

INSPECTION REPORT

Essential Learning Company

19 January 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
- **learn**direct provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**)

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

Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

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

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

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

Overall effectiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grading

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

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

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Essential Learning Company (ELC) is a private training organisation based in Marple, Cheshire. The company provides training in health, public services and care, business administration and law and preparation for life and work. Only health, public services and care was inspected as learner numbers were too low in the other areas of learning. There are currently 233 learners taking a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 in care. Funding for this Employer Training Pilot (ETP) is provided by the Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSC). ELC is part of the Careconnect virtual learning network and offers courses and assessment in the care standards induction. Since the start of the contract in August 2005, 19 learners have started the learndirect course and have been funded by the Careconnect Hub operator. ELC is managed by two directors and supported by a number of full- and part-time staff to deliver and manage training. The training and assessment is delivered in the workplace by assessors.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

2. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** ELC's leadership and management and its arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory, but the arrangements for equality of opportunity are unsatisfactory. The provision in health, public services and care is good.

3. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The quality improvement plan which comes from the business strategy and the self-assessment process is detailed and identifies clear actions, responsibilities and timescales. The self-assessment process involves learners, staff and employers. However, the feedback gathered does not focus sufficiently on the learning process. The report is not critical. Many of the judgements in the self-assessment report did not match those made by inspectors.

4. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** ELC has good strategies in place to continue making improvements in the quality of the learning process. It manages performance very effectively, sets high and demanding targets and makes good use of management information to make decisions.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ESSENTIAL LEARNING COMPANY:

- maintain good retention and achievement rates
- improve stakeholder participation in, and understanding of, the self-assessment process and report
- implement observations of staff
- improve collection and analysis of feedback
- develop and implement a thorough approach to promoting and monitoring equal opportunities

- further develop and implement skills for life arrangements
- complete the review of the quality assurance process

GRADES

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

Leadership and management		3
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		4
Quality improvement		3

Health, public services and care			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Social care		2	
learndirect	19	2	
Employer training pilot	233	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. Health, public services and care was reported on with a contributory grade for social care. Four inspectors visited the provider over four days in January 2006.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learners interviewed	41
Number of staff interviewed	27
Number of employers interviewed	11
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	2
Number of visits	11

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

- Retention and achievement rates are very good.** Many learners make good progress.
- Learners on the ETP programme develop good skills in the workplace.** Employers provide good opportunities for training, shadowing and coaching to help learners develop appropriate skills.

The quality of provision

8. **Personal and vocational support for learners is very good.** Regular visits, challenging targets and a variety of assessment methods help learners make good progress and succeed.
9. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, as are the resources to support learning. Most learning takes place in the workplace with individual support from assessors.
10. Initial assessment and induction are satisfactory. If individuals need additional support then arrangements are in place to provide that support.
11. Assessment is satisfactory. Learners' progress is reviewed regularly by assessors who use a wide range of assessment methods.

Leadership and management

12. **Performance management is very good.** High and demanding targets are closely and effectively managed.
13. **The use of the management information system to manage performance is good.** Learners' progress, achievement and support are effectively monitored.
14. **Strategies to improve the quality of the learning process are good.** There are good internal communications, challenging targets, effective performance management and good staff development, training and support.
15. Business planning, staff resources, arrangements to support learners with additional learning needs and internal verification are all satisfactory aspects of leadership and management.
16. **The self-assessment process and the report are weak.** The collection and analysis of data, together with observations of key learning processes are insufficient to improve the quality of provision.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very good performance management
- good use of management information system
- good strategies for quality improvement

Weaknesses

- weak self-assessment process and report
- inadequate promotion of equal opportunities
- poor monitoring of equal opportunities data

Health, public services and care

Social care

Grade 2

Strengths

- very good retention and achievement rates
- good development of learners' skills in the workplace on the ETP
- particularly effective personal and vocational support for learners

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ESSENTIAL LEARNING COMPANY:

- 'learning new things and different ways of looking at how I do things'
- 'my assessor always explains things to me so I understand'
- 'really good support from my assessor'
- learning to use a computer
- learning is enjoyable
- training and support is flexible and fits with work commitments
- feel better able to communicate with clients
- 'good to learn at work'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK ESSENTIAL LEARNING COMPANY COULD IMPROVE:

- 'I would like more information on funding'
- 'more about what I can do when I finish level 2'
- the induction - it gives too much information in one session
- the terminology in the NVQ

