

INSPECTION REPORT

The Learning Curve Network

23 March 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

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

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

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

Overall effectiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grading

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

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

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Learning Curve (LC) evolved from a project which was set up in 1997, jointly managed by five Councils for Voluntary Service in Wiltshire and Swindon. In 2002, the LC was established as a charity in its own right. It is a registered charity and a registered company limited by guarantee, which is contracted by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Wiltshire and Swindon to provide adult and community learning services throughout Wiltshire and Swindon. The LC carries out some of the provision itself and funds other elements carried out by voluntary sector organisations, which are members of the Learning Curve Network (LCN), an informal consortium, which it set up in 2002. The LC has two main areas of activity which are the organisational and workforce development for the voluntary and community sector and the direct provision of learning in the community. The LC has two main premises which are a mainly administrative centre and a further training venue, both in Chippenham. Learning takes place in a wide variety of community venues in the area.
2. The LC senior management team consists of a chief executive supported by an operations director, three assistant directors, a management information and finance director and a quality officer. There are a further seven administrative and support staff and a co-ordinator for the probation service provision, and 12 outreach worker/tutors. There are other staff involved in projects outside the scope of this inspection.
3. The LCN members are involved in the planning, monitoring and delivery of the contract. To date, there are 64 members of this network, of whom approximately 20 provided learning opportunities through the network during 2004-05. The LC centrally manages the management information system and quality improvement arrangements for the network and is the focal point for communications with the local LSC.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** Leadership and management are good and the arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement are satisfactory. The provision in health, public services and care, information and communications technology (ICT), and business administration and law is good. The provision in preparation for life and work is satisfactory.
5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The 2004-05 report was the fourth to be produced. It was appropriately critical and largely accurate in its findings. Actions taken since it was produced have improved the provision in three of the four areas of learning, which is reflected in the grades. The fourth area has undergone considerable expansion since the report, and it is not accurately represented.
6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** This judgement is based on the correlation between self-assessment and development

plans and actions taken, and on improvements made since the commissioning of a pre-inspection report in 2005.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE LEARNING CURVE NETWORK:

- ensure good practice is identified and shared throughout the organisation
- improve the analysis and use of management information
- improve target-setting and progress monitoring for learners
- maintain and improve the quality of teaching and learning
- further improve the promotion of equality of opportunity

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

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

Health, public services and care			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Counselling Adult and community learning	8	2	
Health & safety/ environmental health Adult and community learning	71	2	
Early years Adult and community learning	29	2	

Information and communications technology			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
ICT for users Adult and community learning	95	2	

Preparation for life and work			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Literacy and numeracy Adult and community learning	117	3	

Business administration and law		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Accounting and finance Adult and community learning	14	2
Administration Adult and community learning	5	2
Business management Other government-funded provision	15	2
Adult and community learning	10	2
Employer training pilot	4	2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. Health and social care, ICT, preparation for life and work and business administration and law were inspected and graded, as well as leadership and management.

Number of inspectors	9
Number of inspection days	30
Number of learners interviewed	97
Number of staff interviewed	41
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	29
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	16
Number of visits	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **Learners in health, public services and care develop good personal and work-related skills.** They make good progress towards acquiring skills and qualifications for employment or for further study. Learners work effectively together demonstrating increased self-confidence and self-awareness and greater independence.

9. **Completion rates for short and long courses in ICT have been consistently high** at 93 per cent and above between 2002 and 2004. In 2004-05, the rate is 86 per cent with 12 per cent of learners still in learning.

10. **Achievement in ICT is good.** In 2003-04 and 2004-05, achievement on accredited programmes at levels 1 and 2 was 75 per cent and 82 per cent respectively. On non-accredited programmes achievement was 94 per cent and 89 per cent for the same periods.

11. Learners in preparation for life and work develop good literacy, numeracy and personal skills. Tutors introduce various practical aids for learning that enable learners to share tasks and increase their skills and confidence. In some courses, learners gain additional skills in computing and mental arithmetic. Learners with learning difficulties increase their ability to concentrate and learn to use descriptive words when discussing music they have listened to in class.

12. Retention and achievement rates on accredited management programmes are high. In 2004-05, 24 learners started and 96 per cent were retained. Sixteen of those retained have completed their programme and the remainder are on target to complete by their expected end date.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Health, public services and care	0	2	1	0	3
Information and communications technology	0	4	1	0	5
Preparation for life and work	0	5	4	0	9
Business administration and law	1	3	1	0	5
Total	1	14	7	0	22

13. Teaching in business administration and law and in ICT is good. The best sessions have a clear and purposeful structure, and are lively, well planned, well paced and challenging. Differentiation is used effectively to allow increased support for some learners and for more experienced and confident learners to gain additional learning outcomes.

14. The range of courses meets the local needs. Courses in health, public services and care lead to qualifications which are required to enter employment in early years settings. Short courses provide essential skills for youth leaders and other voluntary workers. Courses are provided at appropriate times and in convenient locations. In preparation for life and work, provision meets the needs of disadvantaged learners. Courses are held at weekends and evenings for 51 weeks of the year. Learners who would not attend formal training are attracted to learning through the effective partnership working with voluntary and community groups.

15. The opportunities for learners in ICT to attend additional training are good. Many community venues offer learners the opportunity to practise their newly acquired classroom skills and complete homework at the venue at a different time, frequently with the aid of a volunteer support worker.

16. The formal recording of progress on some preparation for life and work courses is inadequate. Formal assessment of progress is not used sufficiently by all tutors to plan appropriate activities and materials to challenge the more able learners or to support the least able learners. Evaluations of sessions are not sufficiently effective in recording individual progress and planning small steps in learning.

