

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **Manchester Enterprises**

**7 December 2005**



**ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE**

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

### Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

If 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 have 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 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 satisfactory or better grades in leadership and management and at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. A satisfactory 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 improvement. The descriptors for the four grades are:

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

## Language of the University for Industry's learndirect

Terminology varies across the range of education and training settings covered by the *Common Inspection Framework*.

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Manchester Enterprises

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE OPERATOR

1. Manchester Enterprises is the economic development agency for Greater Manchester with a remit to deliver economic growth and to improve the prosperity of its population. It works with businesses, individuals and strategic partners through a range of providers and delivery organisations. Manchester Enterprises is a not-for-profit group of companies, has a private sector-led board with local authorities and other partners represented, employs over 1,100 people and has an annual turnover in excess of £100 million.

2. The Contracted Learning and Skills Programmes (CLaSP) unit is part of the Manchester Enterprises Limited holding company and contracts with a network of providers. Through this unit Manchester Enterprises operates **learnirect** hubs in the geographic subregions of Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria and Greater Manchester. Over the past 15 months it has also operated the national Proskills hub that works with the industrial sector of process manufacturing. The sector includes manufacturers of coatings and inks, extractives and mineral processing, furniture and soft furnishings, paper, printing, glass, refractories and building products. The shared mission of the hubs is to use e-learning and distributed learning to improve the skills, knowledge and employability of the workforce and communities where they operate by providing a high-quality and flexible learning experience that is relevant to individuals' and employers' needs.

3. The hub operator management team consists of the head of CLaSP, four hub managers, six business account managers, a marketing manager, a head of finance and audit, and a head of quality and data. The head of CLaSP reports directly to Manchester Enterprises' board of directors.

4. The overall unemployment rate in Greater Manchester is close to the national average but varies from higher than the national average in Manchester to well below the national average in Stockport and Trafford. Unemployment rates in Cheshire and Warrington are well below the national average. The overall unemployment rate for Cumbria is below the national average but varies from higher than the national average in Barrow and Copeland, to well below the national average in Eden and South Lakeland. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of the population that comes from minority ethnic groups is 8.9 per cent in Greater Manchester, 1.6 per cent in Cheshire, 2.1 per cent in Warrington, and 0.7 per cent in Cumbria, compared with the national average of 9.1 per cent. In Greater Manchester the percentage varies considerably, from 19 per cent in Manchester to 1.3 per cent in Wigan.

### SCOPE OF INSPECTION

5. The Manchester Enterprises hub operator, the three geographic hub areas of Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, and Greater Manchester, and the sector hub Proskills were inspected. The Cheshire and Warrington hub was previously inspected in December 2002. The information and communications technology (ICT) and preparation for life and work areas of provision were inspected in the three geographic hub areas. The business-related area of provision was inspected in Greater Manchester and the automotive area of provision was inspected in Proskills. The inspection took place over three weeks. The Cheshire and Warrington and Greater Manchester areas were inspected in the first week, the Cumbria area and Proskills in the second week and

the hub operator in the third week. The inspection took place during the last two weeks of November and the first week of December.

### **Cheshire and Warrington Hub Area**

6. Since 1 August 2005, 1,148 learners have enrolled on ICT courses, representing 42 per cent of the hub's **learnirect** provision. Of these, 618 are still in learning. Sixty-five per cent of learners are women, 9 per cent are identified as having a disability, 93 per cent are under the age of 55 and 34 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Of the 8,821 learners enrolling in 2004-05, 1,337 are still in learning. All venues offer ICT courses and nationally recognised qualifications in common desktop computing products. Most learners make appointments to attend learning centres at times convenient to them. A small proportion work in other locations. Many learners are seeking to enhance their prospects of gaining employment and others are responding to changes to their existing jobs that now require them to have computer skills. Most learners enrol on courses with an expected duration of less than 15 hours. All learners are offered an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills when they enrol on an ICT course.

7. Since 1 August 2005, 1,434 learners have enrolled on preparation for life and work courses, representing 53 per cent of the hub's **learnirect** provision. Of these, 306 are still in learning. Sixty-seven per cent of learners are women, 12 per cent are identified as having a disability, 91 per cent are under the age of 55 and 7 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Of the 3,393 learners starting in 2004-05, 141 are still in learning. Learners are referred to the centres from a national advice service, jobcentres or in response to advertising. Many learners enrol to improve their literacy and/or numeracy skills and to enhance their prospects of obtaining employment. Others are working on their literacy and numeracy for various reasons, such as helping their children with schoolwork or to become more effective in their own personal lives. Some learners enrol for ICT courses and have literacy and numeracy skills support needs identified during their course. Most learners enrol on courses with an expected duration of less than 15 hours.

8. The hub area has 22 centres, 15 of which are medium-sized centres and seven of which are link centres. There is also a virtual learning centre. Centre locations range from high-street sites to a college of higher education and include a centre in a prison.

The following table shows the learning centres associated with the hub area. The \* indicates those visited on inspection.

Large centres (full range of course)	Medium centres (core centre courses)		Link centres (access points)	
	Charter Training Services Ltd (Chester)		Alsager School Link Centre	
	Charter Training Services Ltd (Crewe)	*	Deafness Support Network	
	Charter Training Services Ltd (Macclesfield)		Sandbach Link Centre	
	Charter Training Services Ltd (Warrington)	*	Bollington Drop-in Link Centre	
	University of Chester	*	Barrowmore Training Centre	
	Total People	*	Verdin High School	
	Total People @ Ellesmere Port	*	The New Vic	
	Charter Training Services Ltd (Northwich)			
	VRDS IT Learning Centre	*		
	Congleton Learning Partnership	*		
	Assa T&L			
	HMP Risley	*		
	Business Advice Direct			
	Business Focus & Associates Ltd			
	Virtua			

### Cumbria Hub Area

9. Since 1 August 2005, 756 learners have enrolled on ICT courses, representing 35 per cent of the hub's **learnirect** provision. Of these, 492 are still in learning. Sixty-two per cent are women, 10 per cent are identified as having a disability, 68 per cent are under the age of 55 and 1 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Of the 7,230 learners starting in 2004-05, 1,045 are still in learning. All the centres offer ICT courses. Many learners make appointments to attend local centres at times suitable to them, often on a weekly basis. Some access their courses from home and others, already in employment, do so at work. A newly installed broadband and wireless network in Cumbria allows learners to access courses on the internet in rural areas. Many learners want to improve their prospects of gaining employment and others are responding to changes in their existing jobs that now require them to have computer skills. All learners are offered an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills when they enrol on ICT courses. Most learners enrol on courses with an expected duration of less than 15 hours. Recent changes in the funding arrangements have reduced the number of enrolments on the more advanced courses.

10. Since 1 August 2005, 1,366 learners have enrolled on preparation for life and work courses, representing 63 per cent of the hub's **learnirect** provision. Of these, 385 are

still in learning. Sixty-two per cent of learners are women, 16 per cent are identified as having a disability, 83 per cent are under the age of 55 and 4 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Of the 4,146 learners starting in 2004-05, 195 are still in learning. Most learners hear of **learndirect** by word of mouth, advertising and through partner organisations such as jobcentres and rehabilitation groups. Many learners enrol on courses to improve their literacy and numeracy skills as part of wider training in areas such as ICT and lift truck driving and improving their employability opportunities. Most learners enrol on courses with an expected duration of less than 15 hours.

11. The hub area has nine centres, all medium sized. There is also a virtual learning centre. Centres are a mix of privately operated centres and centres with links to the local adult education service. Many of the centres also use 'outreach' centres belonging to other providers of educational services to deliver **learndirect** courses.

The following table shows the learning centres associated with the hub area. The \* indicates those visited on inspection

Large centres (full range of course)	Medium centres (core centre courses)	Link centres (access points)	
	Appleby Heritage Centre		Eden Rural Foyer *
	Harrington CDC	*	
	System Group	*	
	KTD Learning Centre	*	
	NeuroSystems	*	
	Age Concern Training - Cumbria	*	
	PHX Training	*	
	KTD Learning Centre Carlisle		
	KTD Learning Centre Ambleside		

### Greater Manchester Hub Area

12. Since 1 August 2005, 3,559 learners have enrolled on ICT courses, representing 31 per cent of the hub's **learndirect** provision. Of these, 2,365 are still in learning. Fifty-nine per cent of learners are women, 10 per cent are identified as having a disability, 80 per cent are under the age of 55 and 16 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Of the 35,386 learners enrolling in 2004-05, 6,426 are still in learning. Almost all the centres offer ICT courses. Many learners make appointments to attend local centres at times convenient for them, often on a weekly basis. Some access their courses from home and others, already in employment, do so at work. Many learners want to improve their prospects of gaining employment and others are responding to changes in their existing jobs that now require them to have computer skills. All learners are offered an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills when they enrol on ICT courses. Most learners enrol on courses with a duration of less than 15 hours.

13. Since August 2005, 7,269 learners have enrolled on preparation for life and work courses, representing 64 per cent of the hub's **learndirect** provision. Of these, 2,977 are still in learning. Fifty-six per cent of learners are women, 7 per cent are identified as having a disability, 93 per cent are under the age of 55 and 34 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Of the 31,842 learners who enrolled in 2004-05, 3,433 are still in learning. Courses are provided in most centres across Greater Manchester. Most learners attend learning centres in their local communities. Many learners enrol to



improve literacy or numeracy skills or to enhance their prospects of obtaining employment. Others are working on their literacy and numeracy for various reasons, such as helping their children with schoolwork or to become more effective in their own personal lives. Some learners enrol for ICT courses and have literacy and numeracy skills support needs identified during their course. Most learners enrol on courses with an expected duration of less than 15 hours.

14. Since August 2005, 551 learners have enrolled on business-related courses, representing 5 per cent of the hub's **learnirect** provision. Of these, 300 are still in learning. Approximately 50 per cent of the enrolments are on retail and distribution courses and just under 50 per cent are on business and management courses. Forty-eight per cent of learners are women, 5 per cent are identified as having a disability, 7 per cent are under the age of 55 and 29 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Of the 6,094 learners who enrolled in 2004-05, 947 are still in learning. Learners attend centres across Greater Manchester for periods of time which vary between a few hours and several weeks. Business-related courses include the development of business and management skills, such as interview techniques and European languages, and technical skills development within industrial sectors, such as lift truck theory development and manufacturing productivity courses. Typical learners are adults in employment seeking to update their skills, or those out of work and aiming to acquire new employability skills. Most learners enrol on courses with an expected duration of less than 15 hours.

15. The hub area has five large centres and 33 medium-sized centres. In addition, there are 32 link centres and one virtual learning centre. There is a balance of centres ranging from colleges of further education to private providers.

The following table shows the learning centres associated with the hub area. The \* indicates those visited on inspection.