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- very good performance management
- good use of management information system
- good strategies for quality improvement

Weaknesses

- weak self-assessment process and report
- inadequate promotion of equal opportunities
- poor monitoring of equal opportunities data

17. Performance management is very good. ELC sets high and demanding targets for its programmes. Progress towards, and achievement of, these targets is closely and effectively monitored by the management team. The arrangements for reviewing staff performance are very good, and have had an effect on the rates of achievement. All staff have a performance review on a quarterly basis where previously agreed key performance indicators are linked to learners' progress and achievement and the personal development of staff. Staff who are having difficulty meeting their key performance indicators are quickly identified through this system and are given additional training and support. All staff training and development is reviewed at the quarterly performance review.

18. The collection and use of data for decision-making and performance monitoring is good. ELC identified that the previous data management system was insufficient to identify problems with programme performance. A new data management system has been introduced which captures all progress information, including details of unit achievement and additional support needs. However, equality and diversity data is not adequately collected or analysed. The enhanced data system has allowed managers and staff to have accurate details of learners' progress against planned activity, and to provide additional and effective support for learners in a responsive way.

19. The business planning processes are satisfactory. In July 2005, ELC reviewed the processes and now has a business plan, which reflects the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats to the business, and a thorough competitor analysis. From this information, ELC has devised a strategy to determine the future of the organisation and how it plans to achieve it. While there is no formal business development plan, the quality improvement plan identifies who is responsible for actions, and timescales for achievement.

20. The adequacy and suitability of staff is satisfactory. Staff workloads are monitored carefully through the performance review and staff are trained according to business and personal development needs. However, four staff currently have caseloads which exceed the limits set by ELC.

21. The strategy to support literacy, numeracy and English language is satisfactory. Prior to November 2005, little identification of additional support needs took place. The strategy

was to encourage learners to attend additional training and give referral details of local organisations which offer skills for life courses. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. ELC recognised the need to improve this and during 2005 some staff attended formal education and training in teaching literacy and numeracy. All learners who have started an ETP programme since November have been screened for additional support needs. If the learner is in agreement, formal support is offered by ELC.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

22. Staff are committed to fair and inclusive practices. Learners are encouraged to attend learning, and support for additional learning needs is available for all learners. Twelve per cent of the learners on the ETP are men and 21 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Most learners have a satisfactory understanding of equal opportunities, their rights and responsibilities, and how to deal with bullying and harassment should they arise in the workplace. All employers are screened initially to ensure equality of opportunity in the workplace. Much of the learners' knowledge derives from their course, and for some learners this is supplemented by equality and diversity training from their employers. Some learners have completed an equal opportunities questionnaire for their portfolio. Many of the written answers reflect a satisfactory understanding, but there is no evidence that staff have discussed these responses and, where necessary, helped the learner to amend any incorrect written comments.

23. There is inadequate promotion of equality of opportunity. Equal opportunities is covered only briefly at the induction and is not discussed at progress reviews. There are some policies and procedures covering equality of opportunity, grievance, discipline, confidentiality and whistle blowing, but the policies do not cover recent legislation and some wording is inappropriate. There is no equal opportunities strategy or action plan to drive forward developments and improvements. Equality and diversity are not discussed as regular and meaningful agenda items at any of ELC's planned meetings. Staff have not received formal training relating to equality and diversity either to develop their own understanding or to help them support learners in their awareness and understanding. The company does not carry out any planned activities to attract individuals from under-represented groups, or carry out any promotional activities in the community. There are no materials to promote equal opportunities generally or during the Careconnect course. ELC's office and training premises do not comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Access is not suitable for those with restricted mobility.

24. There is poor monitoring of equal opportunities data. ELC has no targets to work towards and data is not produced for decision-making and action-planning. There is no data available for staff to monitor the progress and achievement of different groups and categories of learners.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

25. There are good strategies to improve the quality of provision. In the year prior to inspection, ELC has made significant changes and improvements to the programmes offered. Improvements have been implemented through good internal communications, the setting of challenging targets, close performance monitoring and good support for staff. In particular, achievement rates are high and they improved in 2004-05 by 7 per cent on the previous year. Achievement is also more timely. During this period, support for learners has also improved. Staff have received training and development in support for

literacy and numeracy. New data systems have been implemented which identify learners' progress and aid decision-making. leardirect courses have been successfully implemented without quality monitoring support by the hub operator, Careconnect.