17. The monitoring of probation provision is insufficient. Progress in observing probation sessions is slow. It is not clear which learners are compulsory attendees. The probation service does not keep the provider adequately informed of actions taken

following non-attendance. Arrangements for covering sickness are inadequate as insufficient information is available to enable the replacement tutor to plan the session.

18. Individual learning plans for some learners in business administration and law are inadequate. A learner record which contains the overall objectives of the programme is too general to be useful to the learners. The objectives are not broken down into smaller learning goals or targets. There is no individual learning plan for learners and tutors to use to regularly review progress.

19. The arrangements for initial assessment are inadequate for some learners in business administration and law. None of the learners in this area of learning have been identified as needing additional learning support and none of them have completed a diagnostic assessment. Inspectors observed some learners who have language support needs.

Leadership and management

20. The provider offers particularly effective and flexible support for its network members. Membership is free for all voluntary sector organisations. The LC works collaboratively with its partners to design individual support packages for each provider in the network and facilitates the development of productive working relationships between its members. This adds value and allows the development of successful collaborative projects.

21. The curriculum planning is particularly responsive to the needs of its local community and the members. LCN plays an active part in strategic reviews of the training available in Wiltshire. Care is taken to avoid duplication of training opportunities while ensuring that the needs of the local community are met. Wherever possible, courses are planned to provide clear progression routes to further education and training.

22. The provider employs successful strategies to widen participation in education and training by disadvantaged groups. The LC and its network partners use a wide variety of community venues and offer support with childcare arrangements. Network partners work closely with a variety of disadvantaged individuals. These include those with a disability, a history of mental illness, ex-offenders, the unemployed, lone parents and the elderly. The network partners have a good awareness of the training and educational needs of their client groups, which they apply to the curriculum offer.

23. The LCN has developed good initiatives to support the improvement of teaching and learning. All tutors have, or are working towards, a nationally recognised teaching qualification. All new tutors attend a day's training as an induction to teaching. The LCN has developed an effective lesson observation scheme. Two additional training days cover some common areas for improvement.

24. The LCN is particularly successful in the promotion of accredited programmes. In 2004-05, 22 per cent of learners were following accredited programmes. Non-accredited programmes follow the curriculum of an accredited course whenever possible to enable learners to progress to accreditation in the future.

25. There are good partnerships with local organisations which widen participation in business administration and law courses. Employers support their staff in gaining

THE LEARNING CURVE NETWORK

management qualifications. The partnership with TEMPO is providing courses which meet the needs of the local community. Accredited provision helps learners to become job ready and return to the labour market.

26. The LCN makes insufficient use of management information. Until very recently, network members were not set targets for achievement, retention or progression. Information on retention, achievement and progression has not been analysed at member level, nor has it been used effectively to evaluate provision. The provider does not use data sufficiently to monitor the relative progress and achievement of learners by ethnicity, gender or disability.

27. The LCN does not effectively identify or facilitate the sharing of good practice. Lesson plans and schemes of work vary in quality from very good to poor. In business administration and law, internal verification practices are particularly good, but these have not been shared with other curriculum areas, such as ICT where practices are poorer. Further opportunities should be made available to share good practice, and tutors should be encouraged to take up opportunities.

28. The use of data in health, public services and care is not fully developed. Unrealistic completion dates for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) have been entered and the implications for monitoring of achievement have not been recognised. There is no systematic collection and analysis of data on achievement or review of attendance on non-accredited courses.

29. The planning of some courses in ICT is inadequate. Courses are usually fully subscribed and in some instances become quickly over-subscribed. Sometimes learners have insufficient equipment, insufficient workstations with internet access and cramped study conditions.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- particularly effective and flexible support for network members
- very responsive curriculum offer
- successful strategies to widen participation
- good initiatives to support the improvement of teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of management information
- insufficient identification and sharing of good practice

Health, public services and care

Strengths

- good development of personal and work-related skills
- good response to local needs
- very good support to network members

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data

Information and communications technology

ICT for users

Strengths

- high completion rates
- good achievement
- good promotion on accredited courses
- good additional learning opportunities
- much good teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- inadequate planning on some courses
- insufficient opportunities to share good practice

Preparation for life and work

Literacy and numeracy

Strengths

- good development of skills
- responsive provision to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate formal recording of progress for some learners
- insufficient monitoring of probation provision

Business administration and law

Strengths

- good partnerships with local organisations
- good teaching and learning
- good development of personal and work-related skills

Weaknesses

- inadequate arrangements for initial assessment for some learners
- inadequate individual learning plans for some learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT THE LEARNING CURVE NETWORK:

- 'the tutor gives us time for the penny to drop'
- 'the NVQ programme fits round my work'
- 'the fact that I left school at 13 and had no more education till now'
- the good progression opportunities
- the approachable tutors
- 'now I read the newspaper rather than just scanning'
- the location and free parking
- the opportunity to develop personally
- 'not like a school class'
- the social and emotional development
- the free courses

WHAT LEARNERS THINK THE LEARNING CURVE NETWORK COULD IMPROVE:

- the car parking at Third Age Challenge
- 'we would like a whiteboard'
- the size of the classrooms
- the noisy teaching room
- 'we had to chase our certificates'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- particularly effective and flexible support for network members
- very responsive curriculum offer
- successful strategies to widen participation
- good initiatives to support the improvement of teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of management information
- insufficient identification and sharing of good practice

30. The LC provides particularly effective and flexible support for its network members. Membership is free for all voluntary sector organisations. Organisations can join the network simply to receive information, to obtain support with providing training or to access funding to help them design and offer their own training courses. A clearly written prospectus provides useful information to help potential partners find out what membership involves, how it might benefit them and the areas of expertise of existing members. The LC takes particular care to ensure that funding is distributed fairly by operating a sliding scale of the funding it holds back, which depends on the length of each course and the level of support required by the provider. In some cases, tutors provide the training at other providers' premises. In other cases, all of the training requirements can be met by the provider. The LC works collaboratively with its partners to design individual support packages for each provider in the network and facilitates the development of productive working relationships between its members to add value and allow the development of successful collaborative projects. It uses its own experience and expertise to bid for funding and to help its partners bid for funding for special projects.