Large centres (full range of course)		Medium centres (core centre courses)		Link centres (access points)	
Stretford Library	*	Lightbowne Learning Centre		Yew Tree Primary School	
The Learning Place		Paramount - Online (Cheadle)	*	MANCAT, City Centre	
Online Learning Centre (Sale) Ltd		Salford Jobshop Learning Centre		Urmston Library	
International Learning Centre	*	International Learning Centre (Levenshulme)		Wigan & Leigh College (Railway Road Campus)	
Grove Training	*	Community Training Direct		Tyldesley Community Education Centre	
		Manchester Business Consortium	*	Bedford High School	
		Business Advice Direct Greater Manchester		Balderstone Technology College	
		The Oldham College	*	ERP Beswick	
		Linda Taylor Associates	*	Avalon College	
		Wigan & Leigh College Flagship		Brinnington Community Centre	
		Abraham Guest High School	*	Patak's Foods Ltd	
		Alliance Learning Ltd	*	Donns Solicitors	

Large centres (full range of course)		Medium centres (core centre courses)		Link centres (access points)	
		Chamber Business Connection	*	Sale Library	
		Assa South Manchester		International Learning Centre (Rochdale)	
		Red Rose Training (Bolton) Ltd	*	Manchester Learning Centre	
		Skills City Limited	*	Whalley Range High School	
		ERP - The Workshop		St Lukes Church	
		ridgedanyers@themill	*	Wormald Ansul (UK) Ltd	
		Hargreaves Training Services Ltd	*	Terrestrial Learning	
		North Trafford College		Inspired Sisters Burnhan	
		Ashton Sixth Form College		Christy Learning Centre	*
		AWAAZ Manchester	*	Step Ahead	
		Online Learning Centre (Chorlton) Ltd		St Michael's Church	
		Learning Systems Institute Salford University		Grove Training Marple	
		TESG		Wai Yin Chinese Centre	
		Burnage Learning Centre		R.Stuart Ridgway + Associates	*
		Online Learning Centre Ltd		ADAS	
		Charter Training Services Ltd		Grove Training (Romiley)	
		Impact Learning		Sale Moor Community Centre	
		Skills Solution	*	Old Trafford Library	
		Taitec Manchester		A6 Routes	
		Paramount - Online (Droylsden)		Hurst Library Computer Learning Centre	*
		Little Hulton Skills Centre	*		
		Virtua			

### Proskills Sector Hub Area

16. Since 1 August 2005, 538 learners have enrolled on productivity courses, representing 91 per cent of the hub's **learnirect** provision. Of these, five are still in learning. Other enrolments on preparation for life and work and ICT courses are normally in addition to the productivity courses. Thirty-seven per cent of learners are women, 1 per cent are identified as having a disability, 83 per cent are under the age of 55 and 3 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Twenty per cent of learners are unemployed. Of the 2,205 learners enrolling in 2004-05, 13 are still in learning. All courses are paperbased. Most are run on employers' premises or in convenient hotels. They are seen by the learners as part of their employers' employee development

programmes. Most learners enrol on courses with an expected duration of less than 15 hours.

17. The hub has six medium-sized centres including the virtual learning centre. Of these, three have started delivering learning programmes. The centres are privately run and have close industrial connections.

The following table shows the learning centres associated with the hub area. The \* indicates those visited on inspection

Large centres (full range of course)	Medium centres (core centre courses)	Link centres (access points)
	Assa T&L	*
	Virtua	*
	Q Group	*
	Creative Minds Partnership Ltd	
	Darley Training	
	Durham Logistics College	

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	11
Number of inspection days	65
Number of learners interviewed	168
Number of staff interviewed	158
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	35

## OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

## Grade 2

18. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, the hub operator's leadership and management and its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement are good. Preparation for life and work courses in the Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria and Greater Manchester geographic hub areas are good. Automotive productivity courses in the Proskills sector-hub area are good. ICT courses in the Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, and Greater Manchester geographic hub areas are satisfactory. Business-related courses in the Greater Manchester geographic hub area are satisfactory.

19. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** Learning centre self-assessments are amalgamated into hub area and the hub operator reports. The latest version of the self-assessment report for each hub area and the hub operator is, in the main, an accurate reflection of inspection findings. However, inspectors placed more emphasis on ICT course completion rates and awarded lower grades for this curriculum area.

20. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Specifically, the hub operator has successfully implemented measures that have significantly improved two under-achieving hub areas, has produced good-

quality preparation for life and work provision and has greatly increased the number of nationally recognised qualifications provided. The hub management team has recently been reorganised, and the capacity and capability of the centre network has improved.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR MANCHESTER ENTERPRISES HUB OPERATOR:

- improve the completion rates on ICT and business and management courses
- make more use of supplementary materials to consolidate learners' understanding
- further reinforce learners' understanding of equality of opportunity
- continue to develop the learning observation processes
- further improve the analysis of learners' satisfaction surveys

## GRADES

grade1= outstanding, grade 2= good, grade 3= adequate, grade 4= inadequate

<b>Manchester Enterprises Hub operator</b>	
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality improvement	2

<b>Cheshire and Warrington Hub Area</b>	
<b>Grade 3</b>	
Area of learning grades:	
Information and communications technology	3
Preparation for life and work	2

<b>Cumbria Hub Area</b>	
<b>Grade 2</b>	
Area of learning grades:	
Information and communications technology	3
Preparation for life and work	2

<b>Greater Manchester Hub Area</b>	
<b>Grade 3</b>	
Area of learning grades:	
Information and communications technology	3
Preparation for life and work	2
Business-related courses	3

<b>Proskills Sector Hub Area</b>	
<b>Grade 2</b>	
Area of learning grades:	
Automotive	2

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievement and standards

21. **Completion rates are good on the preparation for life and work courses and automotive courses.** Completion rates are satisfactory on ICT courses and are unsatisfactory on business courses in the Greater Manchester hub. Pass rates on nationally recognised literacy and numeracy qualifications are good. The number of learners obtaining vocationally recognised qualifications are significantly above targets.

22. **Many learners are developing good skills and improving their confidence.** ICT learners are developing skills which are relevant to their work and to their personal lives. They are becoming confident users of computer hardware and software. Preparation for life and work learners are developing their literacy and numeracy skills and their personal confidence. Many are achieving nationally recognised qualifications for the first time.

23. **Many learners are making good progress.** Many complete a number of courses at the same level, while others progress through a number of levels. Some complete an appropriate mix of literacy and numeracy, and ICT or business-related courses.

### The quality of provision

24. **Coaching and support for individual learners is good.** Learners speak highly of the individual attention they receive. Tutors are knowledgeable, help learners to understand course material and motivate learners to succeed. The support is particularly valued by learners with high-anxiety levels and contributes significantly to their growth in confidence and self-esteem.

25. **Many centres have taken effective measures to increase participation of those learners who might not normally attend further education courses.** Measures include the siting of centres close to targeted groups of learners and developing close links with a wide range of local organisations to promote learners' access to courses.

26. Accommodation in centres is satisfactory. Most centres are welcoming, well laid out and conducive to learning. Computer equipment is up to date and there are few hardware or connection difficulties. Most learners are clear about the need to work at a computer safely. Some centres make extensive use of aids for learners with a disability, although staff in some centres are not clear about the availability of these aids.

27. Most staff are suitably qualified and experienced. Centres have development plans to ensure that the hub has better-qualified tutors at levels 3 and 4 to support learners. Centres have concentrated appropriately on developing tutors' knowledge and skills to help support the increasing number of learners on literacy and numeracy courses.

28. Initial advice and guidance for learners is satisfactory. Most learners are enrolled on courses that are sufficiently challenging and appropriate for them. Enrolment and induction processes are consistently applied by tutors. Tutors of learners at virtual learning centres use a good set of exemplar e-mails to provide a consistent and comprehensive enrolment, induction and advice service.

29. Initial enrolment and assessment processes identify learners who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Many learners on ICT courses study an appropriate literacy and/or numeracy course alongside their ICT courses. Other learners study on

literacy and/or numeracy courses before returning to their chosen ICT course. Appropriate help is offered to learners who have little prior knowledge of using a computer or a keyboard.

30. Many centres make good use of supplementary materials to reinforce learning, including handouts to summarise key points and exercises for further practice. When required, tutors mark work carefully and make comments to help learners improve. However, **too little use is made of supplementary materials in some centres.** In these centres, learners make copious notes about key points or print large amounts of screen notes, and their knowledge is not consolidated through extra exercises.

31. **Some individual learning plans are vague and do not explain clearly the learners' journey towards achieving their goals.** Most learners do not see the learning plans as helping them to organise their work. Too many reviews focus on recording what learners have done. They rarely look forward or set goals for subsequent learning. Most learners do not have clear short-term targets which will aid their progress.

32. Staff have been trained to observe the learning processes. Observation schedules have been drawn up and tutors have carried out some observations of induction. Areas for improvement have been identified and suitable actions taken forward. However, the process is still at an early stage and most scheduled observations have still to be carried out.

### Leadership and management

33. **The hub operator has managed recent changes very well.** It has taken over the management of a number of hubs and has improved the provision to be satisfactory or better. It has successfully reduced the number of learning centres and managed the recent changes in funding allocations.

34. **The hub operator's strategy to support the development of learners' skills has been implemented successfully.** The **learndirect** provision contributes to the overall skills development in the hub areas. The hub operator works closely with partner organisations to develop learners' access to courses, and learning centres are sited carefully. Many learners improve their skills, self-confidence and self-esteem. The take-up and achievement of vocationally related qualifications has increased significantly and most centres have high progression rates onto further courses.

35. **The hub operator provides good support for centres.** The centres' performance is reviewed frequently by hub business account managers who provide advice and monitor progress towards targets and improvements in quality. Centre managers have a clear understanding of areas which still require improvement, and of their responsibilities towards learners. Communications are good across the various hubs and centres.

36. Hub steering groups provide satisfactory support for the work of the hub operator. Membership of the steering groups includes appropriate representation from the local community, employers and major stakeholder organisations.

37. The hub operator has the required range of strategic and business plans, although there is too much overlap between the requirements of individual plans. Centre business plans include clear targets which are monitored regularly.

38. The hub operator has a clear strategy for implementing preparation for life and work courses. Most centres have made very good progress in developing preparation for life

and work provision to reflect the revised funding priorities. The quality of preparation for life and work provision is good in each hub inspected.

39. Hub-provided staff development opportunities are advertised effectively. Most centres operate staff appraisal schemes, although a few schemes do not adequately link to appropriate staff development activities.

40. The hub operator provides centres with well-presented, good-quality performance data. The business account managers make good use of the data to discuss possible centre improvements. However, some centre managers do not use the data effectively to improve their provision.

41. Ufi only allocates a small proportion of the budget to non-priority learners. Some centres with substantial numbers of unemployed learners, categorised as non-priority in **learnirect**, have used up the funds available and some learners have not been able to start courses.

42. **The hub operator's initiatives to widen participation are good.** Its policy to aim delivery at clearly identified groups has been implemented effectively. Many learning centres have developed good links with a wide range of local organisations to meet the needs of learners.

43. **The hub operator makes good use of data to support equality and diversity.** The data is mostly well understood by centre managers. Many centres set achievement targets according to learners' characteristics, such as gender or disability. **However, some centres are not using data sufficiently well.** The hub operator is developing a framework to assist centres to systematically collect, analyse and use equality and diversity data.

44. The hub operator's equal opportunities policies and procedures are suitably developed. Two staff members 'champion' equality of opportunity within the hub operator. Equality and diversity issues are discussed regularly at centre managers' meetings. The regular hub operator equality audits ensure centres are operating within current policies and procedures. Centre managers are helped to develop relevant action plans and staff training relating to equality of opportunity.