26. The internal verification system is satisfactory. Eight internal verifiers report to the lead internal verifier who is responsible overall for the quality of assessment. Assessor and internal verifier standardisation meetings are carried out bimonthly to share best practice and for training and development purposes. ELC closely monitors the amount of portfolios referred by internal verifiers for further assessment.

27. The ELC quality assurance system has ISO 9001 accreditation which has been adapted to meet the requirements of the organisation. This is an international quality assurance standard. This was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. The system is managed by the quality director who controls and monitors compliance. ELC has decided that as the organisation has expanded and the need for continuous improvement increases, the quality assurance procedures should be reviewed. Systems and procedures are in the process of being revised and many new processes have been recently introduced and are not yet fully implemented.

28. ELC produced its first self-assessment report in December 2005 with little staff training in the process of self-assessment or the production of a report. The process incorporated the views of staff and feedback from employer and learner questionnaires. The collection and analysis of feedback from the questionnaires is unsatisfactory. Response rates are low and only one survey has been carried out in 2005. The questionnaires are mainly business related and do not seek sufficient feedback on the quality of training. Staff are unaware of the content of the report. The report is insufficiently critical, and some of the strengths are no more than normal practice. Observations of training are not carried out. However, assessment is observed, but results are not used in the self-assessment report. There are plans to carry out a range of observations to drive forward quality improvement in the learning process.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, public services and care

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Social care		2
learndirect	19	2
Employer training pilot	233	2

29. There are 252 learners in health, public services and care. Courses started in August 2005 and run throughout the year at six-weekly intervals. Learners are offered tutor assistance through a two-day course at a local venue. Since the start of the contract, 19 Government-funded learners have started the course. Two hundred and thirty-three learners are on an ETP programme leading to an NVQ at level 2 in care. In 2005-06, 230 learners joined the programme, of whom 28 are men. One hundred and forty-seven are employed in a domiciliary care setting and 83 in a residential care setting. Seventy-nine per cent of learners are from a white British background and 21 per cent are from minority ethnic groups.

30. ELC has two directors jointly responsible for overall planning and management of programmes, and 21 peripatetic assessors/trainers. There is a lead internal verifier/NVQ co-ordinator who is responsible for the operational management of the programme and eight internal verifiers. ELC works with a wide range of employers, including domiciliary care providers, residential homes, nursing homes, respite care, and day centres for the elderly and those with learning difficulties. Learners are selected by employers. ELC carries out an initial assessment and creates an individual learning plan. Induction into the programme is carried out with learners on an individual or group basis. All learners are allocated an assessor/trainer and are visited every two weeks for assessments and skills and knowledge building. A programme of training supports some aspects of the programme. However, most learners access individual coaching with their assessor. All learners are observed regularly in the workplace.

Social care

Grade 2

Strengths

- very good retention and achievement rates
- good development of learners' skills in the workplace on the ETP
- particularly effective personal and vocational support for learners

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses

Achievement and standards

31. Retention and achievement rates are very good. In 2003-04, retention and achievement rates on the ETP were 74 per cent, in 2004-05 they increased to 81 per cent

and for 2005-06 the current retention is 97 per cent. Most of the learners are making good progress and are likely to achieve their qualification within six months. Of the 19 learners who started the learndirect course, 18 have completed it, giving a 95 per cent achievement rate.

32. Good skills are developed in the workplace on the ETP programme. Many learners are well trained by their employers and have experience of working in the care sector in a variety of settings. Employers ensure opportunities for work shadowing with an experienced carer, and for coaching from supervisors to enable learners to develop appropriate skills. The ETP focuses them on the job role and gives them a better awareness of their roles and responsibilities. Employers report increased motivation, better infection control, improved working relationships with other professionals and a willingness to attend more training and development.

33. Most of the learners produce a satisfactory standard of work in their portfolios. Learners have achieved certificates in a range of relevant subjects such as health and safety, promoting independence, dealing with disabilities, preventing the abuse of vulnerable adults and administering medication.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Employer training pilot	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	236		312	100	328	100										
Retained*	0		253	81	242	74										
Successfully completed	0		253	81	242	74										
Still in learning	230		3	1	0	0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

The quality of provision

34. Personal and vocational support for learners is particularly effective. Assessors visit individual learners on a fortnightly basis. They set challenging targets which encourage most learners to make good progress. Some learners receive more frequent visits to enable them to succeed. Learners appreciate the assessors' accessibility and willingness to help and in making use of different assessment methods to meet their individual learning needs. Employers and learners value the support provided and the flexibility of assessors in arranging visits to reflect different rotas, including late evening and early morning. Many learners want to progress to the level 3 of the NVQ after their experience on the programme. learndirect courses are offered to learners and employers on a virtual learning basis. However, ELC has recognised that many learners need additional support of tutorial groups. The flexible tutorial system ensures that learners who need most help receive it through good assessment of their previous experience and personal needs.

