 47 per cent.

The quality of provision

73. Teaching techniques are ineffective in many language sessions. These lessons are characterised by insufficient use of the target language to provide a model for learners and to help them to understand their chosen language. In some classes there is over-emphasis on grammar. This often involves lengthy explanations in English using grammatical terminology, with few opportunities for learners to put the new forms into practice. There is rarely good differentiation in classes, and all classes are mixed level. Some classes are poorly structured and do not help learners to assimilate language adequately. In too many lessons there is little understanding of how to implement strategies for personalised learning. In many classes, mistakes are not routinely corrected and learners do not work on individual targets to improve their language skills. In some classes, learners perpetuate mistakes in pronunciation and grammar, only acquiring vocabulary in an unstructured manner. The best classes were conducted in the target language, and incorporated a range of activities which provided learners with extensive opportunities to practise and develop their ability to communicate in the language with appropriate correction by the tutor.

74. Some tutors carry out their own form of initial assessment, but when this happens, the process is not always used to guide learning. Learning records exist, but are not always in use. Learners have no way of measuring their progress against their own goals.

75. The range of provision is limited. The current strategy is to provide beginners' courses and to direct learners to progression routes, but tutors have not been given the information needed to do this. Progression routes are unclear. There is a limited range of courses on offer at higher levels in German, French, Italian and Spanish. However, these courses are ill-defined, and levels are very mixed. There has been no analysis of the needs and aspirations of local people with regard to language learning. Provision is almost exclusively in the evenings, and the choice of languages offered is traditional and unplanned, depending largely on the availability of tutors. There is no weekend provision, and only three daytime courses are currently available. The service plans to introduce some taster sessions. Tutors are not always well qualified and experienced. There is currently little training for tutors in this curriculum area.

76. Pre-course information is given to learners largely by means of a brochure. This brochure is insufficiently detailed to allow learners to choose the right level of course. Courses are given uninformative names, such as 'speak more French', 'French intermediate', 'French improvers', 'keep up your French'. Not all learners receive the brochure. The curriculum specialist is available to speak to prospective learners about what courses entail, but this can only happen if people know that the courses are on offer. The curriculum specialist has produced additional marketing materials for language provision.

77. Much language provision is delivered in unsuitable accommodation which is poorly served by public transport. In some primary schools, chairs are too small for adults. Some rooms are completely unequipped. In some cases they are too small to allow the introduction of even a flip chart. Few resources are available to language tutors, who are responsible for supplying their own materials and for funding their professional development. The service plans to purchase a course book for tutors.

Leadership and management

78. The quality of the provision is insufficiently monitored. A specialist curriculum leader is employed part time, and conducts observations of teaching and learning. A new system of observations has been introduced this academic year to replace a faulty system. Although the system is very new, one tutor has changed her practice as a result of feedback and is now delivering learning through the medium of the target language. The new observations of teaching and learning have not resulted in training being offered to tutors so far. It is unclear how action points are followed through to implement continuous improvement. There is no timely monitoring of retention rates, and no intervention at an early stage to establish why learners are leaving. There is a very big drop-out rate in beginners' language classes, but NCC does not currently have accurate, timely data to establish trends and to improve the situation. Some tutors are poorly qualified to teach languages, and in some cases they lack the necessary skills to do so. The service has no established, effective systems to identify this, and no support mechanisms in place to provide training for tutors with specific needs. The self-assessment report does not accurately identify all of the weaknesses found during the inspection.

79. Resources to support the curriculum area are inadequate. The curriculum specialist offers high levels of support to tutors, and keeps them informed of developments through a newsletter. However, operational managers are under-resourced and have insufficient staff. They do not have enough time to do their jobs. Job roles and responsibilities are defined, but there are gaps in these definitions and it is not clear who has responsibility for essential operations such as tutors' development and induction. The curriculum specialist is attempting to fill these gaps. Responsibilities described in the self-assessment report are unrealistic, giving too much responsibility to too few people, and failing to recognise the limits of the team.

80. The administrative support provided for operational managers is inadequate. The managers do not have access to reliable data for planning and delivering the provision. Some staff are based in offices with no access to e-mail and computers. Curriculum specialists do not provide adequate support to tutors. Curriculum specialists do not have a clear idea of the service's strategic direction and focus, and high levels of uncertainty exist among staff.