31. The LC's curriculum planning is particularly responsive to the needs of its local community and its members. It plays an active part in strategic reviews of the training available in Wiltshire. Care is taken to avoid duplication of training opportunities, while ensuring that the needs of the local community are met. Members are encouraged to offer courses which lead to accreditation and nationally recognised qualifications. Wherever possible, courses are planned to provide clear progression routes to further education and training. The LC promotes progression opportunities and helps learners to identify further training that might be appropriate for them. It works effectively with its network members to meet the training needs of minority groups and those whose specific and special training needs are not being met. It also effectively promotes and provides training for members' staff to build the capacity of the voluntary organisation. For example, staff have successfully achieved management qualifications at level 4 and 5. Termly curriculum planning meetings and course reviews and evaluations are used effectively to plan the next term's courses. All potential new courses are carefully evaluated to ensure that they meet the identified priorities for community training. The provision of information, advice and guidance is at least satisfactory. Most learners are on appropriate courses and most have

an adequate initial assessment when they start training.

32. Governance of the LC is satisfactory. Trustees meet six times a year and have an appropriate mix of expertise to meet their responsibilities. The board has recently introduced a number of subcommittees to investigate and advise the board on key issues. Two trustees represent the network members. The network members' organisations have their own governance arrangements.

33. The financial management is satisfactory, as is the business and strategic planning. However, there are insufficient links between the business plan and the self-assessment report. There are sufficient resources, including staff and premises. The LC has appointed a financial director this year and introduced a number of measures to further enhance financial management, including the production of monthly financial reports. It is too early, however, to judge the effect of these measures.

34. The LC has a satisfactory strategy for the development of learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills and is a member of the basic skills strategy group for Wiltshire. It encourages network members to include the development of literacy, numeracy and language skills as an integral part of all training programmes. All network members can obtain a free copy of a useful and well-designed basic skills tool kit to help them include literacy, numeracy and language support in their training courses. The LC has offered a series of basic skills awareness raising events for members' staff including voluntary workers and probationary service staff. A basic skills group meets every six weeks to discuss new initiatives. To further raise awareness of literacy and numeracy all LC's staff have had a literacy and numeracy, screening test and all have achieved, or are working towards, awards in literacy and numeracy at levels 1 and 2.

35. Communication at the LC and with its network members is satisfactory. A wide range of meetings between staff, staff and managers, trustees and network members is held regularly. The website is used effectively to communicate news and information. A monthly newsletter and a directory of learning opportunities are used effectively to promote training.

36. The LC makes insufficient use of management information. Currently it contracts with an external company to manage its management information. However, it recognises that this restricts its ability to access data quickly and to produce management reports in a timely and useful way. There are plans to change to an in-house management information system during 2006. Until very recently, providers were not set targets for achievement, retention or progression. Although targets are now set, it is too early to judge how these might contribute to the management of the curriculum offered. Until now, information on retention, achievement and progression has not been analysed at an individual provider level or used effectively to evaluate provision. Currently, the management information system is used to meet funding body requirements rather than to review performance.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

37. The provider employs successful strategies to widen participation in education and training by disadvantaged groups. The LC and its network partners use a wide variety of community venues, which are readily accessible to otherwise isolated groups. When courses are set up the provider ensures that they are not duplicating other local provision, although similar courses may be offered at times and venues to suit the needs of particular

target groups. Support with childcare arrangements facilitates attendance. Network partners work closely with a variety of disadvantaged individuals. These include those with a disability, a history of mental illness, ex-offenders, the unemployed, lone parents and the elderly. The network partners have a good awareness of the training and educational needs of their client groups, which they apply to the curriculum offer. The LC works with its network partners to build their capacity to provide training through organisational and workforce development. Physical access to most training venues is satisfactory. The provider is aware of which of its network partners' venues are unsatisfactory and advises them of their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Alternative arrangements are made available for such learners if required, for example moving the class to a ground-floor room or referring the learner to another provider.

38. Awareness of equality is satisfactory. The LC has a satisfactory equality statement and policy, a short version of which is included in the learners' handbook which is issued to all its own learners, and is offered to its network members as a model. The statement clearly articulates the organisation's commitment to the principles of equality and diversity and willingness to apply positive action, which is further amplified in the policy. However, the documents make no direct reference to any of the relevant legislation. The LC board of trustees has recently established an equality and diversity subgroup whose remit extends to the wider network. The group has produced an equality action plan which recognises the need for a number of actions to further enhance equality of opportunity. However, it is too early to judge the effect of the plan as most actions are yet to be taken. Staff have received training in equality and diversity and this is also planned for new trustees on the board. The provider uses comprehensive training materials and exercises to promote awareness of inappropriate language and other equality of opportunity issues as part of its training. Equality of opportunity is covered satisfactorily at the learners' induction and is also satisfactorily promoted during courses through the application of a learners' charter and a tutors' checklist. These are designed to get tutors to review the session content and training materials in the light of the equality of opportunity policy. There are few black and minority ethnic groups in Wiltshire. The board successfully recruited a member of a black development group in Bristol to become a trustee in order to enhance its awareness of racial equality issues.