45. Access to premises is satisfactory. Existing centres that are not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 have an action plan to ensure they become compliant by next year. The hub operator requires new centres to be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 before it approves them.

46. The hub operator has a comprehensive range of resources to support specific learning needs. Most learning centre staff are aware of these resources.

47. The hub operator provides suitable guidance for centre staff on the effective marketing and promotion of **learnirect** courses. Promotional materials contain an appropriate range of images. Leaflets are suitably targeted at potential learners to rectify under-representation.

48. An appropriate hub complaints procedure is in place. Most learners are aware of their rights and responsibilities and how to make a complaint. Complaints are dealt with promptly.

49. **Hub strategies to reinforce learners' understanding of equality of opportunity are not sufficiently developed.** Many learners have a poor understanding of equality and diversity, especially learners who take a number of courses or who are on longer courses.

50. **The hub operator has implemented successful measures to improve the quality of provision for learners throughout its hub areas.** Its strategies have created good-quality provision and have significantly increased learners' participation.

51. The sharing of good practice within and between hub areas is good. Hub managers meet to share experiences and identify areas for improvement. The twice-yearly practitioners' meetings for centre staff help them to develop their knowledge and understanding of **learndirect** activities.

52. The hubs' analysis of learners' satisfaction data is satisfactory. Responses are analysed on the basis of the stages in the learning process and development plans are implemented where necessary. However, responses are not analysed by centre or by curriculum area.

53. The hub operator has satisfactory procedures for checking the quality of internal verification procedures for those centres offering nationally recognised qualifications.

54. The approach to hub self-assessment is very thorough. The self-assessment report produced in November 2005 is, in the main, an accurate reflection of inspection findings. However, inspectors placed more emphasis on the course completion rates in ICT and gave lower grades.

55. **The observation of key learning processes is not yet fully implemented.** The hub operator has identified this as a weakness and is continuing to develop this quality improvement process.



*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

## **Manchester Enterprises Hub Operator**

### **Leadership and management**

#### **Strengths**

- good management of change
- successful strategy to support the development of learners' skills
- good support for learning centres
- good initiatives to widen participation
- good use of data to support equality and diversity
- successful quality improvement measures

#### **Weaknesses**

- insufficiently developed strategies to reinforce learners' understanding of equality of opportunity
- incomplete implementation of learning process observation

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF MANCHESTER ENTERPRISES HUB OPERATOR

Grade 2

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

#### Strengths

- good management of change
- successful strategy supporting development of learner skills
- good support for learning centres
- good initiatives to widen participation
- good use of data to support equality and diversity
- successful quality improvement measures

#### Weaknesses

- under-developed strategies to reinforce learner understanding of equality of opportunity
- incomplete implementation of observation of learning processes

56. The hub operator has managed change well while still maintaining the quality of the provision. Over the past two years, the hub operator has taken over two geographic hubs in Cumbria, and in Cheshire and Warrington, merged three hubs to form the Greater Manchester hub and taken responsibility for the Proskills sector hub. The hub provision was aligned effectively to meet the new priorities introduced in August 2005 requiring hubs to focus on preparation for life and work courses and on learners without a qualification at or above level 2. Centres were reassessed against revised objective criteria, including their location, in relation to priority groups of learners, staff and resource availability to meet the revised learning focus. The number of centres was reduced through a fair and thorough tendering process. Hub-provided training supported the learning centres' staff in meeting the revised priorities. The effect of budget reductions on learners was mitigated by appropriate hub actions. For example, an agreement with Stockport College gave learners access to alternative courses if required. Inspectors judged the management of the Cumbria and Proskills hubs to be good and the management of the Cheshire and Warrington and Greater Manchester hubs to be satisfactory.

57. The strategy to support the development of learners' skills has been implemented successfully. The hub operator works strategically to support skills development in the Manchester region. This expertise and support is applied to hub areas outside of Manchester. There is a clear vision and close co-operation to use **learndirect** provision to contribute to the overall development of skills in the areas covered by the hubs. The hub operator's staff work closely with partner organisations in developing opportunities for progression, maintaining and developing learners' access to courses and delivering **learndirect** provision. Careful consideration is given to the location and purpose of learning centres to ensure each contributes appropriately to the fulfilment of local strategies. Many **learndirect** learners improve their skills, including their literacy, numeracy, self-confidence and self-esteem. Completion rates are at least satisfactory on most courses. There is significant take-up and achievement of vocationally related qualifications and most centres have high progression rates onto further courses. Some

centres have arranged for the hub provision to be delivered alongside provision from other hubs or training providers, offering a wider range of courses and progression options for learners.

58. The hub support for learning centres is good. Centre performance is reviewed frequently by hub business account managers who visit, sometimes weekly, to advise and monitor progress towards targets and improvements in quality. Centres are monitored to ensure issues including health and safety, contract performance, documents and access and provision for learners with disabilities are given suitable emphasis and lead to improvements in the provision. Centre managers have a clear understanding of areas which still require development and of their responsibilities towards learners. Hub managers are active in dealing with issues which arise at centres. The hub co-ordinator provides good support for preparation for life and work courses and the hub operates an accredited mobile testing unit for vocational qualifications. Communications are good across the various hubs and learning centres. Centre staff receive weekly updates on relevant issues through the use of an electronic bulletin. The meetings structure is comprehensive, with satisfactory records being kept of meetings held and actions which follow. Hub centre managers' meetings include opportunities for training and networking.

59. Hub steering groups have been revised recently. The role of the steering groups has been clearly defined to help balance the hubs' finance and business needs with community representation. Membership includes appropriate representation from local community, employers' and major stakeholders' organisations. Between meetings, steering group members are able to discuss issues with the relevant hub manager. This provides an effective channel for views and concerns to be raised and actions taken.

60. The hub operator has an appropriate staff development strategy that includes specific and appropriate arrangements for business, occupational and personal development activities. There are good hub-provided staff development opportunities, with many opportunities advertised effectively through the weekly learning centre bulletin. Most centres have staff appraisal schemes in operation, although a few schemes do not yet adequately link to appropriate staff development activities. While the hub has not been required to carry out checks of centre staff to ensure the safety of any children and young people in learning, some centre staff have completed relevant checks through previous employment or other contracts in place at their centres.

61. The hub operator has a number of strategic and business plans which use local and regional information to support suitable development actions for it and its hubs. Numerous plans are required to fulfil Ufi's contract requirements. While the hub operator produces these to a satisfactory standard, the system is too complicated and there is too much overlap between the requirements of individual plans.

62. The hub operator has a clear strategy for implementing preparation for life and work courses and support for learners. Many centres have made good progress in developing preparation for life and work provision to reflect the revised funding priorities. Most learning centres now have staff qualified to meet the literacy and numeracy skills support needs of learners and are working towards further relevant qualifications. The quality of preparation for life and work provision is good in each hub inspected.

63. The hub operator provides learning centres with well-presented, good-quality data on their performance which they receive monthly. This usefully supplements weekly data received from Ufi. It allows centre managers to compare their performance with other centres and is used by business account managers to discuss possible

improvements within centres. Centre managers make use of the performance data available but not all are sufficiently clear on how to use the data to analyse trends and identify improvement strategies.

64. Ufi only allocates a small proportion of the budget to non-priority learners. This includes many unemployed learners who have obtained qualifications at or above level 2 as part of their previous employment and would normally be eligible to have their fees paid on education courses. Some centres with substantial numbers of unemployed learners have used up the small allocation of non-priority funds available. While the hub operator has supported centres to meet learners' needs where possible, some unemployed learners at a few centres have not been able to start courses.

## Equality of opportunity

## Contributory grade 2

65. Initiatives to widen participation are good. The hub operator's policy ensures that it targets priority groups. Regular checks by the hub operator ensure that this targeted approach is succeeding in widening the participation of under-represented groups. In the Greater Manchester hub, a number of centres actively aim provision at people from a wide range of ethnic groups. Learners from over 100 nationalities attending one centre. A number of centres offer programmes only for women, especially in sectors such as the automotive industry, in which women are under-represented. There are also centres that target under-represented men. In the Proskills hub, unemployed learners attend automotive productivity courses and, on completion, are offered the opportunity for employment. In the Cumbria hub, centres are located in very deprived wards to increase and widen access to learners not traditionally involved in education. Many learning centres have developed good links with a wide range of local organisations to meet the needs of learners. Examples include centres forming links with the Chinese community in Manchester, and a young offenders' organisation, a local organisation working with single mothers and organisations working specifically with people with a range of disabilities.

66. The hub operator makes good use of data to support equality and diversity. Appropriate data is collected and sent to centres monthly. Information on learners' participation is collected and analysed according to the learners' characteristics, including gender, disability and ethnic background. The hub operator provides suitable training on the analysis and use of this data and it is mostly well-understood by learning centres. Many individual centres set targets for achievement by learners' characteristics. However, some centres are not using the data sufficiently well to monitor the performance of different groups of learners. The hub operator is developing a framework to further assist centres systematically to collect, analyse and use equality and diversity data.

67. The hub operator's equal opportunities policy and procedures are suitably developed. The hub operator has recently updated its policy to include good detail on current relevant legislation. The policy is dated, is reviewed annually and appropriately covers all relevant areas. Two staff members 'champion' equality of opportunity within the hub operator. An equality and diversity working group, with representation from the learning centres, has recently been established.

68. The hub operator works effectively with learning centres in promoting equality of opportunity. A framework for action is developed with centres to ensure that their own equal opportunities policies are updated regularly, are compliant with current legislation and are promoted to learners. The hub operator carries out a regular equality audit to

ensure that centres are operating within current policies and procedures. Each centre is supported by the hub operator to develop an action plan for under-represented groups, to develop training and guidance for staff on equality of opportunity and to ensure that there are effective mechanisms to deal with any unlawful practice. Centre managers' meetings cover equality and diversity and the managers have received training on such issues as faith and diversity, adaptive technology and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 audits. Manchester Enterprises has offered equality of opportunity training to all hub and centre staff.

69. Access to premises is satisfactory. Thirty of the 39 centres in the Greater Manchester hub, eight of the 13 centres in the Cheshire and Warrington hub, seven of the nine centres in the Cumbria hub and two of the four centres in the Proskills hub are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The hub operator has required non-compliant centres to draw up an action plan for next year to ensure they become compliant. Hub operator approval for new centres requires them to be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Most learning centres are accessible by learners using public transport. Where centres or link centres do not have easy access, alternative arrangements are made for learners to attend nearby centres which have better access.

70. The hub operator has a comprehensive range of resources to support specific learning needs. Most learning centre staff are aware of these resources, although some centres have made little use of them. The hub operator provides training on adaptive technologies and assists centres in making appropriate claims for support and services on behalf of learners.

71. The hub operator provides suitable guidance to learning centres on how to effectively market and promote **learnirect** courses. This guidance refers well to equality and diversity to ensure the range of learners and opportunities are promoted effectively. Promotional materials contain an appropriate range of images. Leaflets are targeted at potential learners to rectify under-representation.