81. Promotion of equality and diversity is poor. Currently, five learners from minority ethnic groups are enrolled across all language programmes. The service has not targeted under-represented groups or planned provision to meet the diverse needs of the local population. Few staff have had comprehensive training in equality and diversity, although some training on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was offered last year. Tutors have been offered some general training, but this was poorly attended. Some information was sent to tutors who did not attend. There is no monitoring of teaching and learning resources for equality and diversity. Three world languages are offered by the service, but the presentation is largely eurocentric. The offer appears to be aimed at a white, middle class learner group and does not attract others. The former system of observations of teaching and learning did not place enough emphasis on equality and diversity, and comments revealed insufficient understanding of issues. The new observation system does not routinely mention equality and diversity. Most lessons are delivered through the medium of English, presenting potential barriers for learners who speak English as an additional language.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Adult and community learning	241	4 4
<i>Independent living and leisure skills</i> Adult and community learning	336	3 3

82. At the time of the inspection there were 241 learners on foundation courses in literacy, numeracy and ESOL, with 40 on literacy courses, 35 on numeracy courses and 166 on ESOL courses. Courses are mainly offered in the daytime for two and a half hours a week, with a small number offered in the evening. Courses take place in a range of community venues. The service also has partnerships with other community organisations, such as a centre for the homeless, and offers a small amount of provision in the workplace. Learners can work towards qualifications from entry level to level 2. Most learners are working towards a national qualification but learners can also achieve against personal targets.

83. A total of 336 learners have made 400 enrolments on independent living skills programmes, with 122 of these learners enrolled on leisure courses. All 52 planned courses ran in 2005-06, with 36 running during inspection. In 2004-05, 156 learners made 302 enrolments on 34 courses. Independent living and leisure skills courses include preparation for work, communication skills, cookery, art and craft, and performing arts. All courses are at pre-entry level and none are accredited. Courses run from 10 to 30 weeks for two hours a week, with some short courses and summer holiday provision. Courses run in the daytime and evenings at a variety of venues across the county including day centres, work-based learning providers, community colleges and village halls. NCC could not provide accurate data on learners' gender, black and ethnic minorities, and disabilities. Sixteen part-time tutors teach independent living skills. They are managed by a full-time curriculum specialist who has county-wide responsibility for the area of learning. Six tutors are designated as curriculum specialists.

Literacy and numeracy***Strengths***

- good development of confidence and personal skills in literacy and numeracy
- good reviews of learners' progress
- effective arrangements for advice and guidance on progression and learning opportunities

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to learners' contexts and goals in most lessons
- inadequate planning of provision to meet the needs of communities and learners
- weak quality improvement

Achievement and standards

84. Learners develop good confidence and personal skills in literacy and numeracy. Learners who were poor at mathematics are now enjoying it and are confident to attempt the national test and describe their thinking processes to others. Learners who would never previously speak in a group, talk comfortably to their fellow learners and enjoy learning together. Others gain confidence with computers or the use of dictionaries and thesauruses. Learners express confidence in achieving their goals, examples of which are to succeed in obtaining a qualification and to progress on to the next level. One learner was going on to become a classroom assistant and was amazed at her own success.

85. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory in most lessons. Some lessons included examples of good extended writing development and of learners improving their spelling and ability to apply numeracy concepts and solve mathematics problems. However, some learners' work consisted mainly of completed worksheets, which were insufficiently challenging or gave little indication of learners' progress in developing their literacy or numeracy skills. In ESOL, the development of oral language skills is slow for many learners, and in some cases, learners make little or no progress in learning spoken English.

86. Insufficient accurate data is available on achievement rates for national qualifications in 2004-05. Most learners achieved their learning targets. This year, so far, 13 learners have achieved national qualifications in literacy or numeracy and 30 more are waiting for their results. Many more are planning to take the national tests in the next few months and several have progressed from level 1 to level 2.

The quality of provision

87. Learners' progress is reviewed well. Formal reviews are thorough and systematically carried out on most courses, with very good involvement of learners. Learners discuss how they feel about their own progress. They are encouraged to evaluate their progress against the targets in their individual learning plans and to identify new targets.

88. Teaching and learning are mostly satisfactory. The better lessons are planned well with clear aims that fully engage learners. Learners are set challenging tasks. In one good ESOL lesson, activities stimulated animated discussion which extended learners' use of the English language and their understanding of the British social context. In a good literacy lesson, learners worked on very effective individual spelling programmes which gave them confidence in their learning and enabled them to extend their writing skills. Tutors use a range of resources to support learning, including information and learning technology (ILT), and tutors produce some good tactile and visual resources to fit individual learning styles.