39. The provider does not use data sufficiently to monitor the relative progress and achievement of learners by ethnicity, gender or disability, to identify under-achievement by any particular group.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

40. All network members must meet the LC's basic quality standards before offering any training as part of the network. They are given a comprehensive handbook on compact disc, which explains the standards required and includes all the relevant policies and procedures as well as standard forms and paperwork. A short test helps to ensure that the staff have read and understood the handbook. This handbook has been developed and improved in response to feedback collected from members that have used it. The LC is working with some network partners who need support to reach the quality standards. In some cases these members are not yet complying fully with all of the quality assurance arrangements. A quality group meets each month to discuss the training programmes and to identify actions for improvement. Minutes from these meetings and other useful information is available in quality corner, a part of the LC's website which is dedicated to quality improvement. The LC has drawn up a quality cycle which identifies and plans the

various parts of its quality assurance arrangements.

41. The LC has developed good initiatives to support the improvement of teaching and learning. All tutors are required to have, or be working towards, a nationally recognised teaching qualification. All new tutors must attend a day's training as an induction to teaching on any of the courses provided by the network. The LC has developed an effective lesson observation scheme and has successfully promoted the observation of teaching and learning as an effective tool for quality improvement. The scheme has been operational since March 2005, and, as yet, some of the tutors have not been observed. However, the LC has prioritised observations to ensure that new and inexperienced tutors are observed first. The observations accurately identify strengths and weaknesses, and the recording form is completed thoroughly and carefully. Following the observation, an action plan is drawn up and this is reviewed regularly until all actions for improvement are completed. In some cases, tutors are resistant to the observations and do not readily accept the support offered. However, the LC has recognised this and is working hard to overcome this difficulty. Currently, staff are working in partnership with another organisation to help standardise the judgements made about the quality of teaching. In some cases the grading of observed sessions is too high and the lesson observation scheme does not include particular action to be taken to remedy unsatisfactory teaching. However, after the observations the LC identified some common areas for improvement and offers two training days to support tutors with these.

42. The LC actively seeks feedback from learners and has developed appropriate ways of collecting the views of all learners, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. However, although it uses this feedback to improve its training programmes and to contribute to its self-assessment report, there is insufficient formal checking of individual network members' responses to learners' comments on evaluation forms. There is no feedback to learners on the actions taken in response to their comments. Few learners leave their courses early, but those who do are not systematically contacted to find out why they left.

43. The LC produced its fourth self-assessment report in November 2005. Self-assessment is an established and valued part of the LC's quality improvement arrangements. All network members are interviewed so that their views can be included in the report. However, individual tutors have a poor knowledge of the final report. The report includes the views of learners, but these are not adequately analysed or used to identify common themes. Data is used to support judgements on achievement and there is a separate analysis of achievements on accredited courses, compared with those on non-accredited courses. There is also a comparison with the previous year's achievement and retention. However, the report is lengthy and overly descriptive. Many of the strengths identified are no more than normal practice. The LC has produced a comprehensive development plan in response to the findings in the self-assessment report and this has been regularly reviewed and updated. However, the self-assessment report and the development plan do not refer to individual network members and members are not able to identify the actions for improvement which apply specifically to them. The LC plans to encourage members to produce their own self-assessment reports to overcome this difficulty.

44. The LC does not effectively identify and share good practice. For example, there is too much variation in the quality of the content of individual learning plans. One of the network members does not consistently draw up individual learning plans for its learners.

In other cases there is too much variation in the quality of learning goals set and the individuality of the plans drawn up. There is too much inconsistency in the use of initial assessment to plan training and identify training needs. Lesson plans and schemes of work vary in quality from very good to poor. This is a particular problem for tutors who are covering absence for sickness. They do not always have sufficient information to provide good and appropriate teaching. In business administration and management, internal verification practices are particularly good but these have not been shared with other curriculum areas such as ICT where internal moderation practices are poorer. Tutors have not been encouraged to share good practice in their teaching. The LC does not yet monitor learners' attendance effectively.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, public services and care

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Counselling Adult and community learning	8	2
Health & safety/ environmental health Adult and community learning	71	2
Early years Adult and community learning	29	2

45. In 2004-05 there were 795 enrolments. To date, there have been 342 enrolments for 2005-06 on courses which include personal safety, manual handling, food hygiene, first aid, safe practice in youth clubs, drug awareness, counselling, stress management, skills for parenting and the certificate in community volunteering level 2. These are provided through a range of organisations and agencies which specialise in mental health, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, older learners, teenage parents and disaffected young people.

46. At the time of inspection there were 108 learners, of whom 68 were women. Twenty-nine learners are working towards an NVQ in early years at levels 2 and 3 through a member organisation. In another organisation, learners with a range of disabilities choose from courses which support personal and professional development. Most other courses are short and respond to local needs for training.