72. An appropriate hub complaints procedure is in place and all learners have a copy of it. Most learners are aware of their rights and responsibilities and how to make a complaint. Complaints are logged and dealt with promptly. Trends are analysed, and action points are developed and raised at management meetings at hub operator and centre levels.

73. The hub strategies to reinforce learners' understanding of equality of opportunity are not sufficiently developed. Many learners have a poor understanding of equality and diversity, especially learners who take a number of courses or who are on longer courses. Equality of opportunity is appropriately covered at induction. Review forms do not record the checking of learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues. Learners at virtual learning centres are sent a hard copy of the welcome pack, which appropriately covers equality of opportunity. While health and safety issues are regularly reinforced through e-mail contact with learners enrolled with virtual learning centres, equality of opportunity is not similarly reinforced.

### Quality improvement

### Contributory grade 2

74. The hub operator has implemented successful measures to improve the quality of provision for learners throughout its hub areas. The hub operator has improved two hub areas that were not meeting key performance indicators and/or financial targets before

2004, but which have now been judged by inspectors to be satisfactory or better. The hub operator has successfully implemented strategies for preparation for life and work courses and for providing vocationally related qualifications. Both of these strategies have developed provision judged by inspectors to be of good quality and have significantly increased learners' participation. The recently re-organised management team has improved the contract management and the capability and capacity of the hub operator's network. A range of information sources are used to identify areas for improvement. Quarterly centre audits, monthly centre manager meetings and other centre visits help the hub operator to identify and act on areas requiring improvement. The hub operator has an effective support system for new centres and for centres that are not meeting key performance indicators. Business account managers make weekly visits to centres requiring intensive support. Each visit includes a review of the development plan and progress towards achievement. Many centres develop and improve through this process, but those that do not improve have their contract withdrawn.

75. The sharing of good practice within and between hub areas is good. Hub managers meet each month to discuss policy and strategy issues, to share experiences and to identify areas for improvement. The monthly centre managers' meetings include a development topic. Hub staff assist inter-hub visits to share good practice. The twice-yearly practitioners' meetings for all centre staff help them to develop their knowledge and understanding of specific **learnirect** courses.

76. The hubs' analysis of learners' satisfaction data is satisfactory. Data is collected at induction and on completion of a learner's course and through learners' focus groups. Responses are analysed on the basis of the learning process and development plans are implemented where necessary. However, responses are not analysed by centre or by curriculum area.

77. The hub operator has satisfactory procedures for checking the quality of the internal verification procedures of centres that offer nationally recognised qualifications. The tendering process ensures that centres have awarding body approval and suitably qualified staff. Staff resources are checked during the monthly visit. The hub operator has assisted centres to become accredited centres and has provided training for assessors' and verifiers' awards.

78. The approach to hub self-assessment is very thorough. Each centre produces a self-assessment report and associated development plan on an annual basis. Centres' self-assessments are effectively scrutinised and key judgements are challenged. Centres which are inexperienced in self-assessment are offered training and support. Progress on the development plan is reviewed monthly by the business account managers in conjunction with centre managers. Each centre's self-assessment feeds into its respective hub area self-assessment, which in turn feeds into the hub operators' self-assessment. Hub areas' and the hub operator's self-assessments are reviewed by a validation panel of members external to the hub and experienced in self-assessment. The self-assessment report produced in November 2005 is, in the main, an accurate reflection of inspection findings. However, inspectors placed more emphasis on the course completion rates in ICT and gave lower grades.

79. The observation of key learning processes is not yet fully implemented. The hub operator has identified this as a weakness and is continuing to develop this quality improvement process. Only induction sessions have been observed. However, following observation, the hub operator made changes in the induction process which have improved learners' recollection of the topics covered.

## Hub Areas

### CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON HUB AREA

Grade 3

Area of learning	Number of learners	Grade
Information and communications technology	1,955	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

#### Strengths

- good achievement of vocationally related qualifications
- good support for learning
- very effective widening of participation

#### Weaknesses

- ineffective monitoring of progress in some centres
- insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity

#### Achievement and standards

80. Many learners achieve nationally recognised vocational qualifications and the hub has greatly exceeded its targets for the achievement of vocational qualifications such as an examination-based qualification in information technology (IT). On **learndirect** courses, the overall completion rate is just below the national average. The Congleton Learning Partnership and CCL Technology centres have good completion rates of 77 per cent and 73 per cent, respectively. The Castella Training and the Warrington Collegiate centres have low completion rates of 49 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively, and were closed prior to the start of the new contract year.

81. Most ICT learners are developing good computing skills relevant to employment such as word processing and using spreadsheets to support decision making. Many learners have developed good confidence in their skills, increasingly using e-mails, the internet and word processing for formal letters. A group of learners with hearing impairments have developed their internet skills to improve communication with family members and friends. They stated that their quality of life had improved and that they now feel more at home in an increasingly technology-dependent society.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded learndirect provision								
	2005-06		2004-05					
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
	Number of starts	1,148		8,821				
Retained*	672	59	8,596	97				
Successfully completed	483	42	5,572	63				
Still in learning	618	54	1,337	15				

\*retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point.

## The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Information and communications technology	1	1	1	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

82. Support for learning is good. Learning in centres is productive and free from interruptions. No unsatisfactory learning was observed. ICT tutors are knowledgeable and can always answer learners' questions. There are sufficient tutors in centres and learners rarely have to wait for tutors' responses. Support for learners in centres is universally friendly, personally supportive and sensitive to the age and maturity of the learners. Tutors have good personal knowledge of their learners. They use affirmative comments well, encouraging and praising learners' progress. This support is particularly valued by learners with high-anxiety levels and contributes significantly to their growth in confidence and self-esteem. Most learning takes place through a mix of independent study and individual support. A minority of centres further extend their learners' knowledge well with good supplementary learning materials. Learners report few technical problems.

83. Many centres have taken extensive measures to widen participation. Centre staff have made positive links with local communities and business parks to encourage increased take-up of ICT courses. Centres are located well and have good links to public transport, many being in town centre locations. Some centres are within other training or education providers such as further education colleges. Promotion of **learndirect** is good in many centres. Learners' success is celebrated well by some centres, with case histories displayed prominently in centres and on websites. Many centres have close links with the **nextstep** service which helps learners to progress their learning and their career prospects. Tutors effectively promote the use of assistive and adaptive technology for learners with a disability.

84. Learning environments are well maintained and comfortable, and many present a bright, welcoming and modern image. Computing equipment is up to date and there are few hardware or connection difficulties. Most learners are well aware of health and safety issues in using computers. They are clear about the need to work at a computer safely and to take frequent breaks. Most centres emphasise good health and safety practice through posters, and health and safety is a key topic at induction.

85. Staff are suitably qualified and development plans are in place to ensure that the hub has better qualified staff at levels 3 and 4 to support learners. Most centres have staff appraisal schemes in operation which enable effective training and development plans to be produced.

86. Initial advice and guidance for learners is satisfactory. Most learners take courses that are sufficiently challenging and appropriate for them and many progress to higher levels. A few learners are enrolled onto courses which they find too demanding for their level of language or numeracy skills. Tutors are quick to recognise this when it happens and agree more appropriate courses with the learners.

87. The enrolment and induction process is satisfactory. Tutors achieve consistency through using comprehensive checklists. Learners usually have a satisfactory individual induction with their tutor. This includes an introduction to the **learndirect** software



systems. Tutors of learners at virtual learning centres use a good set of exemplar e-mails to provide a consistent and comprehensive enrolment, induction and advice service.

88. The enrolment process requires the learner to review their level of literacy and numeracy skills and offers a further diagnostic check for those who want to take it. Learners with additional literacy, numeracy or language skills development needs are encouraged to take courses to improve their skills. The learners' computing skills and experience are also reviewed. Appropriate help is offered for those who have little prior knowledge of the use of a computer or a keyboard.

89. The monitoring of learners' progress is ineffective in some centres. Individual learning plans are sometimes vague and do not clearly explain the learners' journey towards achieving their goals. Insufficient use is made of challenging targets to manage and monitor learners' progress. Individual learning plans for learners on longer courses, or a series of shorter courses, do not include sufficient intermediate milestone targets to measure progress. Some tutors' records of the reasons for extending courses are inadequate. However, some centres review learners' progress frequently and well. At Charter Training in Warrington, managers review the progress of all learners every fortnight. They review the hours learners have studied on their course against the expected hours. They note dates of the most recent access by the learner and action by the tutor and instigate appropriate follow-up action by tutors. The ratio of completers to withdrawals has improved very significantly since this system was introduced.

## **Leadership and management**

90. Learning centres receive good support from the hub and their own internal organisations. The hub manager provides good support for the promotion of ICT courses and for the day-to-day management of centres through the use of hub operator's resources. Centre managers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Most centres have staff that specialise in ICT. The range of ICT courses available in HMP Risley is small due to the lack of internet access. The prison only uses compact disc-based courses which greatly restricts the range of courses available to inmates.

91. Communications between the hub and learning centre managers are good. Staff attend monthly meetings and receive regular updates through the use of weekly electronic communications. A programme of centre managers' meetings provides specialist training and workshops and the opportunity for networking. The Cheshire and Warrington Steering Group includes representatives from the local community, and employers and major stakeholders' organisations to promote opportunities effectively for learners.

92. Centres have access to a range of adaptive technology including large keyboards, screen magnifiers and tracker balls which are available from the hub's central resources and in many cases from within the centres' own training organisations. The Vale Royal Disability Services centre specialises in the use of adaptive technology and provides training and consultancy for other hub members. Some centres are difficult to access for learners with a disability. All centres are aware of the problems and have plans to resolve these difficulties. All centres have had audits for the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and have development plans to rectify non-compliance.

93. Most learners are aware of the equal opportunities policy and the complaints procedure. Discussion on equality of opportunity takes place but there is little reinforcement of equality of opportunity during formal reviews. This is particularly

relevant for the many ICT learners who take a series of courses over an extended period of time.

94. Centres have an effective quality improvement programme and staff in most centres are carrying out formal observations of the learning process. Centre staff are aware of the self-assessment and identified action points are improving learning. The self-assessment report identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses for ICT. Inspectors gave a greater emphasis to the satisfactory completion rates and gave a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment.

Area of learning	Number of learners	Grade
Preparation for life and work	447	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

### Strengths

- good completion and pass rates
- good development of learners' skills and confidence
- good support for learning
- very effective widening of participation

### Weaknesses

- insufficient use of supplementary materials
- insufficient identification of additional learning needs

### Achievement and standards

95. Completion and pass rates are good. In 2004-05, the completion rate was significantly above the national average for **learndirect** provision in preparation for life and work. Centres with substantial numbers of learners have completion rates close to the hub's average. Enrolments, completions and the number of learners passing national tests have increased significantly over the past year. In 2004-2005, 86 per cent of learners passed national tests at levels 1 or 2.

96. The self-confidence and self-esteem of most learners is increased significantly. Learners develop the skills to work at their own pace and to manage their own learning successfully. Learners enjoy learning and state that they are more effective in their personal and working lives through the confidence and skills gained on their courses. Some have applied for jobs at a level which they would not have previously applied for, and learners in prison gain useful skills which can be used for employment.