89. Insufficient attention is given to learners' personal goals and contexts in most lessons. Targets in individual learning plans and learning outcomes in lessons are focused on qualification aims and frequently do not relate to practical applications in learners' own lives or to their interests. When planning group activities, tutors do not take sufficient account of learners' different ability levels or interests, or of their prior knowledge and experience. In some ESOL lessons, learners do not get enough practice in speaking. In some ESOL and numeracy lessons, too much reliance is placed on paper-based resources which are not adapted to meet the interests of learner groups or to suit different learning styles. Some resources have little learning value. In some numeracy lessons, too much

emphasis is placed on working things out with paper and pencil or on working through a textbook.

90. Initial and diagnostic assessments are carried out and include detailed diagnostic interviews. However, they are not always used effectively in planning teaching and learning. Support is provided for those with disabilities if requested. However, the service has no clear referral system for providing specialist support for dyslexic learners.

91. Arrangements for advice and guidance on progression and learning opportunities are effective. Visits from advice and guidance staff are arranged for each group in every venue. Learners also have an opportunity to request an individual interview and discussion about learning opportunities.

92. The overall planning of provision is not adequate to meet needs of communities and learners. The service's skills for life strategy is not sufficiently developed and there is no system for identifying literacy, numeracy and language needs in other areas of learning. There is no strategy for attracting new learners because of the limited capacity to meet demand. Learner numbers are very low in some literacy and numeracy classes, whereas some ESOL groups have large numbers of learners. The range of levels in some small classes is too wide, sometimes extending from entry level 1 to level 2. Some of the accommodation is too small and limits the range of learning activities. Courses tend to depend on the availability of tutors rather than the needs of the community. There are few evening classes to meet the needs of working learners in areas where much of the population is low-skilled. The number of literacy classes is small and these are not always in areas of need. Some provision is not appropriate for the learners. There are no planned progression routes and most learners can only progress within the same group. Few choices for progression are available for learners. No courses are linked with other areas of learning, although the service plans to develop some pilot courses.

Leadership and management

93. Communications and support for staff are satisfactory, but arrangements are not always effective. Staff use e-mail and the telephone to communicate and share information and resources. All teaching staff are encouraged to bring examples of resources to share at team meetings. Some sessional staff attend meetings and training. Managers are accessible and are felt to be very supportive.

94. Staff qualifications are satisfactory. All teaching staff have specialist qualifications or are working towards them.

95. Quality improvement is weak. A new lesson observation system is linked with appraisals and action points are agreed. However, there has not yet been any monitoring of actions or any effect on improving teaching and learning. Lesson observation grades given by the service are significantly higher than those given by inspectors, and the service's observations have not identified weaknesses in teaching and learning and some poor practice in ESOL. Data collection is poor and little use is made of learners' feedback and data to monitor and plan provision. Teaching staff do not sufficiently contribute to the self-assessment process or to curriculum planning. The self-assessment report identifies many of the weaknesses in the provision and has begun to put in place systems to rectify these, but these systems have not yet had an effect.

Independent living and leisure skills

Strengths

- good achievement of individual learning targets
- effective partnerships to provide a wide range of accessible learning opportunities

Weaknesses

- poor ICT resources
- insufficient information, advice and guidance for learners

Achievement and standards

96. Learners achieve their individual learning targets particularly well. They also develop personal and communication skills to assist in independent living and work skills as well as opportunities for beneficial leisure activities. For example, two learners working towards entry level 2 in a numeracy class were supported in running the cafeteria at a day centre. They gained good skills in food preparation and customer service. Learners with severe learning disabilities enjoy sharing their feelings about their favourite parts of a session. Tutors capture their responses in innovative ways. Tutors plan individualised pre-entry targets in all courses where appropriate and learners achieve them. One learner won a national learner of the year award and was supported to travel to London independently to receive the award at Westminster. Insufficient targets for ICT skills are set across the curriculum area as a whole.