Strengths

- good development of personal and work-related skills
- good response to local needs
- very good support to network members

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data

Achievement and standards

47. There is good development of personal and work-related skills. Learners make good progress towards acquiring skills and qualifications for employment or for further study. Learners who have a range of disabilities work effectively together demonstrating increased self-confidence and self-awareness leading to greater independence. On NVQ early years programmes, learners have progressed from level 2 through level 3 to training and assessment roles. Short courses provide mandatory and optional qualifications such as first aid and counselling for learners in supervisory roles such as youth leaders. Learners who work in a voluntary capacity acquire skills and professional qualifications, such as the certificate in community volunteering, which enhance their employment opportunities. In the best lessons, learners gain new skills in a supportive and therapeutic atmosphere and

frequently develop additional skills such as improved physical, mental or social well being.

48. Rates of achievement on short courses are very good. First aid courses for Youth Action Wiltshire has had 100 per cent success rates for the past three years. On long courses the results are generally satisfactory. On the NVQ early years course, retention is very good for the level 3 programme at 88 per cent for 2003-04 and 2004-05 and on the level 2 programme the rates are 88 per cent and 92 per cent respectively for the same years. Pass rates have been good, with level 3 at 69 per cent and level 2 at 75 per cent for 2003-04. In 2004-05, the rate of completion has been slow with no passes at level 3 and 13 per cent at level 2. The provider has agreed extended completion dates to meet the special circumstances of the learners who move regularly because of army commitments. These extensions were not shared with the LC. Child minding practice courses delivered by TEMPO had a good rate of achievement in 2004-05 at 84 per cent, but in 2005-06 one intake had a pass rate of 55 per cent. A subsequent intake has had a 92 per cent achievement rate. Attendance was satisfactory in personal development courses during inspection.

The quality of provision

49. There is a very good response to local needs. Learners take courses which offer the qualifications needed to enter employment and meet national requirements to provide a qualified workforce in early years settings. Short courses provide essential skills for youth leaders and other voluntary workers. The interaction between members of the LCN widens opportunities through the sharing of resources. The provision of funding for childcare has been particularly important to allow learners to attend. Courses are provided at appropriate times and in convenient locations. Delivery is flexible enough to meet the needs of the learners.

50. Teaching is generally good. Experienced tutors successfully incorporate learners' experiences to illustrate theory and extend understanding. The wide range of learners' abilities within the same class is particularly well managed. In some classes, learners with different intellectual, mental and physical disabilities all contributed to discussions with confidence.

51. Support for learning is good. Learning is regularly checked and reinforced. NVQ learners attend regular sessions on background knowledge for each unit. On longer courses, learners receive regular tutorials, and NVQ learners have regular reviews.

52. Assessment practice is good. Assessors are approachable and give good, clear and positive feedback. On NVQ programmes, assessors use a good range of methods and attend regular standardisation meetings. Internal verification is rigorous with good record-keeping and monitoring. External verifier reports are good.

53. Initial assessment is satisfactory. On most courses an initial assessment is used which is appropriate to the length of study, but the findings are not always formally shared with tutors. Specific requirements for an individual are not always incorporated into lesson planning, such as the provision for learners with severe physical disabilities. Where learners have declined specialist literacy support, arrangements are made to give extra time or different methods of assessment are used such as guided discussion. The use of individual learning plans is not standardised across all members.

Leadership and management

54. There is very good support for the member organisations. Regular meetings and frequent communication keep the members well informed about the services offered by the LC. Quality assurance systems, teaching observations, funding advice and support are all highly valued by members. The LC has worked with an advice bureau to identify problems in the delivery and achievement of the certificate in community volunteering. Individual trainers have gained support and guidance through membership. The LC also provides a capacity-building service for organisations that need further development. Some members in this category are not aware of the full range support available. Tutors who do not have teaching qualifications have not been observed, and some have little understanding of lesson planning to meet individual needs.

55. Resources are satisfactory. Learners have access to appropriate resources, although some locations are cramped for the type of activity. Tutors are well qualified with appropriate vocational experience and qualifications such as psychotherapy, nursing, teaching and early years experience. Most have, or are working towards, teaching and assessor qualifications. Where there are exceptions the LC is working with the member organisation to ensure compliance.

56. Learners complete questionnaires and their feedback contributes to the self-assessment report. However, the learners' comments are used without analysing their effect.

57. Equality of opportunity is fully promoted. Many courses recruit and include disadvantaged groups and individuals.

58. The use of data is not fully developed. There have been misunderstandings between the LC and its members about the submission of information. Unrealistic completion dates for NVQs have been entered and the implications for monitoring achievement have not been recognised. There is no systematic collection and analysis of data on achievement or review of attendance on non-accredited courses.

Information and communications technology**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
ICT for users		2
Adult and community learning	95	2

59. In 2004-05, 234 learners enrolled on 446 courses. At the time of inspection, 95 learners are enrolled on information technology (IT) user qualifications. The LC offers a variety of ICT courses at venues across Wiltshire. Courses include a range of topics from introductory courses in digital photography to accredited courses in computer literacy. LC's tutors offer most courses, but courses are also offered by four network providers, TEMPO, Third Age Challenge, Community Learning in Penhill and Living Options. Courses start throughout the year and are provided on a request basis from individual communities. A variety of learning venues are used which range from community and village centre locations to dedicated IT classrooms at LC's offices.

ICT for users*Strengths*

- high completion rates
- good achievement
- good promotion on accredited courses
- good additional learning opportunities
- much good teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- inadequate planning on some courses
- insufficient opportunities to share good practice

Achievement and standards

60. Completion rates for short and long courses have been consistently high at 93 per cent and above between 2002 and 2004 and at 86 per cent for 2004-05 with 12 per cent of learners still in learning.

61. Achievement is good. In 2003-04 and 2004-05 achievement rates on accredited programmes at level 1 and 2 were 75 per cent and 82 per cent respectively. On non-accredited programmes, achievement was 94 per cent and 89 per cent in the same periods.