97. The rate of progression is good. A high percentage of preparation for life and work learners progress to other courses. Learners are motivated and encouraged to achieve their learning targets and move on to further study or employment. Some preparation for life and work learners have moved on to work as tutors in centres. Learners with disabilities move on to gain jobs.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded learndirect provision								
	2005-06		2004-05					
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Number of starts	1,434		3,393					
Retained*	1,236	86	3,389	100				
Successfully completed	1,075	75	2,947	87				
Still in learning	306	21	141	4				

\*retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point.

## The quality of provision

98. Support for learning is good. Tutors provide effective coaching for individual learners. Tutors have good working relationships with learners and encourage reluctant learners to continue with their learning. Learners enjoy their learning. Tutors are active in identifying when learners are having difficulties understanding concepts and help learners to overcome them. Some centres are providing particularly good support for employed learners. For example, Charter Training (Crewe) is meeting the needs of local employers by updating learners' employment skills to reflect changing patterns of employment. In the Vale Royal Disability Services centre, there is very good support for learners with physical disabilities and those with a history of mental illness.

99. Many centres have taken extensive measures to widen participation. Centre staff have made positive links with local communities and business parks to encourage more take-up of preparation for life and work courses. Centres are well located and have good links to public transport, with many being in town-centre locations. Some centres are within other providers of training and education such as further education colleges. Promotion of **learndirect** is good in many centres. Learners' success is celebrated well by some centres with case histories displayed prominently in centres and on websites. Tutors effectively promote the use of assistive and adaptive technology for learners with a disability. Many centres have close links with the **nextstep** service which helps learners to progress their learning and their career prospects.

100. Most centres are welcoming, well laid out and conducive to learning. All are well maintained and comfortable and many present a bright, welcoming and modern image. Computing equipment is up to date and there are few hardware or connection difficulties. Vale Royal Disability Services makes extensive use of adaptive technologies for learners with a disability.

101. Staff are suitably qualified in most centres. Centres have appropriately concentrated on developing staff members' expertise and confidence in dealing with preparation for life and work learners. Development plans are in place to ensure that the hub has better qualified staff at levels 3 and 4 to support learners. Most centres have staff appraisal schemes in operation which lead to effective training and development plans.

102. Individual learning plans are used to establish targets and to monitor progress. Most plans are effective in helping learners to progress their learning but some contain only general statements and do not help learners to achieve their goals.

103. Advice and guidance given by centres is satisfactory. Initial advice and guidance is given through informal discussions with learners to agree their objectives. Most centres give advice and guidance linked to the **nextstep** careers programme.

104. Insufficient use is made of a range of supplementary materials. Supplementary materials are available in some centres but are generally limited to worksheets. Insufficient use is made of a variety of other resources such as textbooks.

105. Learners' additional needs are not sufficiently identified. Staff are not consistently aware of resources for additional needs. Induction does not effectively identify learners with additional needs in most centres. Good practice in identifying needs is not sufficiently shared between all centres.

## Leadership and management

106. Individual learning centres receive good support from the hub and their own internal organisations. The hub manager provides good support for the promotion of preparation of life and work courses and for the day-to-day management of centres through the use of hub-operator resources. Centre managers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Most centres have staff that specialise in preparation for life and work courses. The hub operator has a preparation for life and work co-ordinator who provides good support for centres in the development of their provision.

107. Communication between the hub and learning centre managers is good. Staff attend monthly meetings and receive regular updates through the use of weekly electronic communications. A programme of centre manager meetings provides specialist training and workshops and the opportunity for networking. The Cheshire and Warrington hub steering group includes representatives from the local community, employers and major stakeholders' organisations to promote opportunities effectively for learners.

108. Centres have access to a range of adaptive technology, including large keyboards, screen magnifiers and tracker balls, which is available from the hub's central resources and in many cases from within their own training organisations. The Vale Royal Disability Services centre specialises in the use of adaptive technology and provides training for the other hub members to improve the use of these techniques. Some centres are difficult to access for learners with a disability. All centres are aware of the problems and have plans to resolve these difficulties. All centres have had Disability Discrimination Act 1995 audits and have development plans to rectify non-compliance.

109. Most learners are aware of the equal opportunities policy and the complaints procedure. Discussion on equality of opportunity takes place but there is little reinforcement of equality of opportunity awareness during formal reviews.

110. Centres have an effective quality improvement programme and staff in most centres have started to carry out formal observations of the learning process. Centre staff are aware of the self-assessment and identified action points are improving learning. The self-assessment report identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors and gives provision the same grade as that given by the inspectors.

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON HUB AREA:**

- the friendly staff
- the flexible working - it fits in well with shift patterns
- the helpful tutors - they encouraged me to carry on
- that the tutors are not condescending
- 'I am pleased with new skills I have got'
- being able to take workbooks home
- 'I am more relaxed now and confident in getting a job'
- being able to work at their own pace

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON HUB AREA COULD IMPROVE:**

- the size of the rooms
- the amount of opportunities to practise the learning
- the leg-room at the workstations
- the price - it went up halfway through programme
- the access for learners in wheelchairs
- the initial information - pre-course perceptions were that you had to be computer literate before coming on programme
- the ability to go back to work on previous programmes
- the accuracy of software - calculating axle weights on programmes did not work

## **KEY CHALLENGES FOR CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON HUB AREA:**

- improve the monitoring of learners' progress
- reinforce understanding of equality of opportunity for learners who study for an extended period
- make better use of supplementary materials and other available support resources

## CUMBRIA HUB AREA

## Grade 2

Area of learning	Number of learners	Grade
Information and communications technology	1,537	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

### Strengths

- good coaching and support for learners' progress
- very effective widening of participation
- good management to meet learners' needs

### Weaknesses

- ineffective use of progress reviews
- insufficient use of supplementary materials
- insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity

### Achievement and standards

111. Most ICT learners are developing good computing skills relevant to employment such as word processing and using spreadsheets. Learners master the use of e-mails, the internet and word-processing skills for administration such as letters, posters and desk-top publishing. Many learners have developed good confidence in their skills and some learners claim that they now use computers at home confidently.

112. Most learners take courses leading to nationally recognised qualifications, and the achievement rate for vocationally related qualifications is improving. Completion rates are satisfactory and are the same as the **learnirect** national average for ICT courses. Completion rates vary between centres but not significantly. Most of the centres with low completion rates in 2004-05 have been closed. A significant proportion of learners make good progress and, overall, 35 per cent of learners have progressed from a course for beginners to complete a range of further courses at different levels. In most centres, attendance and retention are good. Procedures to contact and withdraw inactive learners are rigorous in most centres.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded learnirect provision								
	2005-06		2004-05					
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Number of starts	756		7,230					
Retained*	361	48	7,153	99				
Successfully completed	222	29	4,752	66				
Still in learning	492	65	1,045	14				

\*retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point.

## The quality of provision

113. Learners receive good coaching and support. Many learners are new to ICT and welcome the sensitive personal approach which helps them cope with a new style of learning. Learners often start at a basic level in ICT and the support they receive helps and encourages them to broaden their skills and, in some cases, to progress on to more advanced levels. In a number of centres, extra support is provided by telephone and e-mail. Some learners normally work from home and attend centres to be coached in subjects where they need specific support. The Age Concern centre has an 'explorer' bus which is used for ICT training at various locations for four days a week. Learners receive good support from the on-board tutor and a voluntary tutor, including extra work to practise at home.

114. The centres in the hub are very effective at widening participation. Centres are spread throughout the county and are sited carefully to attract learners who might not normally participate in further education. Learning environments are very welcoming. Learners appreciate the celebration of their successes. Courses are promoted well through good marketing and leaflet dropping. There are many partnership arrangements, some between **learnirect** providers and others with charity organisations. Courses are effectively advertised through local business and commercial organisations. Centres recruit learners in a number of ways including contacting clients of an adjacent cybercafé and through effective promotion on a centre website. Many centres work with schools to promote courses to staff and parents. Peer communication is very effective and learners' recommendations play a major part in recruitment and widening participation.

115. Learners receive satisfactory guidance and additional support. Pre-course literature accurately describes course content and all courses include a structured induction. Centres either have or are working towards national awards for initial advice and guidance. Some courses are specially targeted at learners with additional needs. Systems are in place to provide support for learners with language needs but these are not always used.

116. Most tutors are well qualified and experienced in using ICT. Effective professional development opportunities enable tutors to keep up to date and to broaden their knowledge and skills. Centres are well equipped. Laptop computers are used in community venues which do not have desktop computers. The 'explorer' bus is well equipped with six computer terminals, a satellite link and a large LCD screen. A wide range of adaptive technology is available to support learners who have specific needs and most staff are experienced in using the technology. Tutors are usually aware of learners' difficulties and, for example, many help by increasing the size of the letters and symbols on the computer screen.

117. Staff development is satisfactory. Most centres have some form of appraisal system and many of the systems are linked to a training plan. Monthly hub managers' meetings encourage the sharing of good practice, which helps staff to develop their skills.

118. The initial enrolment and assessment process helps to identify if ICT learners would like to develop their literacy and numeracy skills further. Those who enrol on short, taster ICT courses are frequently identified as having literacy and/or numeracy development needs. Many learners transfer to preparation for life and work courses to improve their literacy and numeracy. Some of these learners study on appropriate



literacy and/or numeracy courses alongside their ICT courses. Other learners study on literacy and/or numeracy courses before returning to their chosen ICT course.

119. Ineffective use is made of progress reviews. Reviews often focus on what learners have done, and rarely look forward or set interim goals to help learners progress towards their longer-term targets. Targets do not always state clearly what needs to be done and by when. Individual learning plans do not include adequate long- and short-term targets or milestones, and are rarely used as a basis for the review, particularly when learners are progressing on to other modules. Individual learning plans are not always updated following a review. Most learners do not see the learning plans as helping them to organise their work.

120. Insufficient use is made of supplementary materials. Most learners' notes consist of print outs from computer screens. Some workbooks are used and these are generally of good quality, but little use is made of textbooks or handouts to illustrate or reinforce learning. Insufficient use is made of practice materials linked to small assignments and there is little use of examples that demonstrate the effects and advantages of using IT. Very few motivational posters show people who work in IT, the type of work that they do and the ways that IT is used to aid commerce and industry.

## **Leadership and management**

121. The hub is managed well. The recent reorganisation of the hub has been managed very effectively. The number of providers has been reduced substantially from 34 to six in two years. Learning centres are managed well. Centre managers have adapted quickly to the change in funding emphasis from 1 August 2005, which requires them to focus on improving levels of literacy and numeracy and on learners who do not have a qualification at or above level 2. Overall, centres are above their targets for this time in the year and ahead on other indicators compared to 2004-05. The Appleby Heritage Centre is underperforming and is receiving extensive support to improve its service. Other centres which underperformed in 2004-05, particularly in ICT, have been closed.

122. There is much co-operative working between centres and partners external to the hub to provide a coherent plan for learning for Cumbria. Centres work closely together to manage and improve the **learnirect** provision and to share good practice. There is good collaboration with local organisations, and providers work closely with partners for the benefit of learners. Outreach activity is effective and uses good contacts with local councils and local disability organisations. Some centres work closely with local jobcentres and the probation service to support learners on to further education and work.