The quality of provision

97. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Attendance at inspection was good at 88 per cent and reasons for absence are well recorded. Teaching is better and sometimes outstanding where staff have relevant qualifications and experience of working with learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. In the best sessions, learners are purposeful and keen to learn. There is a good pace and variety of teaching and learning activities. Learners are appropriately challenged to make choices and produce and cost high-quality work, such as artwork which is sold to the public. Tutors motivate learners by relating learning to real-life situations in engaging ways, such as trying on real safety clothing in a preparation for work course, a game giving change with real coins, or preparing a dance routine for public performance at a theatre. However, tutors have insufficient skills in non-verbal communication. There is insufficient use of sign language and symbols to communicate with learners for whom verbal communication is difficult. In less effective sessions, there is insufficient differentiation and a narrow range of teaching styles, with too much reliance on cutting and sticking. Instances of challenging behaviour are rare and are managed well by tutors and support workers.

98. The recording of achievement in individual learning plans is satisfactory. There is some thorough and detailed recording of progress by more experienced and qualified tutors, which highlights learners' own involvement in assessing their own learning. However, in a few sessions there is poor identification of assessment criteria, weak assessment and some poor recording. Learners are proud of their achievements. They receive certificates and record their public performances on DVD. However, there are few opportunities for accreditation.

99. ICT resources are poor. Most venues have insufficient assistive technologies and ICT and software packages to support learners. The distribution of available resources is patchy. Tutors are using their own laptop computers and buying software to support literacy learners. The internet was not used in any of the sessions observed, nor were assistive technologies such as roller balls or big keyboards. Learners complained that laptop computers were very difficult to use, and two learners with visual impairments and poor manual dexterity complained that this often led to them losing their work. Learners with visual impairments receive poor support, as assistive software is not distributed to tutors who do not always know to request it. Some resources are not appropriate for the age of the learners. However, in the better sessions, tutors make a real effort to produce attractive resources, often with photos of the learners included to make learning more personally relevant.

100. Satisfactory use is made of consultation with learners in the planning of provision. The curriculum specialist uses learners' evaluations to bring about change in provision. Fifteen new courses were run in 2005-06 in response to consultation with learners. There are well-planned progression routes in cookery, performing arts, and numeracy and literacy. Learners are no longer allowed to enrol twice on the same course.

101. Learners with learning disabilities and disabilities receive insufficient information in an accessible format such as symbols or Braille. Some information on opportunities is included in the service's brochure and some information on cookery and performing arts is provided in symbol format. Lists of courses are sent out to partners but these are not in symbol form. However, very few learners are on inappropriate courses. There are emerging strategies to improve information, advice and guidance, which is identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, but these strategies have yet to take effect. There is some good practice, such as the 'Works for Me' DVD in which learners talk about their positive experiences of learning.

Leadership and management

102. NCC has effective partnerships with other providers to deliver accessible learning opportunities. The curriculum co-ordinator plans the delivery of courses at a variety of venues across the county including day centres, work-based learning centres and community colleges. Learning is made available to many learners who would otherwise have great difficulty in attending classes due to mobility and personal care needs. This effectively widens participation for adults with severe and profound learning difficulties and disabilities. For example, the collaboration with work-based learning providers involves very good use of specialist areas to provide real-life contexts to work-based learning and training such as catering.

103. Arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. Many quality improvement actions in the recognition and recording of progress and achievement are already having an effect. The recording of achievement and learners' progress is particularly good in the best sessions and is rarely incomplete in satisfactory sessions. The curriculum specialist has observed most tutors. There are some good informal networks and support for tutors. The curriculum specialist calls 'keep in touch' meetings for part-time tutors, which take place in the holidays, and one curriculum-specialist tutor is a mentor for support workers. Staff are aware of the self-assessment report, and have been sent a copy of it, but not of their contribution to it. However, staff are unsure about how feedback from the process for

observing teaching and learning is used to improve the quality of teaching and learning, to share good practice, or if it is used in the planning of staff training. There is some poor communication with part-time staff, who cannot always be available for meetings and staff training.

104. Equality of opportunity practice is satisfactory. Some good practice includes the learners' charter, which is published in symbol format. Learners recall having been told who to complain to if they are bullied. One class had set very clear ground rules for how they were to behave and treat each other. Attendance during the inspection showed that participation rates were good for men in most classes and were at least representative for minority ethnic learners. However, no data was available to support this. There is no systematic monitoring of resources for content to represent cultural diversity. Although there is some attempt to mark festivals such as Chinese New Year, there is little active promotion of cultural diversity.

