

INSPECTION REPORT

Learning Plus

10 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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Learning Plus

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Learning Plus is a charitable company established in 2001, as a consortium for members within the voluntary and community sector in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Its offices are in Saltash on the Devon, and Cornwall border. Learning Plus does not carry out training for learners itself, however it does provide training for staff of member companies. Learning Plus is a registered centre for a number of awarding bodies. It has a board of trustees offering governance to a chief executive officer, supported by three managers and three other staff. Thirty-one not-for-profit organisations are members of the learning consortium, but during 2005-06 only nine received funding through a Learning and Skills Council (LSC) contract.

2. Learning Plus contracts with Devon and Cornwall LSC to provide mostly accredited training in horticulture and preparation for life and work, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), community development, and literacy and numeracy.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** The leadership and management are satisfactory, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. The provision in agriculture, horticulture and animal care, and preparation for life and work is satisfactory.

4. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process and the action-planning are satisfactory. All member organisations' own self-assessment reports contributed to the self-assessment report for Learning Plus. The report was compiled in consultation with members, trustees and colleagues. A number of training events supported staff in the development of the report. Although feedback is gathered from the learners, this information is not used sufficiently in the report. Learning Plus has only recently put arrangements into place to collect data on learners' opinions directly. Learning Plus has produced three self-assessment reports, the latest of which was produced in February 2006. The current self-assessment report is an accurate reflection of Learning Plus's provision.

5. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** Learning Plus has recently introduced good initiatives to improve quality. Many problems were identified in a health check exercise which was carried out by consultants in 2005. Learning Plus acted swiftly to put an action plan in place to deal with these problems. Many action points have been implemented and the smaller member companies have responded well to improve their quality procedures. Recent action has also been taken to formalise the contract arrangements, with the aim of making these consistent across all member companies.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR LEARNING PLUS:

- continue to build partnerships
- improve planning and delivery of learning
- improve monitoring of learners' progress
- continue to develop quality improvement arrangements
- reinforce equality and diversity in teaching and learning

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

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

Agriculture, horticulture and animal care			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Horticulture		3	
Adult and community learning	32	3	

Preparation for life and work			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
ESOL		3	
Adult and community learning	110	3	
Literacy and numeracy		2	
Adult and community learning	108	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. Both areas of learning were reported on and graded. Evidence was examined from community development, which was not reported on and graded separately, to support judgements in the leadership and management section of the report.

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	31
Number of learners interviewed	62
Number of staff interviewed	7
Number of subcontractors interviewed	34
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	12
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1
Number of visits	23

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

7. **In horticulture, achievement rates are good** with over 65 per cent of learners achieving the national vocational qualification (NVQ). **For learners on the preparation for life and work programme, success rates on most courses in literacy and numeracy are very good.** In ESOL, the overall standard of work is satisfactory. Retention rates and the achievement in ESOL are also satisfactory.

8. **In horticulture and literacy and numeracy, the retention rates are good for all courses,** averaging over 85 per cent. In ESOL, retention rates are satisfactory at 78 per cent.

9. **In horticulture, learners who started in 2004-05 have made slow progress towards achievement of the NVQ at level 2.** Insufficient assessment was carried out in the workplace. Assessment is now satisfactory, but for recent learners recording of assessment outcomes and progress monitoring is poor.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Preparation for life and work	1	7	8	5	21
Total	1	7	8	5	21

10. **Learners have particularly good support on all programmes.** Learners value the opportunities that they are given. The learners are enthusiastic about their courses and good, informal tutor support helps them increase their confidence and gain additional skills. Learners receive good information, advice and guidance. Tutors and other supporters help

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learners who have personal, domestic and immigration problems. Provision is community based, and support is flexible throughout the programme to meet learners' needs.

11. On horticulture and literacy and numeracy courses, learners develop good personal and work skills. The increase in learners' confidence and self-esteem is also good. Many learners who have not attended education and training for many years develop a positive approach to learning.