62. Learners demonstrate good ICT skills. On introductory courses, learners gain basic computing skills quickly and are able to work independently after a short period of time. On accredited programmes learners attain computer literacy skills which help them to improve their employability and home life.

63. Overall attendance at courses is good. When learners do not attend, the reasons are

usually known by the tutors. Course registers are kept for individual classes, and monitoring of attendance is good.

The quality of provision

64. The quality of teaching is generally good. Tutors are well qualified and experienced in the delivery of courses for adult learners and learners who are disadvantaged. Courses and sessions are well planned to meet individual needs. Differentiation is used effectively to allow increased support for those who need it and for more experienced and confident learners to gain additional learning outcomes. Assignments and homework are marked well and useful feedback is given to learners on how their work can be improved. Tutors create a friendly and supportive atmosphere and learners enjoy their courses.

65. The opportunities for additional training are good. Many of the community venues allow learners to practise their new skills and complete homework at the venue at a different time, frequently with the aid of a volunteer support worker. Learners who do not have computer equipment at home or at work particularly welcome this. Learners are also able to use their ICT skills to prepare a curriculum vitae and to use the internet.

66. Resources are generally satisfactory. Most of the venues are bright, spacious and well decorated. Computer hardware is up to date and to commercial standards. Most of the tutors provide handouts and additional learning materials and assignments.

67. Initial assessment is satisfactory. For most short courses, learners are referred by volunteer workers who understand their requirements and are able to recommend a course of an appropriate level and duration. In some venues, learners carry out a self-assessment of their computer literacy. Tutors quickly identify the level of learners' computer skills and ensure that adjustments to courses are made.

68. The course review process is satisfactory in most of the venues. After the initial assessment, a mid and end review take place. The primary focus of the reviews is to identify learners' progress against the objectives of the course and whether personal aims have been met. The tutor records comments on whether aims and objectives have been met. In the best courses the review process is used to inform the support workers of progress made in areas such as jobsearch. In the weaker courses, little course review takes place and records only show when objectives have been met.

69. Assessment and moderation of accredited programmes is satisfactory overall. Some of the venues use the LC's centre approval process. Tutors carefully mark assignments and they are moderated either by another tutor or by moderators at the LC. However, little moderation activities are planned.

70. The support for literacy, numeracy and English language is satisfactory. Most of the ICT tutors have experience of working with learners who need this support. Support is available at many of the LC's venues or is offered in class on an individual basis by the ICT tutors.

Leadership and management

71. The LC is particularly successful in the promotion of accredited programmes. In 2004-05, 22 per cent of learners were following an accredited programme.

Non-accredited programmes follow the curriculum of an accredited course if this is available and this enables learners to progress to accreditation in the future. The alignment of non-accredited programmes to the curriculum of accredited courses is strongly promoted by tutors.

72. Observation records of teaching are thorough and include an action plan for improvement in practice. However, lesson observations have only taken place on two tutors. The self-assessment process has not included the views of many of the tutors. The report identified many of the strengths, but it is mainly descriptive and it does not identify the significant weaknesses.

73. The promotion and monitoring of equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall. Good signs at learning venues encourage members of the community to participate in training at an appropriate level. Careful consideration is given to individual needs and how the course can meet personal aims. Most of the venues are accessible for those with restricted mobility and have specialist equipment available. However, there is little promotion of equality of opportunity to learners.

74. The planning of some of LC's courses is inadequate. Courses are usually fully subscribed and in some instances become quickly over-subscribed. Tutors manage this aspect as best as possible, but learners sometimes have insufficient equipment, insufficient workstations with internet access and cramped study conditions.

75. The opportunities to share best practice are insufficient. Inspectors observed many good examples of best practice such as outstanding lesson planning and review documents, but there are few opportunities for tutors to share their knowledge, skills and experiences.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Adult and community learning	117	3 3

76. The LCN offers a wide range of literacy, numeracy and language courses throughout Wiltshire and Swindon for learners from disadvantaged communities, in conjunction with voluntary, community and probation services. Probation courses are delivered in partnership with Wiltshire Area Probation Service within probation offices throughout the sub-region. Community courses are delivered in a range of venues and settings including church halls, leisure centres and social centres. Community courses include courses for learners with learning difficulties, a young mums-to-be course, a course for homeless girls and a course for learners with mental health problems. Many learners are working towards the achievement of accredited literacy and numeracy qualifications, while others are on non-accredited provision. Fifty-seven learners are enrolled on community courses and 60 learners are on probation courses. All learners have an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and language skills and the results form the basis of the individual learning plans.

Literacy and numeracy*Strengths*

- good development of skills
- responsive provision to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate formal recording of progress for some learners
- insufficient monitoring of probation provision

Achievement and standards

77. Learners develop good literacy, numeracy and personal skills. Initial assessment of individual needs is thorough on most courses. A good balance of individual and group work enables effective tutor and peer support to take place. Tutors introduce various practical aids for learning that enable learners to share tasks and increase their skills and confidence. For example, in one numeracy session, good use was made of various objects to increase the understanding of proportions. In one weekend workshop, learners gained additional skills including computer skills and mental arithmetic. Learners who have learning disabilities and difficulties enjoy their learning. They increase their concentration and learn to use the descriptive words they discuss from listening to music. In some classes, learners take great pride in producing good portfolios of their work.