Family learning**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i>		2
Adult and community learning	415	2

105. The service offers family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN), and wider family learning provision. These programmes cover a range of opportunities to develop learners' own skills and support their children's learning. Provision is developed in partnership with schools, children's centres and community organisations, and is delivered in 53 community venues. Many courses are targeted to engage learners not traditionally involved in learning and who live in deprived communities, such as Kingswood in Corby and Queensway in Wellingborough. Wider family learning courses include family first aid, ICT, art and craft, language, science, dads' and lads' football, and baby massage. Most are offered as six-hour courses, for two hours a week. FLLN courses include workshops, short courses and intensive programmes. Courses are offered from entry level 1 to level 2. Courses run in the daytime and evening, with 82 per cent of learners attending in the daytime. FLLN and wider family learning provision is managed by a county family learning manager.

106. In 2004-05, 709 adults and 221 children attended FLLN courses. Wider family learning enrolment data for 2004-05 is not available. In 2005-06 to date, 415 learners and 223 children have enrolled on FLLN courses, and 157 adults and 256 children have enrolled on wider family learning. There are 415 current learners. Ninety-five per cent of learners are women, 14 per cent are from minority ethnic groups, and 6 per cent are identified as having a disability. Thirty-four per cent of learners are aged between 24 and 35, and 33 per cent are aged between 35 and 44. During the week of the inspection, 28 courses were running.

Adult and community learning*Strengths*

- good targeting and partnerships to widen participation
- good achievement in national qualifications
- good development by parents of confidence, skills and ability to help children learn
- much good teaching and learning
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- poor information, advice and guidance and admissions processes on some courses

Achievement and standards

107. Learners have good opportunities and are encouraged by tutors to gain national qualifications. There is good participation in national tests by learners on FLLN courses running for 30 hours or more, with 68 per cent of learners in 2005-06 entering for these tests to date. The achievement rate on these tests is good, with 91 per cent of those who

entered having passed to date.

108. Learners progress well and achieve their learning goals. In a numeracy programme, learners gain more understanding of the work their children do at school and how to help them. Their own mathematics skills also improve. In a healthy eating course, learners were making inexpensive and nutritious meals, which they cook at home and their children enjoy. Bengali women improve their spoken English. They learn how their children are taught at school and activities they can do with them at home.

109. Learners' development of confidence, skills, and the ability to help their children learn is good. Parents and partner organisations describe how parents are now able to help their children with homework and visit school more readily to talk to teachers. Some have begun volunteering in school. Families gain enhanced parenting skills. Parents take part in more activities with their children at home. They are better able to manage children's behaviour. One parent said that before she took her course she had not been able to bond with her child. Now, they do activities together and the bond she has always wanted with her child is established.

110. Learners are encouraged to think about progression. Many have clear future educational and work goals. Many learners progress on to other courses within the service, including literacy, numeracy and language skills programmes. However, learners' progression beyond the service is not monitored.

111. Reliable retention data is not available. In a small proportion of classes, attendance is low. Average attendance for observed sessions was 67 per cent of those enrolled. Learners often inform tutors of the reason for their non-attendance, and tutors follow up non-reported attendance appropriately.

The quality of provision

112. There is much good teaching and learning, with imaginative, differentiated and contextualised learning activities. Parents and children are engaged and motivated to learn. In a story sacks course, parents were designing and making games, linked to the chosen book, for their children to develop particular skills. Work with children is well integrated with adult learning. In an FLLN joint numeracy course, parents learnt to cancel fractions down and to compare fractions with decimals, while the children worked with a teacher in the library. When the children returned, they cut up different types of cakes and used play dough to learn about shapes and fractions. There is some good use of ILT. In a course to make personalised story books for their children and grandchildren, learners were developing skills in literacy, ICT and in planning and writing the story. In a 'keeping up with the children' and ESOL course, interactive software was used to enhance learners' language skills and the understanding of citizenship. Learners could choose from options for health, housing, government, community, learning and work.

113. Cultural diversity is celebrated in teaching and learning. A learner on a 'learning together' course talked to the group about Eid celebrations in her family. On a play and storytime course, the group sang songs in Bengali and English, and looked at Bengali and English storybooks.

114. A new process of initial assessment has been introduced, and tutors choose the most appropriate option for the group and context. Learners enjoy identifying their own and

their children's learning styles. Initial assessment is satisfactory and is linked to individual learning plans, which are regularly reviewed. Most wider family learning courses are mapped to the appropriate adult speaking and listening core curriculum. Literacy, numeracy and language skills support is good.