12. On ESOL courses, the subcontractor develops particularly effective partnerships with local community organisations, to ensure support for learners and recruitment of learners from vulnerable groups. The organisation contributes well to local strategies to meet the changing needs of migrant workers and asylum seekers.

13. In horticulture, individual learning plans are not used effectively to plan lessons. In ESOL, the planning of learning is inadequate. Learners' needs are not used sufficiently to create schemes of work and lesson plans. Information from initial assessment is not used effectively and most individual learning plans do not contain suitable individual targets. In literacy and numeracy classes, teaching is not sufficiently individualised to fully meet the needs of learners.

14. In literacy and numeracy, the planning and monitoring of learners' progress is insufficient. Targets are often too vague and the quality of the individual learning plans varies considerably between subcontractors. Some organisations are good at setting short-term targets while others do not set targets at all. Reviews are not detailed and do not measure specific progress over a period of time.

15. Curriculum leadership for ESOL is insufficient. Systems and practices across the organisation are not standardised. Sharing of good practice and learning resources is also insufficient. Observations of teaching has taken place and improvement in the quality of teaching and learning is insufficient.

Leadership and management

16. The staff from Learning Plus are well supported. The team works closely together and their work is appreciated. Meetings are frequent and regular and cover strategic and operational issues. Staff development and opportunities for continuing professional development are good.

17. Internal communication is good and communication with subcontractors is satisfactory. Management of resources is satisfactory, as is the management information system.

18. Subcontractors work very effectively in partnerships to recruit learners from the most disadvantaged groups. Close links with local community-based support organisations give good access to hard-to-reach groups. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups and those with disabilities or learning difficulties is high.

19. Learners' awareness of their rights and responsibilities and the complaints procedure is satisfactory. However, the learner review documents, learning materials and other paperwork does not always sufficiently promote and reinforce equality and diversity.

20. **Learning Plus has recently introduced a range of good initiatives to improve quality.** Many recently identified weaknesses have been dealt with and action has been taken to improve contract management.

21. **Quality improvement arrangements are not sufficiently established.** Many have only recently been introduced.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good support for staff
- particularly effective partnerships to widen participation
- good recent initiatives with smaller companies to improve quality

Weaknesses

- insufficiently established arrangements for quality improvement across the whole consortium

Agriculture, horticulture and animal care

Horticulture

Strengths

- high achievement rate for NVQ at level 1
- high retention rates
- good, supportive environment for learners
- good development of personal and work skills

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards, and monitoring of, achievement on the NVQ at level 2 programmes
- ineffective use of individual learning plans
- inadequate quality assurance

Preparation for life and work

ESOL

Strengths

- very good support for learners
- particularly effective partnerships

Weaknesses

- inadequate planning of learning
- insufficient curriculum leadership

Literacy and numeracy

Strengths

- high success rates on most courses
- high retention rates on all courses
- good development of learners' confidence and self-esteem
- very good pastoral support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning and monitoring of learners' progress
- insufficient individualised teaching to meet learners' needs

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT LEARNING PLUS:

- 'this course is just what I needed'
- 'I'm learning a lot'
- 'tutors are really helpful'
- the timing and flexibility of courses
- very good support
- 'I feel listened to'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK LEARNING PLUS COULD IMPROVE:

- the challenges for some learners
- the access to computers
- the accommodation and chairs

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- good support for staff
- particularly effective partnerships to widen participation
- good recent initiatives with smaller companies to improve quality

Weaknesses

- insufficiently established arrangements for quality improvement across the whole consortium

22. Staff are well supported. The team is small and staff and managers work closely together. Members of staff are valued and their work is appreciated. Meetings are held every two weeks to exchange information and to discuss strategic and operational issues. Staff attend an 'awayday' three times a year to consider strategic planning based on the development plan and the quality improvement plan. All staff are aware of the broader strategic outlook as well as being well informed of operational matters. Staff are encouraged to attend training days and share information with the rest of the team. Opportunities for continuing professional development are good, and each member of staff is working towards a qualification. Training courses are also available to staff from the member organisations in all aspects of provision. These are well attended and appreciated. Additional support by e-mail, telephone or personal visits is also readily available.