78. Achievement and progression are satisfactory. In 2004-05, of the 178 learners, 96 per cent achieved their agreed learning goals. Additionally, 46 learners achieved a level 1 or 2 numeracy qualification and 31 learners achieved a level 1 or 2 literacy qualification. Many learners on community courses progress to other courses to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

79. Attendance is poor on probation courses. During inspection, attendance was 45 per cent. On one weekend workshop only three of a possible seven learners attended. On one evening course one learner had attended for only 20 per cent of the sessions. Some learners are compulsory attendees, but, despite this, attendance remains poor. Attendance is satisfactory on most community courses.

The quality of provision

80. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The better sessions are well planned and have clear objectives which are understood by learners. Learners are fully involved in these lessons. Tutors and learners have a good rapport. Tutors in community provision use imaginative approaches to make learning enjoyable. Tutors create a good atmosphere which gives learners confidence and promotes their learning. In the better literacy sessions, tutors give clear explanation of word meanings and context. Numeracy tutors give effective explanations and demonstrations of concepts. In the less effective sessions, tutors rely on printed work sheets. During inspection, IT was not used to enhance learning.

81. The learners' understanding of key induction topics is satisfactory, including equality of opportunity and health and safety. Learners believe the hour allowed for induction is too short.

82. Assessment of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory overall. All learners are given an initial assessment that includes online or paper-based tests, a piece of free writing and analysis of preferred learning styles. However, information from assessment is not always used effectively to plan learning. Individual learning plans contain long- and short-term aims and identify areas of support which are matched to the core curriculum. Some group goals are insufficiently clear and do not allow for individual needs.

83. Resources are satisfactory overall, but some rooms are cramped and others are over large for use by small groups. Learning is inhibited in these rooms by echoes, particularly where learners have hearing difficulties. Accommodation within probation offices are sometimes not conducive to learning, while others are very good. All probation venues have access to ICT, including the internet and a range of other learning materials. Learning materials vary, with some being poor in content and reproduction. In one learner's file there were photocopied pages from a traditional grammar book. Some tutors have produced their own good learning resources that are up to date and relevant.

84. Provision meets the needs of disadvantaged learners. Courses are held at weekends, evenings and over 51 weeks of the year. Learners who would not attend formal learning are attracted to learning through the effective partnership working with voluntary and community groups. Project meetings with network members are regular. The provider helps network members build their capacity. There are good arrangements for meeting the needs of learners. Provision is based in areas that learners can access easily. A wide range of literacy, numeracy and language activities is delivered through QEST over a wide geographical area to support learners with difficulties. One course at Devizes Quaker meeting house is provided for learners who have a disability or a long-term mental health problem. A course based at a hostel for homeless girls in Swindon helps learners to work towards Open College Network units, while another project is designed to support young mums-to-be.

85. Information, advice and support for learners is satisfactory. Information and advice is

included in most courses and mainly relates to literacy and numeracy qualifications and IT at first level. Impartial advice is provided on progression in local colleges and with other providers. Qualified advisers are available to give more specialist help. Individual support for learners within sessions is good. The provider works effectively with partners to arrange appropriate support. The provider is aware that some of the volunteer helpers need training to be able to support individuals with particular needs.

86. The formal recording of progress on some courses is inadequate. Some learners have effective individual learning plans that include realistic and achievable targets. Others have general targets that are not sufficiently related to the specific needs and interests of individuals. Formal assessment of progress is not used sufficiently by all tutors to plan appropriate activities and materials to challenge more able learners or to support the least able learners. Evaluations of sessions do not record individual progress and plan small steps in learning effectively. In some instances, only a one-line comment describes the tasks carried out or the number of the unit covered. Daily logs are sometimes completed by the tutor or the learners, but in some instances they are not completed at all. Checklists are being introduced but documents are not audited routinely.

87. The monitoring of probation provision is insufficient. Progress in observing probation sessions is slow. Despite the provider recognising that the courses provided by colleges are weaker than those established in partnership with the community probation services in Salisbury, Swindon and Trowbridge, all tutors have not been observed. Attendance on these courses varies. It is not clear which learners are compulsory attendees. Attendance figures are collected each week from registers, but follow-up enquiries do not include effective actions. Arrangements for covering sickness are inadequate as insufficient information is available to enable the replacement tutor to plan the session. One tutor found it difficult to cover for the absent member of staff and resorted to using ICT to engage learners fully. One tutor was given no scheme of work or lesson plan. Some operational problems arise through ineffective communication with probation tutors. One course was cancelled as there was no arranged support for health and safety. Two learners and the tutor were not informed. Where provision is better, there is no formal mechanism for sharing good practice.

Leadership and management

88. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced. Some tutors have achieved level 4 in their subject while others are working towards it. Staff have access to an appropriate range of in-service training, including equality of opportunity.

89. Access is satisfactory. Arrangements for supporting learners who have sensory, physical or learning difficulties and disabilities are satisfactory. Volunteers are used to help learners practically. However, insufficient attention is given to clarifying the role or increasing the skills of some of these volunteers. Good, clear information is available for staff and learners on making learning accessible.

90. Arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. Information for tutors, in the handbook and in the survival guide on quality assurance procedures, is clear. The process for observing sessions is satisfactory and is clearly laid out for tutors. An action plan is prepared after an observation and support is provided where weak teaching is identified. Training for staff is arranged each term in response to the findings from observation reports. However, attendance is not compulsory and some tutors do not attend. Learner feedback

is collected at the end of courses and is shared with probation and network members. Formal analysis is not shared or used to negotiate improvements. The complaints procedure is clear, but few complaints are received.