115. Good use is made of needs analysis, with demographic and school key stage results data used to prioritise courses offered. Family learning is primarily focused in deprived wards, and strong links with the service's neighbourhood learning team enable responsiveness to community needs. However, in about a third of the provision observed, a few learners were on an inappropriate course or the course was not what they expected. There are weaknesses in the information, advice and guidance given to learners on entering courses, and in course admissions processes. Course information sheets are worded in educational language which is unclear to learners. Where needed, tutors make changes to planned courses to meet learners' needs or arrange a more appropriate course for the learners to progress to. Tutors inform learners about progression options, including literacy, numeracy and language courses. There are opportunities for learners to see information, advice and guidance specialist. There is low take-up of individual information, advice and guidance sessions, but some classes benefit from group sessions given by a specialist. In a numeracy class for Somali and Bengali women, an information, advice and guidance session helped several women to clarify their career goals and the steps needed to achieve them. They are getting follow-up support. Termly information, advice and guidance weeks are held to raise awareness of what is available.

116. Additional support needs are identified at enrolment, or during the course, by the learner or tutor. Tutors are able to access additional support for learners. For Asian women there is particularly good support. A Bengali-speaking classroom assistant has additional hours to provide learning and personal support for women in two centres. She also guides learners to appropriate specialist agencies. Support is provided for parents' or children's homework, translations of medical letters and on welfare rights. A good model of dyslexia support runs in Corby and Kettering. Specialist training and resource packs are provided for tutors, and specialists offer individual support for learners. This is being introduced across the county. Childcare is available for many courses. Good-quality crèches are provided through partner organisations.

Leadership and management

117. There is good targeting and partnership work to widen participation by priority groups. The priority groups targeted are male family members, minority ethnic family groups, lone parents, and parents with low incomes and low levels of literacy and numeracy. Well-managed partnerships with schools, family centres, community organisations, Sure Start, and children's and women's charities enable the service to reach and recruit priority groups. It has been least successful in targeting men. Partnerships also enable courses to run at local venues that are familiar to potential learners, as well as providing resources and support for learners. Partner organisations can provide access to information, support groups and signposting to other agencies.

118. Curriculum management is good in family learning. After restructuring, there has been a significant improvement in quality assurance. Teaching is delivered by a small team of well-qualified and experienced co-ordinators and sessional tutors. There is good support, supervision and training for the team. Co-ordinators have six-weekly supervision sessions with the family learning manager. Sessional tutors all have mentors who keep in

regular touch. Regular team meetings and ongoing contact between staff enable the sharing of good practice. Co-ordinators are encouraged to use their specialist skills in areas such as dyslexia, skills for life and neighbourhood development, for the benefit of the whole team, including running training sessions. Co-ordinators have contributed to the development of new processes for initial assessment, individual learning plans and quality improvement. They feel ownership of these processes, and convey this to tutors. Management information has improved, and is beginning to be used for quality improvement. This, and other quantitative data from registers, is increasing the effectiveness of course reviews.

119. Teaching and learning resources are satisfactory, although in some instances, tutors have to transport equipment and resources to community venues. Accommodation is satisfactory, and for much of the provision it is good. There is good practice in promoting equality of opportunity, including successful targeting of courses for minority ethnic communities, celebrating diversity in teaching and learning, the inclusion of multi-faith calendars in course files and offering learners course reviews in Bengali and English.

Community development**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i>		2
Adult and community learning	680	2

120. Neighbourhood learning provision is part of the local authority's first steps programme. The neighbourhood learning team works with residents and community organisations in five designated areas of deprivation across the county to develop learning opportunities for people who would not normally access continuing education provision. The programme consists of a range of short courses, craft and leisure activities, taster sessions, skill sharing and other community-based activities. Most courses are non-accredited. Currently, there are 680 learners involved in the neighbourhood learning programme.