23. The skills for life strategy is satisfactory and appropriately identifies the way in which the provision is delivered. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. It includes a suitably detailed action plan. Staff development needs, appropriate diagnostic assessment tools, and targets for implementation are identified. The additional needs of learners relating to literacy, numeracy, and language support are being met.

24. Internal communication is good and communication with the member organisations, which has improved considerably in the past six months, is now satisfactory. The development plan is in place, but Learning Plus has no business plan to identify broader strategic and financial planning. The board of trustees, which has a long-term vacancy, has not met recently and does not have clearly defined terms of reference. Learning Plus maintains regular contact with member organisations through the annual contract meeting, three-monthly review meetings, quality improvement visits and lesson observations. Learning Plus negotiates suitable contracts with the member organisations, including targets for the contract period. These targets are monitored appropriately at the quarterly review meetings. Learning Plus has good working relationships with a number of outside organisations and further education colleges.

25. The management of resources is satisfactory. The accommodation is good, with a well-equipped training room. Member organisations are responsible for their own resources and these are audited by Learning Plus. Laptop computers are available for

member organisations and for learners to use, as is software for initial assessment and diagnostic testing. Staff at Learning Plus are well qualified and experienced. Learning Plus keeps a database of all teaching staff at member organisations and check that they are suitably qualified and experienced.

26. The use of management information is satisfactory. The company has recently developed an additional database to monitor the learners' retention, achievement and progression. This is in addition to the main administration database. Member organisations keep their own management information systems, but all the paperwork is checked by Learning Plus. Learning Plus sends out a copy of its own spreadsheet each month for the member organisation to check. Data is discussed at the fortnightly staff meeting and is used at the review meetings with member organisations. It is too soon to use the data to identify trends in performance, although the capacity is there to do so.

27. Inspectors also inspected community learning which was not graded as there was insufficient provision. Retention and achievement in community learning was good in 2004-05 and continues to be good in 2005-06. Learners develop confidence and skills well, for example, learners who have been unemployed for many years feel confident enough to return to work or work in the voluntary sector. Teaching is good. Sessions are well planned with a range of activities based on learners' own experiences. Much individual support is available and learners have regular tutorials. As with other programmes, targeting to widen participation is very effective.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

28. The organisations who are subcontracted by Learning Plus to deliver training, work very effectively in partnership to recruit learners from a wide range of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Close links with local community-based support organisations and agencies give good access to hard-to-reach groups, for example, drug rehabilitation centres, ethnic and religious organisations, hostels for the homeless and government agencies. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is significantly higher than in the local community, as is the proportion of those with a disability or learning difficulties. Many of the subcontractors hold events to celebrate their learners' success and publicise their services through good news stories in the local press. Individual subcontractors produce their own marketing materials which are suitable and contain non-stereotypical images. Learning Plus collects and analyses data on the ethnicity, age and gender of learners, however, the effect of this analysis is limited.

29. Individual learners receive good support. Staff at the subcontractors are very supportive and ensure their learners are protected and respected. Many of the most vulnerable learners continue training after their funding has stopped to enable them to achieve accreditation. Learners are very positive about their training experience and feel valued and safe in the learning environment.

30. All learners attend an induction where their rights and responsibilities, complaints and harassment procedures are appropriately covered. All learners are aware of how to make a complaint and have satisfactory knowledge of their rights and responsibilities. However, progress review documents in some subcontractors do not cover equality issues and these are not always dealt with sufficiently through the materials and resources in the classroom.