123. Learning centres are sited in appropriate locations covering the main geographic areas of Cumbria. Many are sited in areas such as Workington, Whitehaven and Barrow, to recruit learners who are not traditionally represented in further education and who need to improve their levels of literacy, numeracy and computing skills. Many make use of the existing community development centre network which has staff experienced in adult education. However, the hub has identified that there are some rural areas which are not covered sufficiently.

124. Most centre staff make effective use of learners' data to manage learners, including checking that learners are still studying on their course. A number of centres have their own well-developed management information systems to supplement this process. Most staff are proficient users of Ufi's data systems for monitoring learners'

progress and performance. Centre managers have used data on the profile of learners in their centres to target specific groups of learners. For example, the KTD learning centre has identified the need to recruit more men. However, at the System Group centre, information was not being used effectively to check if learners were still studying on their course.

125. Equality of opportunity is not sufficiently reinforced, especially for the many learners who complete a number of ICT courses and study for an extended period of time. Reviews or electronic assessment logs are rarely used to reinforce equality of opportunity. Aspects of equality of opportunity covered during induction are not reinforced as learners progress through a series of courses. Review form notes do not record any references to reinforcing learners' understanding of aspects of equality.

126. Staff have been trained to carry out observations of the learning processes, including induction and progress reviews at the end of courses. Observation schedules have been drawn up and observations carried out. Areas for improvement have been identified and suitable actions taken forward.

127. Centre staff have carefully identified the strengths and weaknesses of their provision using a suitable framework provided by the hub. They are using their resulting development/action plans effectively to improve their provision for learners. Each centre's strengths and weaknesses are collated to form the hub's self-assessment report. The self-assessment report is validated by a small panel including members external to the hub. Inspectors gave provision a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report, placing a greater emphasis on the satisfactory completion rates. Other aspects of the self-assessment are largely accurate and the evaluative judgements made in the report matched those made by inspectors.

Area of learning	Number of learners	Grade
Preparation for life and work	580	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

### Strengths

- high pass rates for national tests
- good completion and progression rates
- good use of **learndirect** courses to meet learners' goals
- good management to meet learners' needs

### Weaknesses

- poor target-setting to aid learners' progress
- insufficient use of supplementary learning materials in some centres

### Achievement and standards

128. Sixty-four per cent of all learners starting preparation for life and work courses in Cumbria go on to take national tests, which is significantly higher than the national average. The pass rate is high at 92 per cent, again above the national average. Completion and progression rates are good. In 2004-05, completion rates were 5 per cent above national completion rates. Centres with significant numbers of learners have completion rates close to the hub average. Progression to further learning is good, with the rate increasing by 25 per cent from 2003-04. Retention rates are satisfactory.

129. Learners value **learndirect** training. They make significant gains in confidence and in the development of their skills. They claim that they are better equipped in confidence and increased skill levels to apply for employment. Learners experiencing long-term sickness have improved self-assurance through their learning, enabling them to plan appropriate progression routes to employment and further learning.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded learndirect provision								
	2005-06		2004-05					
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
	Number of starts	1,366		4,146				
Retained*	1,159	85	4,143	100				
Successfully completed	937	69	3,528	85				
Still in learning	385	28	195	5				

\*retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point.

### The quality of provision

130. Good use is made of **learndirect** courses to meet learners' goals. Courses are effectively integrated with other areas of learning to ensure that learning goals are met. Attention is taken to carefully assess learners' literacy and numeracy levels on entry to **learndirect** courses. Learners are motivated to develop their literacy and numeracy skills

as stepping stones to further courses. For example, a number of learners work towards level 1 qualifications in literacy and numeracy, progress to an ICT course and then return after successful completion to work towards level 2 qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Courses are effectively packaged to meet learners' and employers' needs. The Age Concern centre has developed provision to meet the needs of learners on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses who are employed in the hospitality industry and for whom learning about citizenship is a necessity. The System Group centre effectively mixes together lift truck driving theory and practical training alongside literacy and numeracy training. Initial assessments of language levels of some Polish employees are carried out to plan ESOL training alongside lift truck training for a local employer.

131. Learning is effective and increases the learners' ability to develop their personal learning skills. Tutors provide learners with the necessary support to complete courses effectively. Learners enjoy their learning. Their achievements are celebrated well in centres. Visual displays of learners' work and achievements are widely displayed in centres and show the progress learners make. Tutors make good use of a range of comprehensive systems to record learners' achievements.

132. Learning environments are attractive and are well resourced. Staff have appropriate qualifications and increasing levels of knowledge of preparation for life and work courses. The provision of advice and guidance for learners is satisfactory as are induction practices. One centre has produced a very clear information booklet containing many visual images that aid learners' understanding of the centre's policies and procedures. Centres either have or are working towards a national quality standard for information, advice and guidance.

133. Individual learning plans do not effectively set targets for interim learning objectives. Targets are often too general and plans do not always indicate timescales for achievement. Learning plans are rarely used to plan a whole programme of learning including suggested progression routes. Unnecessary duplication takes place as new learning plans are produced for each course. Many staff do not value the use of the individual learning plan and two centres have produced supplementary material to aid the planning of programmes, progression routes and recording of results from initial advice and guidance.

134. Insufficient use is made of supplementary learning materials in some centres. All centres have literacy and numeracy core curriculum materials to support learning but these are not used consistently. Some centres are better established at providing preparation for life and work courses and have a good range of reference materials available to learners as additional resources and for independent study. In other centres, few handouts are available to learners for independent study and as reference material. The Age Concern centre makes good use of group learning sessions to aid differing learning styles. These sessions are planned well and schemes of work are linked to topics required for national tests. However, little use is made of group learning opportunities in other centres.

## **Leadership and management**

135. The hub is managed well. The recent reorganisation of the hub has been managed very effectively to meet learners' literacy and numeracy needs. The number of providers has been reduced substantially from 34 to six in two years. Learning centres are managed well. Centre managers have adapted quickly to the change in funding emphasis from 1 August 2005, which requires them to focus on improving levels of

literacy and numeracy, and on learners who do not have a qualification at or above level 2. Staff development is good. All centres have staff qualified in learner support. One centre has staff qualified to level 4 in literacy and numeracy. Five centres have staff working towards qualifications at level 4 and all centres have staff working towards qualifications at level 3.

136. There is much co-operative working between centres and partners external to the hub to provide a coherent plan for learning for Cumbria. Centres work closely together to manage and improve the **learnirect** provision and to share good practice. Good partnerships exist between centres and external organisations such as mental health and rehabilitation groups, the probation service, employment agencies, Jobcentre Plus and employers. Centres have formal links with external organisations from which many learners are referred.

137. The hub has carefully matched provision to wards and areas of high deprivation in places such as Whitehaven, Workington and Barrow, where it succeeds in meeting a wide range of learners' needs. Many centres make use of the existing community development centre network which has staff experienced in adult education. The Harrington centre makes particularly good use of 11 local outreach centres located in wards with high levels of deprivation. Some centres use peripatetic tutors and laptop computers to provide courses at outreach centres where necessary. Learners who are unemployed represent 76 per cent of all learners taking preparation for life and work courses. The participation of learners with disabilities has increased markedly in the past three years. However, the hub has identified that there are some rural areas which are not covered sufficiently.

138. Most centre staff make effective use of learners' data to manage learners, including checking that learners are still studying on their course. A number of centres have their own well-developed management information systems to supplement this process. Most staff are proficient users of Ufi's data systems for monitoring learners' progress and performance.

139. Equality of opportunity is promoted through displays at centres. Centres promote their policies, equality statements and how learners should make a complaint. Centres have effective systems to deal with complaints. Strategies to widen participation of learners who would not normally study in further education are effective.

140. Staff have been trained to carry out observations of the learning processes, including induction and progress reviews at the end of courses. Observation schedules have been drawn up and observations conducted. Areas for improvement have been identified and suitable actions taken forward.

141. Centre staff have carefully identified the strengths and weaknesses of their provision using a suitable framework provided by the hub. Centre staff are using their resulting development/action plans effectively to improve their provision for learners. Each centre's strengths and weaknesses are collated to form the hub's self-assessment report. The self-assessment report is validated by a small panel, including members external to the hub. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and most strengths were validated by inspectors. Inspectors gave the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT CUMBRIA HUB AREA:**

- working at their own speed
- the opportunity to do national tests as an adult
- being motivated to continue learning
- their increased confidence
- 'achieving skills in IT I didn't believe I was capable of'
- progressing through different courses
- the additional group learning sessions
- the very supportive tutors, who are sensitive to learners' problems
- the good celebrations of success

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK CUMBRIA HUB AREA COULD IMPROVE:**

- the explanations of where they have gone wrong in practice tests
- the amount of paperwork staff have to complete
- the amount of publicity and marketing for higher levels of ICT
- the distance that learners have to travel
- the provision of support materials

## **KEY CHALLENGES FOR CUMBRIA HUB AREA:**

- improve target-setting to aid learners' progress
- make better use of supplementary learning materials
- reinforce the understanding of equality of opportunity of learners who study for an extended period

## GREATER MANCHESTER HUB AREA

Grade 3

Area of learning	Number of learners	Grade
Information and communications technology	8,791	3

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

**Strengths**

- good development of learners' confidence and skills
- good achievement of vocationally related qualifications
- particularly effective coaching and individual support for learners
- good links with local organisations to meet the needs of a wide range of learners

**Weaknesses**

- low completion rates
- ineffective setting of interim learning goals to improve learners' progress
- inadequate sharing of good practice between centres
- insufficient observation of learning

**Achievement and standards**

142. Many learners speak about how they have developed considerable confidence in using computers. They can discuss their skills and understanding of particular applications of ICT. Many learners start with little or no prior computing experience and often have not studied for some time, yet they quickly become able to use the internet and computers for online learning, sending e-mails and developing personal and family applications. Many learners start with a beginners' course and then move on to learn a range of basic software packages. They use their new skills for personal fulfilment, independent learning and enhancing their job prospects. Overall, 44 per cent of learners have progressed from a course for beginners to complete a range of further courses at levels 1 or 2.

143. Overall, Greater Manchester has greatly exceeded its target for learners achieving an examination-based qualification. In 2004-05, 4,095 learners passed units from an examination-based qualification in IT or a basic computer literacy course. These learners gain qualifications that enhance their job prospects or improve the value of their skills to their current employers. Retention rates are satisfactory but completion rates are below the national average. In 2004-05, completion rates varied from 35 per cent at the Business Advice Direct centre to 85 per cent at the Stretford Library centre. Many of the centres with low completion rates in 2004-05 have been closed.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded learndirect provision								
	2005-06		2004-05					
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
	Number of starts	3,559		35,386				
Retained*	1,944	54	34,844	98				
Successfully completed	1,037	29	21,645	61				
Still in learning	2,365	66	6,426	18				

\*retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point.