Business administration and law**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Accounting and finance Adult and community learning	14	2
Administration Adult and community learning	5	2
Business management Other government-funded provision	15	2
Adult and community learning	10	2
Employer training pilot	4	2

91. The LC offers a range of accredited and non-accredited programmes. In 2004-05 there were 459 learners, 326 on non-accredited programmes and 133 on accredited programmes. At the time of the inspection, all 48 learners are on accredited programmes. Only 6 per cent of learners are men. Fifty-eight per cent of learners are funded by the LSC Wiltshire and Swindon and the remaining learners are funded jointly by the LSC Wiltshire and Swindon and the European Social Fund. The programmes are offered in two ways. The LC delivers management NVQs at levels 3, 4 and 5, the introductory certificate in first line management and a coaching and mentoring qualification at level 5. It also works in partnership with TEMPO, which offers accredited programmes, business administration at level 2, book-keeping at level 1, English for business, and the introductory certificate in first line management. All courses are part time. Some of the learners are employed, while others are not in work. The NVQ programmes which are offered directly by the LC are facilitated by three part-time internal verifiers and six assessors.

Strengths

- good partnerships with local organisations
- good teaching and learning
- good development of personal and work-related skills

Weaknesses

- inadequate arrangements for initial assessment for some learners
- inadequate individual learning plans for some learners

Achievement and standards

92. Retention and achievement rates on accredited management programmes are high. In 2004-05, 24 learners started accredited management programmes delivered directly by the LC, and only one learner has withdrawn. Sixteen learners have completed their programme and the remaining learners are on target to complete by their expected end date.

93. On non-accredited courses achievement is good. In 2003-04, achievement was 91 per cent, for 2005-06 it was 95 per cent and to date for 2006-07 achievement is 100 per cent. On accredited courses, 66 per cent of learners achieved their qualification, and this

increased to 72 per cent in 2005-06.

94. Learners' work is of a satisfactory standard. Learners are developing a satisfactory knowledge of the subject and gain good personal and work skills during their programme. Learners state that their confidence has increased and that they enjoy their learning. Learners are well motivated, are enthusiastic, and are keen to learn and progress.

The quality of provision

95. Teaching and learning are good. The best sessions have a clear and purposeful structure, and are lively, well planned, well paced and challenging. Learners are fully involved and complete a good variety of activities. Resources are used well to support learning and there are good links to previous learning. In a minority of sessions the planning is not thorough and the learners are not sufficiently involved in the lesson. Some session plans do not identify how learners' different abilities and needs are recognised and met.

96. Assessment and monitoring of NVQ learning is satisfactory. Portfolios contain a variety of diverse evidence from the workplace and learners are given constructive feedback on assessment decisions. Learners benefit from feedback as they progress through the programme.

97. Resources are satisfactory, although some teaching rooms are cramped. ICT resources and office equipment are adequate to meet the needs of the learners. There is small library of resources to support management learners. New resources are being developed to support learners on accredited management programmes. Resources include workbooks and workshops, but these are not fully developed as yet.

98. Some of the learners do not have adequate individual learning plans, particularly those who are attending programmes which are not delivered directly by the LC. They complete a learner record which contains the overall objectives of the programme, but these are too general to be useful to the learners. The objectives are not broken down into smaller learning goals or targets. There is no individual learning plan for learners and tutors to use to regularly review the learners' progress. Informal, tutor-led support for learners is satisfactory. Learners value the extra time and effort given by tutors to help those who have missed a session or require further explanation. Learners on NVQ programmes are particularly well supported. There are regular meetings with assessors, with good action-planning. The monitoring of learners' progress on NVQ programmes is thorough.

99. The arrangements for initial assessment are inadequate for some learners. None of the learners in this area of learning have additional learning support needs, although none have completed a diagnostic assessment. Inspectors observed some learners who have language support needs. Learners on some programmes stated that they had not been offered extra support for literacy, numeracy or language needs. Learners on provision delivered directly by the LC benefit from a satisfactory initial assessment.

Leadership and management

100. There are good partnerships with local organisations which successfully widen participation. The provision delivered directly by the LC is valued by managers in local organisations. There are good partnerships with employers encourage and help their staff

THE LEARNING CURVE NETWORK

to gain management qualifications. The partnership with TEMPO is providing courses which meet the needs of the local community. They are offering accredited provision which helps learners become job ready and return to the labour market. Learners with childcare needs can use the on-site crèche facility.

101. Internal verification fully meets the awarding body's criteria. Good practice is shared well at standardisation meetings. There are regular assessor meetings which are used for standardisation and to review the progress of all learners. There are also regular internal verifier meetings where the progress of assessors and learners is discussed and monitored. Detailed notes are kept of the meetings and all identified actions are followed up.

102. The quality officer is responsible for quality assuring the provision. The monitoring of quality assurance systems with members of the network is satisfactory. The quality assurance arrangements for the programmes which are directly delivered by the LC are good. The system for observing teaching and learning is satisfactory. However, an insufficient number of observations are carried out to quality assure the learners' experience. Only two observations of teaching and learning have been carried out in this area of learning since April 2005.

103. The staff are well qualified. Team working and communication on management courses is very good, although there is insufficient sharing of good practice across different programmes.

104. Health and safety and equality of opportunity are covered well during the induction. Learners from diverse backgrounds work well together. Learners are respected and protected from bullying and harassment.

105. The internal verifier and the network provider were fully involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report identified some of the strengths identified by inspectors, but some of the strengths identified in the report are no more than normal practice. The weaknesses identified by inspectors do not match the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