31. Learning Plus has recently developed a full range of policies covering equality and

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diversity, anti-harassment and bullying, complaints, and the learners' rights and responsibilities. These are given to all subcontractors and are used by them if they do not have their own documents. Learning Plus checks subcontractors' policies and equality arrangements. They receive copies of complaints and monitor the action taken. Suitable training in equality and diversity is offered to Learning Plus's staff and to subcontractors' staff.

32. An audit of premises has been carried out and some action has taken place to resolve access problems. Overall access to subcontractors' premises is satisfactory, however one training centre has no satisfactory facilities for people with restricted mobility and new premises are being sought. Another provider operates one programme from a temporary classroom which has unsuitable access. Specialist equipment is available through a small discretionary budget and an audit of adaptive technology resources and requirements has taken place. Subcontractors also gain suitable equipment and learning aids through other sources to meet their learners' needs.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

33. Learning Plus has recently introduced a range of good initiatives to improve quality. Many deficits were identified in a health check exercise carried out by consultants in 2005. Learning Plus acted swiftly to create an action plan to deal with these problems. The action points have been implemented and the smaller companies have responded well and have adopted the quality improvement procedures. Larger companies have the option to adopt these procedures if their own procedures are not good enough. For example, documents and processes have been strengthened appropriately and the data system has improved. Good action has also been taken to formalise the quality and contract arrangements with the aim of making these consistent across the various members. Subcontractors acknowledged the improvements made by Learning Plus.

34. Learning Plus has a quality assurance policy and a well-developed quality assurance manual which is made available to all members. The manual is very comprehensive and covers all aspects of quality assurance, with sample documents and guidance for completion. These documents have been revised recently and the latest version of the manual was given to all member organisations the week before the inspection.

35. Lesson observations are completed by the staff at Learning Plus. These complement the lesson observations carried out by staff from subcontractors. The observations are graded and feedback is given to the tutor. Appropriate action is then identified for improvement.

36. The self-assessment process and the action-planning are satisfactory. All subcontractors complete their own self-assessment reports and these contribute to the self-assessment report for Learning Plus. The report was compiled by the quality manager and the quality assistant in consultation with members, trustees and colleagues. A number of training events were held on self-assessment and the Common Inspection Framework to support staff. Although feedback is gathered from learners by the subcontractors, this information has not been used sufficiently in the self-assessment. Learning Plus has recently made arrangements to collect data on learners' opinions directly. It has produced three self-assessment reports, the latest of which was produced in February 2006. The current self-assessment report is an accurate reflection of Learning Plus.

37. Internal verification is the responsibility of the member organisations and this is monitored by Learning Plus. The quality manager checks that the internal verification policies are being followed and that the sampling plans are appropriate and contain the correct variety of assessment methods. The quality manager also checks that standardisation meetings are being held. These arrangements are satisfactory.

38. The quality improvement arrangements are not sufficiently established. Many of these have been recently introduced in response to weaknesses identified by the consultancy exercise. The response has varied. The newer smaller companies broadly welcome them, but they have needed considerable support to implement them. Larger, well-established member companies have the option to adopt the procedures if they are an improvement on their own procedures. The aim is to have consistent quality improvement procedures across the whole provision. At present, the individual learning plans are not always used effectively. Some recording of learners' progress is weak and tutors set too few targets with few actions and no timescales. In some cases, there is little evidence of regular review and the individual learning plans do not support the learner. Checks to ensure the receipt of external verification reports have only recently been put into place. Learning Plus was not aware that a subcontractor had lost its direct claim status in one area of learning.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Agriculture, horticulture and animal care

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Horticulture Adult and community learning	32	3 3

39. Learning Plus offers two NVQ courses in horticulture at levels 1 and 2. There are 32 learners, seven of whom have continued their study from 2004-05. The level 1 and 2 qualifications are offered as part-time course. In 2005-06, 13 learners are working towards the level 1 and 19 are working towards the level 2. All courses are part-time day classes. The courses vary in length from 36 weeks to 108 weeks. Learners attend between one and three days a week. Training takes place at centres in Torbay and Plymouth.