## The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Information and communications technology	0	2	1	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

144. Tutors provide very good coaching and support for each learner. Many centres have recently reviewed their initial advice and guidance to improve course completions. The needs of learners are analysed carefully and suitable ICT courses are recommended. Tutors know their learners well and use this knowledge to provide sensitive and beneficial support for each learner to encourage them to complete their courses and achieve their learning goals. Many learners pre-book their attendance times and choose times that match their life and study patterns. Learners who attend centres have access to enthusiastic and knowledgeable tutors. Some learners study in the workplace and are well supported through telephone, e-mail, some tutor visits and, when needed, individual sessions at a centre. At some centres, staff help learners with their social and personal problems. In the Inspired Sisters centre, a centre for women in an area with a high minority ethnic population, help is available with learning to drive and there is a repair service for home computers.

145. Learning centre staff have developed good links with many local organisations to meet the needs of a wide range of learners. Such organisations include those that help the unemployed, single mothers, young offenders, people with disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. For example, the Skills Solution centre located in the centre of Manchester has developed training with a company in a deprived area and Manchester Business Consortium is also recruiting learners for the examination-based qualification in IT through an organisation that serves the Chinese community.

146. Resources to support learning are satisfactory. Learning centres are located in readily accessible locations with good transport links, and attract a wide range of learners. The centres are welcoming and friendly. Many learners arrive through word-of-mouth recommendation, local high-street drop-in locations or referral through jobcentres. Computers are up to date. Most centres provide or have ready access to a range of equipment to support learners with particular needs. For example, one centre has a height-adjustable desk for wheelchair users. Staff are appropriately qualified for the courses the learners are taking. Learners are very positive about the learning materials and many centres have a range of booklets and exercises to supplement the regular materials.



147. Many learners also improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The initial enrolment process helps identify if learners would like to develop their skills further. Often those on the short ICT courses for beginners have such needs identified, and they study on appropriate literacy and/or numeracy courses alongside their ICT courses.

148. Interim goals are not used sufficiently to help learners to progress as fast as possible and to manage their learning more effectively. Learners' progress is usually monitored well using a mixture of computer-based and paper-based records. However, records document what learners have done rather than encourage the learners to reflect, look forward and set goals for their subsequent sessions. Most of the objectives on the individual learning plans and review sheets are to complete a course at a particular date, rather than interim goals along the way. Most learners do not see the learning plans as helping them to organise their work.

### **Leadership and management**

149. Courses are organised well and centre staff have a clear understanding of their role towards learners. The hub has provided good support for centres. Record-keeping is usually done well and learners' files are well kept. Booking systems are effective and learners can secure a place when they want. Staff are experienced at using the learner support environment software. Managers attend hub meetings regularly and business account managers from the hub make regular visits to centres to check their progress against a range of targets and to disseminate information. Many of the centres with low ICT completion rates in 2004-05 have been closed. Managers make increasing use of the management information system, but are often unclear about how to use the data to make informative analyses of trends. Staff have access to, and take up, training organised by the hub.

150. Equality of opportunity is covered at induction but, unlike health and safety, it is not included on the checklist that some staff use to ensure all suitable topics are covered. Centres promote equality of opportunity through the use of posters and reminders displayed in centres. However, some learners are vague about the topic and about the complaints procedure. Where learners find access to a centre is difficult, good alternative arrangements are made for them. For example, some learners are referred to other centres and one learner with multiple sclerosis was assisted to pass modules of the examination-based qualification in IT using special equipment and support at home.

151. Sharing of good practice in ICT between centres is not fully developed. Some centres have devised supplementary training materials but others are unaware of their existence. Several centres are trying to improve their procedures, such as the use of learning plans, recording sheets and collecting information on learner destinations, but are doing so in isolation. The hub has put measures in place to improve the sharing of good practice, for example covering the issue at hub meetings, inviting presentations and disseminating information over the hub's intranet.

152. Insufficient observations of learning take place to ensure a consistently high quality of learning. Some tutors have recently been on courses on the observation of learning but have not yet put this into practice. Many staff are still unsure about what is required from the observation process. Only a few observations have been carried out in some centres, and none at all in others. Most observations have only focused on one aspect of the learning process. Some centres have now drawn up a schedule of observations to cover all aspects of learning which will take place over future months.

153. Centre staff have a good knowledge of the self-assessment report for their own centre and are using it to improve the learners' experience. The overall hub self-assessment is built up using reports from individual centres. The hub self-assessment identifies some but not all of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. In particular, it does not identify the low completion rates and the ineffective use of interim learning goals. The self-assessment report grades ICT higher than the grade given by inspectors.

Area of learning	Number of learners	Grade
Preparation for life and work	6,410	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

### Strengths

- good and improving progression to other courses
- high pass rates on national tests
- good participation of learners not normally represented in further education
- good development of preparation for life and work provision

### Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data to monitor learners' performance
- insufficient observation of learning

### Achievement and standards

154. Progression is good from preparation for life and work courses to other courses. A high percentage of preparation for life and work learners progress on to other courses. The progression rate has improved significantly from 2001-02. Good progression is made in literacy and numeracy courses, with many learners progressing from level 1 to level 2 national tests. Many learners are new to computer-based learning and are motivated to progress to ICT training on completion of their preparation for life and work courses. Learning centres have clear preparation for life and work objectives which show detailed progression routes for learners. Learners make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills.

155. The pass rates are high on national tests. In 2004-05, 86 per cent of learners who were entered for national tests passed. Significant numbers of learners take and achieve tests in numeracy as well as literacy. A high proportion of learners passing tests, 78 per cent, are unemployed. The hub has a mobile testing unit contributing towards 100 qualification achievements in the national tests. Overall, retention and completion rates on preparation for life and work courses are satisfactory.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded leardirect provision								
	2005-06		2004-05					
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
	Number of starts	7,269		31,842				
Retained*	6,030	83	31,810	100				
Successfully completed	4,033	55	25,359	80				
Still in learning	2,977	41	3,433	11				

\*retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point.

## The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

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

156. The hub is successful at engaging learners not traditionally involved in learning. Good initiatives attract learners through an integrated approach, by providing employment and literacy and numeracy skills development as part of wider training. For example, lift truck driving training integrates vocational training with initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills and further training in literacy and numeracy as part of the one- or two-week courses. Employers carry out pre-recruitment training in association with community partnerships comprising the employers, the local council, Jobcentre Plus and the hub. This training is successful at attracting new learners. Centres are successful at attracting learners through initiatives with local radio stations and through hosting open days for referral agents. Learners are also recruited through good links with partners and community organisations such as the probation service and Jobcentre Plus. In some centres, staff are multi-lingual and can provide advice and guidance in a range of community languages.

157. Tutors provide effective individual coaching for learners, who enjoy learning. In many centres, tutors make good use of a variety of approaches to learning when required. For example, many learners are provided with supplementary learning materials which they can study at home. Some ESOL learners attend group lessons to develop conversational skills and grammar. These lessons are very much appreciated by learners.

158. Induction and initial assessment are effective. An appropriate range of methods is used to assess learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills levels. The results of the assessments are suitably recorded and used to place learners on appropriate courses. However, some induction materials are not appropriate because they contain overly complex language and make insufficient use of visual material.

159. Advice and guidance are satisfactory. Most centres provide advice and guidance using their own staff members' expertise. Some centres have arrangements with external advice and guidance agencies which visit centres on a regular basis. Staff are knowledgeable about the **learnirect** portfolio and are able to advise learners about courses most suited to their needs. Centre staff have sufficient knowledge of other training providers in the area to which they refer learners when necessary.

160. Learners' progress reviews are satisfactory. The use of learning plans is satisfactory, with most centres using a standard learning plan supplemented with a variety of methods to record learning outcomes.

## Leadership and management

161. The hub has developed the preparation for life and work provision well. The hub is exceeding its target for preparation for life and work enrolments in 2005-06. There have been significant increases in enrolments in preparation for life and work courses since 2001. The hub has carefully sited provision in geographic locations related to areas of high deprivation, pre-level 2 educational attainment and ethnicity. The hub's preparation for life and work strategy is successfully increasing specialist support

experience and qualifications of staff. The hub is making good progress towards meeting its own targets for staff qualifications, particularly at level 3. Staff have increased their awareness of the wider learning resources available to support preparation for life and work learners. Good use is made of these resources, particularly for supporting learners in independent study.

162. Centres do not use data sufficiently to monitor the performance of different groups of learners, such as by age, ethnicity and gender. A wide range of data is collected through enrolment and course activities but this is not used effectively to evaluate the courses provided. Learners' satisfaction surveys are not routinely analysed overall at centre level. The hub successfully monitors the progression of learners to other learning but centres do not normally monitor their learners' performance in areas such as finding employment. Centres do not have consistent approaches to managing preparation for life and work learners who have not accessed their learning for some time. Centres with strong systems for contacting learners have high numbers of learners who regularly take part in learning.

163. Insufficient observations of learning take place across centres to ensure a consistently high quality of learning. The hub has carried out observations of some aspects of **learnirect** processes but has not covered all parts of the learning cycle. Centres have produced schedules to observe learning but few centres have implemented them. Differences in practice have not been identified. For example, one centre includes separate group learning activities to develop speaking skills on its ESOL courses but other centres do not.

164. Learners have a satisfactory knowledge of equality of opportunity. Centres promote equality of opportunity effectively and much information is available in community languages. One centre visited did not have access for wheelchair users, although staff were fully aware of alternative provision in the local area. Staff have adequate knowledge of the range of specialist equipment available to learners. Strategies to widen participation are successful.

165. Centre staff have a good awareness of the self-assessment report for their centres. Each centre has an individual development plan which is being used to improve the experience for the learner. The overall hub self-assessment is built up using reports from individual centres. The hub's self-assessment report is broadly accurate. Aspects relating to data, although not reported in the self-assessment, are identified in centre development plans. Inspectors gave the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

Area of learning	Number of learners	Grade
Business-related courses	1,247	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

### Strengths

- effective promotion of learning
- good monitoring of learners' progress
- good partnership arrangements
- very good access to learning

### Weaknesses

- low completion rates on business and management courses
- poor progress review practice
- insufficient observation of learning

### Achievement and standards

166. The standard of work produced by learners is satisfactory. For example, project work on externally accredited leadership and management courses is of an appropriate standard and learners normally successfully complete the theory test for the lift truck operative's qualification within the allocated time.

167. The completion rate on business and management courses is low at 43 per cent. Completion rates on other business-related courses, mainly retail-based, are satisfactory. Many of the business and management courses are taken by learners in addition to their main course in another area of learning. Examples of the courses include the preparation of a curriculum vitae and interview techniques. Many learners leave these courses before completion as they may successfully achieve their main goal, for example finding employment. Where such courses are delivered on employers' premises as part of in-house training, the completion rate is much higher. Hub management has recognised this weakness and strategies to rectify it are being developed.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded learndirect provision								
	2005-06		2004-05					
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
	Number of starts	551		6,094				
Retained*	394	72	6,065	100				
Successfully completed	214	39	3,959	65				
Still in learning	300	54	947	16				

\*retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point.