Adult and community learning***Strengths***

- productive partnerships with a wide range of community organisations
- very effective team-working
- good teaching and learning reaching marginalised community groups and individuals

Weaknesses

- some inappropriate accommodation

Achievement and standards

121. Achievements are considerable and the quality of learners' work is high. Many of the skills learners develop are used to benefit and enrich the local community. For instance, learners use computer skills in the production of community and church newsletters and in advertising local community activities. Learners at a centre linked with a local primary school made story sacks, which they use with the children in the local school and with their own families. Six of the seven learners on this course are now taking a level 1 communications qualification and most plan to take the level 2 award. Halloween masks and decorations made by local children for a party held in the family room at a local pub were to a high standard and were reported as such in the local paper. Most learners on these programmes are new to study and have taken little part in other community activities in the recent past. However, of the 290 new contacts with learners made in the autumn term of 2005, 41 are now taking family learning courses, five have become volunteers in local community groups and 155 have taken part in further neighbourhood learning activities.

The quality of provision

122. Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are well planned and effectively delivered. Activities are designed to meet learners' individual needs and successfully engage learners with few previous educational achievements. The reasons for holding

activities are clearly recorded and may include the development of specific skills, the building of personal confidence or contributing to community cohesion. Tutors identify opportunities for individual progression well. They record aims and objectives clearly. Most schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed and well focused, identifying and meeting the learning needs of the group. Plans are thoughtfully used, and, in the best sessions, they are adapted when necessary in response to learners' needs and interests. In one ICT lesson there were planned outcomes for individual learners, each working on appropriate tasks specific to their interests and their progress. These outcomes were recorded on learners' individual learning plans. In addition to the specific skills they developed, learners were able to describe how the activities had contributed to their general health and wellbeing.

123. Learners' progress is carefully monitored. All learners complete an individual learning plan that is monitored and regularly updated. These documents are kept up to date, and learners' targets and achievements are accurately and clearly recorded on them.

124. There is a good take-up of provision by marginalised groups and individuals. The target number of new learners to this provision for 2005-06 is 700. In the first six months of the programme, 418 new learners from the targeted neighbourhoods took part in the planned programme. Of these learners, 64 per cent were new to formal adult learning. Most had significant literacy, numeracy or language support needs, with 61 per cent assessed as below level 2 in numeracy and 56 per cent below level 2 in English. Eighty-seven per cent of the learners live in the designated areas of deprivation and the remainder are referred by the mental health services. Twenty four per cent of learners are from minority ethnic groups and 31 per cent are unemployed.

125. Learning resources are adequate and are appropriately shared within and between teams. However, some accommodation is inadequate. In two learning sessions targeted at families, the size of the room limited the range of opportunities for the children to play and for their mothers and carers to learn undisturbed. Risk assessments are not consistently carried out. Some are incomplete and some are out of date. The systems in place are not rigorous enough.

Leadership and management

126. Curriculum leadership is strong. The service has formed very productive partnerships with a wide range of community organisations across the county. The neighbourhood learning programme has worked with upwards of 200 statutory voluntary and private organisations since its beginnings in January 2004, including schools, residents' associations, playgroups, churches and a wide range of single-issue interest groups. In the current year, 34 new partners have become involved. Partner organisations support each other through sharing resources, skills and local knowledge. In collaboration with its partners, the neighbourhood learning project effectively contributes to local capacity building by encouraging and supporting learners in community activities. Forty-one of the new learners engaged since September 2005 have become volunteers in a range of regular community activities. The project holds workshops to support community organisations and groups to write newsletters, and constitutions in a form acceptable for grant-awarding bodies. A range of voluntary organisations has been allocated money from the project to support learning activities for marginalised groups, including a mental health charity, a local Bangladeshi association and a local centre for the homeless. The project has been successful in supporting community groups in other funding applications for learning

activities. Between September 2005 and December 2006, funds have been obtained from bodies involved in local heritage, community parks and other local initiatives. As a response to racially motivated violence in Corby, the project is represented by a Serbian community worker on a project sponsored by the local police authority to address prejudice and violence directed at Eastern European immigrants.

127. There are clear and well-managed formal systems of communication, which support good team-working and networking among staff. Planned monthly team meetings cover administrative and curriculum issues. The sharing of good practice within these meetings has supported the good informal sharing of practice and skills. Community development workers actively support their colleagues in other parts of the county through skill sharing. They run courses and activities for each other and support each other's planned activities. In addition, community development workers hold planned supervision sessions with their manager. These give an opportunity to monitor practice, review and plan local provision and support the workers' professional development. Three team members have gained a teacher training qualification while in post and two are enrolled on a degree programme in community development. It is planned that all community workers should be provided with the opportunity to take teacher training by the end of the academic year.