Horticulture

Strengths

- high achievement rate for NVQ at level 1
- high retention rates
- good, supportive environment for learners
- good development of personal and work skills

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards, and monitoring of, achievement on the NVQ at level 2 programmes
- ineffective use of individual learning plans
- inadequate quality assurance

Achievement and standards

40. In 2004-05, 65 per cent of learners achieved the full NVQ at level 1. Current learners' portfolios show good progress with regular assessment as a planned and integral part of the course. Tutors' and learners' copies of monitoring sheets are up to date and show the extent of achievement. Learners are well motivated and participate well in horticultural tasks. Learners have valuable opportunities to develop their skills through a heritage garden project to restore a medieval garden, and by working in a nearby park. Of the learners who started in 2004-05, 11 per cent have already achieved the NVQ at level 2 and a further 60 per cent have portfolios awaiting external verification.

41. In 2004-05, 70 per cent of learners were retained on the NVQ at level 1 and 81 per cent were retained on the NVQ at level 2 classes. In 2005-06, current retention rates have increased to 92 per cent for level 1 and 84 per cent for the level 2.

42. Learners have made slow progress towards achievement of the NVQ at level 2.

Monitoring of achievement is inadequate. Only three of the learners who started in 2004-05 have been awarded certificates. There was insufficient assessment in the workplace and the awarding body has withheld certification rights pending a satisfactory external verification report. This has now been dealt with and work-based assessment is now satisfactory. An additional 13 portfolios are awaiting final external verification. For learners who started in 2005-06, assessment is satisfactory, but overall recording of assessment outcomes is poor. There are no overall monitoring sheets. Learners are unaware of the extent of their progress and tutors are unclear about learners' progress towards achievement. Background knowledge is recorded satisfactorily.

The quality of provision

43. Learners are placed in good supportive environment. Most learners are enthusiastic about their class and the programmes meet their needs and interests. Learners share their work-based experiences with confidence and are keen to learn from each other. Good informal tutor support is provided and learners increase their confidence and additional life skills. Most of the current learners have appropriate work placements and are collecting good work-based evidence. Classes are offered on a choice of days. Tutors have a good knowledge of learners and respond well to learners' needs. In class, support is provided by additional tutors when the need is identified.

44. Learners develop good personal and work skills. Most learners have needs which include mental health problems and special needs such as dyslexia. The classes are of great benefit to this diverse range of learners and prepare some learners well for a return to work following long periods without work. For example, communication and relationship skills are developed through working in the plant sales shop. Practical activity develops good horticultural knowledge. Course leaflets are clear and attractively presented and effectively meet the needs of learners. The centre is very successful in developing learners from non-traditional backgrounds including many mature learners. However, few learners enter full-time employment, as their particular needs present significant barriers to employment.

45. Lessons are suitably planned. In the better classes, tutors engage learners effectively and exploit opportunities to extend learning through practical and topical examples. One tutor successfully integrated the discovery of a vine weevil's larva into the context of a potting exercise, which stimulated the learners' interest. Most tutors use a traditional style of teaching and learners are fully engaged in the lessons. In the better classes, handouts are bold and clear. Learners are encouraged to write in notes or to highlight key words to reinforce learning. However, some of the handouts are too detailed for the level of the class. Learners' portfolios are satisfactory and contain an appropriate range of evidence. In the weaker classes, the tutors struggle to engage learners or to stimulate discussion. Some poor behaviour is not challenged.