## The quality of provision

168. The promotion of learning is effective. From their initial contact with a centre, learners are encouraged to consider a range of course options. Initial advice and guidance is good. Centre staff discuss with the learner their interests and aspirations, and suitable courses are agreed. Business-related courses are mixed well with literacy and numeracy courses. Appropriate use is made of initial assessment to identify any support needs in either literacy or numeracy and to ensure that the learner is able to cope with the level of a selected course. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed in an appropriate vocational context. There is regular formal and informal contact between learners and training staff. Tutors provide good individual support for learners. Learners confirm that they feel well supported and know who to ask for advice and guidance. They are encouraged to expand their skills and knowledge. For example, learners taking the level 2 theory test for lift truck operatives can also develop skills and knowledge which will improve their employability including, for example, a course on health and safety legislation. Learning centres prominently display the success and achievement of former learners.

169. Learners' progress is monitored well. Effective use is made of manual and database systems to provide learners and staff with current information on progress being made. Learners can obtain a printout of their progress and those interviewed have a clear understanding of what they have achieved.

170. Partnership arrangements are good. For example, staff from centres in south Manchester meet regularly as a partnership group to provide a forum for the identification of good practice. The sharing of staff members' experience and expertise in the delivery of leadership and management programmes is an example of practice discussed at these meetings. Learners are recruited through good links with partners and community organisations such as the probation service and Jobcentre Plus. Training targeted at employers' vacancies is also successful at attracting new learners.

171. Access to learning is very good. There is a good range of public and private sector providers with specialist expertise in business-related courses. Centres are sited on main roads, in business communities, on industrial estates and close to under-represented communities. Learners interviewed appreciated the flexibility that the courses offered in enabling them to study at a time and pace which allows for personal and business responsibilities. Centres are open to learners throughout the week and at weekends on a Saturday between, for example, 10:00 and 18:00. Access for learners with disabilities is satisfactory in terms of toilets, lifts and ramps to accommodate wheelchair users. All centres visited had a range of equipment to support learners with identified support needs. Examples of available equipment include wrist rests, a tracker ball mouse and, in one centre, a Braille typewriter.

172. Resources are satisfactory. Staff have relevant business experience and hold appropriate qualifications. An appropriate number of staff hold adult support qualifications. Some staff are currently working towards assessors' qualifications in anticipation of centres being given approval to offer national vocational qualifications (NVQs).

173. Initial assessment is satisfactory. All learners complete an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills, and a suitable learning programme is agreed to meet any identified additional support needs. This includes referral to local further education colleges or drawing upon existing centre expertise in literacy and numeracy learning.

174. Some progress review practice is poor. Some staff are unclear as to the purpose and role of the review as part of a learning programme. In one centre visited, reviews do not take place. In other centres, there are examples of reviews being missed. Reviews are not used to set measurable targets to support learners' progress or to help them plan their learning.

### **Leadership and management**

175. Staff in the learning centres are clear about their job roles and responsibilities. Management is supportive of staff and ensures that they are able to take appropriate staff development leading to assessor and teaching qualifications. Centre managers have a clear understanding of areas for future development, such as the expansion of externally accredited leadership and management courses. Centre managers attend hub meetings, and feedback from these meetings is provided to centre staff. Good use is made of centre bulletins to communicate with staff. Centres often have their own data systems which they use in addition to the Ufi systems. Centres do not all have formal systems to monitor learners' progression, for example, into employment.

176. Centres promote equality of opportunity effectively. Learners have a satisfactory knowledge of equality of opportunity. Staff have adequate knowledge of the range of specialist equipment available to learners. Many learners who might not normally attend further courses are recruited and are successful.

177. Insufficient observation of learning takes place to ensure a consistently high quality of learning. Some tutors have recently been on courses in the observation of learning. Some observations have been conducted and there are centre staff who hold assessors' or verifiers' qualifications and have experience of observation techniques. In a number of centres visited, however, no observation of learning has taken place.

178. Centre staff have a good knowledge of the self-assessment report for their own centre and are using it to improve the learners' experience. The overall hub self-assessment is built up using reports from individual centres. The hub self-assessment report is broadly accurate and gives the same grade for provision as that given by inspectors.



## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT GREATER MANCHESTER HUB AREA:**

- coming to the centre
- 'I have never looked back'
- the friendly staff
- learning with computers
- 'improving my English skills'
- working as a group
- the brilliant staff
- the available time slots and bookings
- the learning materials
- the good equipment to support learners with disabilities

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK GREATER MANCHESTER HUB AREA COULD IMPROVE:**

- the number of conversation classes
- parking at the centre
- the opening times - they could be extended
- the amount of computers and tutors
- the learning materials - they make too much use of cartoons

## **KEY CHALLENGES FOR GREATER MANCHESTER HUB AREA**

- improve the completion rates on business and management courses
- improve the quality of learners' reviews to aid short-term goal setting
- increase the number of observations of learning

**PROSKILLS SECTOR HUB AREA****Grade 2**

Area of learning	Number of learners	Grade
Automotive	18	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

**Strengths**

- good completion rates
- good training to meet learners' and employers' needs
- good initiatives to recruit unemployed learners
- well-run centres

**Weaknesses**

- insufficient literacy and numeracy skills support

**Achievement and standards**

179. Completion rates are good at 99 per cent for 2004-05 and 2005-06 so far, with the remaining 1 per cent still in learning. This is 6 per cent higher than the **learndirect** national average. The development of learners' skills and confidence is good. Learners are very clear that they have improved their team working and communications skills and that their confidence has improved greatly. This is especially beneficial for the unemployed learners at the QGS Synergy centre in helping them to improve their employability. Learners in the ASSA Training and Development centre demonstrate a good understanding of quality and productivity techniques and standard operation planning.

180. Centres pay careful attention to attendance. Any learners who do not attend are followed up carefully. Good alternative arrangements are made to accommodate these learners on future courses. This has involved the hub in making helpful arrangements with employers to let learners from other companies attend their company-based courses. It normally arranges to fit these learners into courses being run for companies that are suppliers or customers of the learner's employer.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded learndirect provision								
	2005-06		2004-05					
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Number of starts	538		2,205					
Retained*	538	100	2,205	100				
Successfully completed	533	99	2,188	99				
Still in learning	5	1	13	1				

\*retained learners are those who have completed a course before the end of its planned duration, or are still registered at that point.

## The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Automotive	0	2	1	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

181. The quality of training to meet learners' and employers' needs is good. Induction is comprehensive and is especially suitable for learners who may not have studied for a number of years. It includes essential information, target-setting, health and safety, and equality of opportunity. Some learners are assessed for their level of literacy and numeracy skills. All learning sessions observed were graded as satisfactory or better, and most were graded as good. The material on automotive productivity is taught enthusiastically and is enjoyed thoroughly by the learners. The courses are all paper-based and the workbooks are of a high quality, laid out well and easy to follow. Presentations are given clearly and visual aids are of a high standard. The workbooks are integrated well with the presentations. The effect of the lessons is significantly enhanced by the use of good interactive activities to reinforce the key learning points. On one course, learners work together in groups to design a paper plane to emphasise successfully the benefits of standard operation planning. The courses improve the learners' worth to their companies and significantly enhance the employability of unemployed learners. Courses are closely integrated into the needs of companies, with many of the employed learners believing that the courses are part of their company's training plans rather than stand-alone **learnirect** courses.

182. The QGS Synergy centre has a good initiative to recruit unemployed learners. The centre identifies the requirements of companies and then works closely with the recruitment agencies to agree what training potential employees would need. Adverts are placed in the local press for training that will help towards the vacancies that are available. This has been very well received by unemployed learners, the recruitment agencies and the employers.

183. Some of the companies are using the successful completion of the courses as a progression route for learners onto an NVQ in performing manufacturing operations. The courses also stimulate interest, with a number of the learners going on to study further qualifications. There is an excellent commitment by one employer working with the ASSA Training and Learning centre to improve company work practice and efficiency through development and training. Courses provided through the hub are supported by an in-company coach to ensure the messages of better work organisation and standards are established in the learners' everyday work.

184. While the documents and processes required for enrolment, setting objectives and end-of-course reviews meet Ufi's requirements, they are not entirely appropriate for these short courses and demotivate some learners. Some learners do not fully understand how to set their own learning objectives and their entries on enrolment documents, if present, have little real value.

185. Insufficient literacy and numeracy skills support is available. At the ASSA Training and Learning centre, no initial assessment has taken place to date. At the QGS Synergy centre, testing takes place if the provider believes that a learner does not have the appropriate literacy and numeracy qualifications. However, the checking of this information is insufficiently thorough. The number of learners who follow a preparation for life and work course is very low. Many learners are unaware of the support that is

available. The hub has recognised this weakness and is introducing hub-wide initial assessment procedures.

## **Leadership and management**

186. The learning centres are managed and run well. Centres have contracts with more than one hub and have the opportunity to learn from several sources and develop best practice. They are committed to the best interests of their learners and employers. Tutoring staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, both in training and in the manufacturing industries with which they work. Centre training takes place in comfortable training rooms. Good support is provided for learners who may be outside the scope of funding subsidy but who are nevertheless unemployed and unable to pay for training. The QGS Synergy centre provides training and travel expenses for these learners irrespective of whether the costs are reclaimable. The hub does not require staff who tutor the few younger learners to complete procedures for safeguarding work with young people. However, some staff have completed these from previous employment.

187. Communication is good. Providers have several training sites across the country, and regular meetings are held for staff between the sites to ensure consistency of approach and to monitor centre performance. A weekly e-mail bulletin is sent from the hub to update on developments. The hub manager makes regular visits to each learning centre to provide further information and to monitor progress. Data is received regularly from the hub and from Ufi and is used by learning centre staff to monitor performance against targets. Staff development opportunities are good. The hub notifies learning centres of development events and offers places on each event.

188. Equality of opportunity is covered suitably during induction. The hub is working with many learners who might not normally participate in further education. Many of its learners are achieving a qualification for the first time. Literature in other languages is available at the ASSA Training and Learning centre to help learners complete the enrolment process. Access for learners with restricted mobility is satisfactory.

189. Individual learning centres carry out observations of learning and these lead to improvements in the quality of training. The ASSA Training and Learning centre has a very thorough process. Dedicated observers who make detailed observations, provide useful feedback to trainers and support those who need further help to improve through staff development and repeated observation. However, this good practice is not shared across the hub.

190. Feedback from learners is obtained at the end of each course taken, even where each course is only of three hours' duration. Results are analysed and actions taken to improve provision if needed. However, little formal feedback is obtained later from learners or employers, when any benefits of training and any improvement ideas might be identified more readily.

191. Learning centre staff have been closely involved in developing their self-assessment reports. The hub self-assessment was broadly accurate. Inspectors gave the area a higher grade than was given in the self-assessment report.

### **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT PROSKILLS SECTOR HUB AREA:**

- working with team mates
- the practical activities
- being away from work
- the good tutors
- certificated learning
- the knowledgeable staff
- being better prepared to obtain employment

### **WHAT LEARNERS THINK PROSKILLS SECTOR HUB AREA COULD IMPROVE:**

- access - the centre is difficult to access from Sunderland
- the amount of information available on other courses
- the forms - they are too repetitive
- the venue - it's not convenient

### **KEY CHALLENGES FOR PROSKILLS SECTOR HUB AREA:**

- improve support for literacy and numeracy skills
- simplify documents
- continue to develop learners' and employers' feedback mechanisms