46. Individual learning plans are not used effectively to plan lessons. Planning for differentiation and the individual needs of learners is insufficient. Tutors respond to some individual needs appropriately and in the better classes tutors use large-print handouts and highlighters to reinforce learning outcomes. However, teaching styles and materials do not always meet the needs of individual learners. Tutors ask questions that are rarely targeted and individual learners can dominate the class. Most tutors use individual learning plans but this is on an informal basis and there is no clear guidance, and tutors are unclear on how to provide effective differentiation in class. A range of plants and a greenhouse are

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used to support learning. Learners benefit from training at a heritage garden and are restoring a medieval garden as part of the learning experience. However, tutors accept inadequate resources, such as dirty whiteboards. One temporary classroom has unsatisfactory access for learners with restricted mobility.

Leadership and management

47. Quality assurance is inadequate. Communication links between the subcontractor and Learning Plus are unsatisfactory. Learning Plus was unaware that the subcontractor had lost direct claims status for the NVQ. Some achievement in 2004-05 was incorrectly recorded. The subcontractor's internal verifier did not identify that insufficient work-based assessment took place in 2004-05. Communication between horticulture management and tutors is satisfactory with regular standardisation meetings. Assessment is now satisfactory. Teaching observations have recently been introduced but it is too early to judge the effect on the quality of teaching and learning. Tutors and learners are unclear of their role in the quality improvement process. The arrangements for equality are satisfactory and learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity. The subcontractor's equal opportunities policy is reviewed regularly.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>ESOL</i> Adult and community learning	110	3 3
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Adult and community learning	108	2 2

48. Learning Plus contracts with one local community organisation to deliver ESOL programmes. Courses are available at entry levels 1 to 3 and NVQs at levels 1 and 2. There are 110 learners on ESOL courses at the time of inspection. Learners can access the new ESOL skills for life qualifications. The organisation specifically helps asylum seekers and their families, and migrant workers. It caters for over 30 different nationalities. Learners come from diverse backgrounds, some with high-level qualifications from their country of origin, while others have had no formal education. The programme is monitored by the quality assurance team from Learning Plus. A development worker has been appointed to help the provider develop the ESOL provision. The organisation employs 15 tutors who work to two team leaders. Eighteen volunteers, including four placement students, provide support to learners in the classroom.

49. Learning Plus has 108 learners attending literacy and numeracy programmes. Thirty-eight learners are attending numeracy programmes and 70 are attending literacy programmes. Learners have the opportunity to gain qualifications from entry level, to the national tests in literacy and numeracy at level 1 and level 2. Training is subcontracted to four organisations, some of which have more than one centre for training. Programmes are delivered on a part-time basis and the number of hours a learner attends depends on their assessed needs. Subcontractors also provide a range of other programmes as part of their provision.

ESOL*Strengths*

- very good support for learners
- particularly effective partnerships

Weaknesses

- inadequate planning of learning
- insufficient curriculum leadership

Achievement and standards

50. The overall standard of work in classes is satisfactory. Learners' English has improved sufficiently to enable satisfactory discussion about news programmes that they had seen on television. Others demonstrate satisfactory progress in spelling and pronunciation.

51. The retention rate for 2004-05 was 78 per cent and is improving in 2005-06,

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particularly for learners at entry 3 level. Many learners are asylum seekers and migrant workers who are keen to achieve.

52. The achievement of ESOL qualifications in 2004-05 is satisfactory, ranging from 62 per cent to 68 per cent across the levels from entry level 1 to level 1. There is insufficient data for 2005-06 to make a judgement on achievement for this year.

53. During inspection the attendance was 70 per cent, which is satisfactory. In the better classes, attendance was good.

The quality of provision

54. Support for learners is very good. All staff in the centre are very accessible. The subcontractor employs a dedicated information, advice and guidance worker who offers a range of advice and support to help learners make decisions about future career and learning opportunities. He makes good links with potential employers and recruitment agencies to secure work placements for learners. There is also a liaison worker who supports learners with personal, domestic and immigration problems. She also recruits and manages a team of volunteers who help learners in the classroom. For example, one volunteer provides particular support to learners with a hearing impairment. There is good childcare provision at one site, which particularly supports the women-only classes. The local church also provides pastoral support, counselling and access to other charitable support such as housing.

55. Teaching accommodation is satisfactory overall, although some classrooms are small. Teaching staff have appropriate qualifications and many are working towards new qualifications. The classes are offered at times when learners can easily attend and are in two locations which are accessible and welcoming. However, the provider is currently unable to meet the level of demand for courses and has a prioritised waiting list of potential learners.

56. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Many of the classes observed during the inspection were good or better, but three were inadequate. In the better classes, tutors use a variety of activities, learners are set challenging tasks and actively engage in learning. There is frequent checking of understanding and regular reviews of previous learning. In one particularly active class, learners drew a life-size bodyshape and used this to label parts of the body, linked with verbs. In the weaker classes, there is a narrow range of teaching strategies. Insufficient attention is paid to accuracy, pronunciation and intonation.

57. The planning of learning is inadequate. Schemes of work and lesson plans do not sufficiently use the learners' needs as a starting point. In some sessions, learners' backgrounds and interests are not sufficiently used to set a context for the learning. For example, in a class where all learners were employed, this experience was not shared in preparation for reading a text about someone at work. Information from initial assessment is not used sufficiently to plan learning. The initial assessment used is effectively to place learners in a class at an appropriate level. However, there is insufficient diagnostic information for tutors to set clear and meaningful learning targets on individual learning plans. Most individual learning plans do not contain meaningful group learning goals or individual targets. Learners' progress is not sufficiently reviewed and monitored. Learning objectives in lesson plans are not sufficiently clear and the planned activities do not enable learners to achieve the objectives. Learning materials are often poor and there is too much

photocopying from published textbooks. Little use is made of material which learners encounter in their daily lives. There is insufficient access to information technology (IT), although the provider has recently made a number of laptop computers available.

Leadership and management

58. The subcontractor has particularly effective partnerships with local organisations and agencies which benefit the learners. Networking is good with local faith organisations to ensure additional support for learners. Partnerships with local education providers enable the sharing of resources and expertise. There are good links with employers and local recruitment agencies, which both help in the recruitment of learners and the sourcing of potential employment. Through links with refugee organisations, the subcontractor contributes to local strategies which meet the changing needs of migrant workers and asylum seekers and respond to government initiatives. The subcontractor contributes frequently to national developments and projects on citizenship and skills for life.

59. Curriculum leadership for ESOL is insufficient. While the stated aims of the subcontractor are to improve the integration and employability of asylum seekers and migrant workers, co-ordination and development for these to be achieved through the language teaching programme is insufficient. Focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning is insufficient. Observations of teaching and learning has taken place and some of the teaching and learning grades are higher than those given during inspection. Systems and practices across the organisation are not standardised. For example, tutorial arrangements vary and systems for reviewing and monitoring progress are inconsistent. Sharing of good practice and sharing learning resources is insufficient. However, the subcontractor has successfully introduced new qualifications for ESOL and provides good professional development opportunities for the staff.

60. Although tutors have a satisfactory awareness of diversity, there is no promotion of equality of opportunity in the materials and resources used in the classroom. However, learners are made aware of the organisation's values, policies and procedures during induction. The self-assessment report identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection.

Literacy and numeracy

Strengths

- high success rates on most courses
- high retention rates on all courses
- good development of learners' confidence and self-esteem
- very good pastoral support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning and monitoring of learners' progress
- insufficient individualised teaching to meet learners' needs

Achievement and standards

61. Success rates on most courses are good. In 2004-05 the success rates on entry-level

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numeracy qualifications was 82 per cent and 84 per cent for numeracy at level 1 and 2. Similarly, in the same year, success rates in literacy at level 1 and 2 was 81 per cent. In 2005-06, of the learners who have left programmes, 82 per cent achieved their numeracy qualification and 71 per cent achieved their literacy qualification.

62. Retention rates are good on all courses. In 2004-05, retention rates on entry-level numeracy are 82 per cent and 86 per cent for literacy. On level 1 and 2 courses in numeracy, retention rates are also good at 84 per cent, and particularly good in literacy level 1 and 2 at 91 per cent.

63. The increase in learners' confidence and self-esteem is good. Learners are frequently praised when the smallest of steps are achieved and are motivated to continue learning. Many learners have not attended education and training for many years and praise by staff improves their self-esteem and promotes a positive approach to learning. Tutors are skilful at promoting positive behaviour in class and learners quickly develop a good understanding of acceptable behaviours in a range of settings, including learning and work.

64. In some lessons, learners achieve good personal and employment skills. For example, in one lesson learners gained a good understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of using a mobile telephone and using information on mobile telephones to identify verbs. In another session, where learners were completing a diagnostic assessment in literacy, one learner who was very reluctant and negative about the assessment was quickly reminded of the benefits and was able to complete a section of the assessment successfully.

The quality of provision

65. Learners have access to very good, supportive community-based provision, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Support throughout the programme is very flexible and meets learners' needs well. Tutors are very experienced in working with learners who have multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or emotional and behavioural problems. In lessons, staff quickly reinforce and challenge behaviour problems in a way that settles learners down into learning with minimum disruption to others. Learners can access a range of other support through personal development programmes. One subcontractor provides a range of courses that are externally accredited to prepare learners for independent living. There is a good focus on the development of employment skills in literacy and numeracy sessions by providing support on compiling curriculum vitae, completing application forms and attending mock interviews. The range of community-based venues is good. Provision is situated across Devon in a range of town centres and rural locations that provides easy access to services by local residents. One subcontractor provides accommodation for homeless learners who are encouraged to attend literacy and numeracy courses as part of their preparation for life and work.

66. The induction for learners is satisfactory and learners have an adequate understanding of what course they are doing, who to go to if they have a complaint, and health and safety arrangements. The arrangements for initial assessment are satisfactory, with an initial screening of literacy and numeracy levels followed by further diagnostic assessment. However, results are not used effectively to plan learning and not all learners complete the diagnostic assessment. Resources are satisfactory with an appropriate range of textbooks, handouts and activities. However, in some cases learners do not use the IT facilities.

67. Planning for, and monitoring of, individual progress is insufficient. Initial assessment is

not used to plan a detailed programme of learning for each individual. Targets on plans are often too vague. The content of individual learning plans varies considerably between subcontractors and between staff members within organisations. Some organisations are good at setting short-term targets, while others do not set targets at all. Reviews are not detailed and it is not possible for subcontractors to measure progress over time. Learning Plus has produced some recent guidance and training on assessment and individual learning plans to try and rectify the problem, but it is too early to measure the effectiveness of the training. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

68. Teaching is often insufficiently individualised to fully meet the needs of learners of differing abilities. In too many sessions, there is an overemphasis on group work with all learners completing the same level activity, regardless of their capability. Some of the learners find exercises easy and have to wait for other learners who struggle with the complexity of the task. In some sessions, there is insufficient focus on the development of reading and writing skills. However in the better sessions, there is a good variety of teaching methods where different resources are used to support learners. For example in one lesson, some learners were using symbols and key words to develop a pictorial day plan while more able learners were writing down the words.

Leadership and management

69. Communication between Learning Plus and subcontractors is good with frequent e-mails and telephone discussions to share ideas and practice. Historically, contracts have been managed informally, but there have been good recent actions to formalise systems and improve quality. There has been good support for staff and subcontractors, including some recent staff development and guidance on the completion of individual learning plans. The self-assessment report identified many of the strengths found during inspection, such as high retention and achievement on most courses, good support and range of provision, and weaknesses in planning of learning and differentiated teaching. Access to premises is satisfactory and learners understand their rights and responsibilities.