35. Teaching and learning on the ETP are satisfactory. Teaching is carried out mainly on an individual basis in the workplace. Friendly, positive assessors create a supportive environment in which most learners progress with confidence. In the best practice there are frequent checks on learning and understanding. Some training is carried out in small

groups on subjects such as first aid, moving and handling, food hygiene, and abuse. These sessions are well planned and have appropriate supporting materials. Feedback from learners indicates their enjoyment of this part of the programme. Resources to support learning at ELC's training suite are adequate, but not easily accessible to some learners. Some employers also provide good additional training opportunities and assessors use these to identify courses which might benefit particular individuals. These include training on motor neurone disease, tissue viability, enteral feeding systems, caring for those with sight impairment, and British Sign Language. Some employers have a good range of books, resources and journals which provide information on a range of topics. Many of the learners have access to the internet in their workplace. The arrangements for learndirect course delivery and assessment of the care induction standards are satisfactory. Courses are offered at local venues throughout the Greater Manchester region according to demand. If the venue does not have appropriate computer hardware and sufficient connections to the internet, then ELC offers the course through wireless enabled laptop computers. learndirect course materials are appropriate and learners who have only basic information and communications technology skills find access to the course relatively easy. ELC supports the learndirect materials with good workbooks and additional learning materials. The knowledge test is satisfactorily assessed and internally moderated.

36. Initial assessment is satisfactory. The company has recently introduced a formal assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills, and has provided resources to support those who need additional help. Assessors have received some training and offer what help and support they can to encourage learners to achieve. Individual learning plans are satisfactory and there has been some recent improvement in their use.

37. The induction is satisfactory and is carried out with individuals or in small groups. The introduction to NVQs is good, as are the instructions for portfolio-building. However, some learners find that they are given too much information in a short time. Equality and diversity is not explained fully at induction or revisited during reviews. Some employer induction programmes are comprehensive and cover the mandatory foundation training for care and the learndirect care foundation programme of training and assessment. This induction training often involves a further range of one-day workshops which are relevant to their jobs. At the start of the course, each learner participates in a group induction which assesses individual needs and introduces the course and health and safety. Each learner has a satisfactory review which is recorded manually and in the learndirect electronic database. Employers are not involved in progress reviews, but most are informed of the outcomes of review meetings.

38. Assessment is satisfactory. Assessors use a range of assessment methods that are focused on the learner. Assessment planning is good, but planning for a well-structured professional discussion is often inadequate. Some answers to questions are not fully recorded. In some instances, answers to written questions are not corrected, for example on equality and diversity. Assessors make good use of witness testimony by working with some employer-based assessors, particularly those on night duty. Assessors regularly review progress on their fortnightly visits to learners.

39. There are some examples of clear progression routes for ETP learners. However, most learners are not able to progress to the NVQ at level 3 through lack of funding. Most learners and employers are clear about their progress. However, there are no formally recorded progress reviews which involve the learner, employer and assessor on the ETP

programme.

Leadership and management

40. Communication is effective and there are regular meetings. Staff performance management is very good. Data is collected on the performance of assessors and the extent to which they have met their targets. Regular three-monthly reviews are supportive and further development is planned. Recent staff development is appropriate for most key areas of the learning process, although staff have not had any formal training on equality and diversity. New procedures and documents for initial assessment and reviewing and recording progress and achievement have been introduced at staff meetings. There are good and productive working relationships with many employers. Staff are not familiar with the content of the self-assessment report, although they recognise that they have contributed to the process. Staff have no knowledge of the development plan or how this is used to make improvements.

41. There is little monitoring of key learning processes apart from observation of assessors as part of the internal verification process. Internal verification is satisfactory. Meetings effectively support assessors and are used to update them on the new awards. Feedback from internal verifiers is very clear and developmental for assessors. However, the most recent internal verification has taken place at the end of the programme, and fewer monitoring visits have taken place to monitor the effectiveness of the process.

42. The course management arrangements for learndirect are good. Staff have an appropriate range and level of qualifications and have attended development training. Recruitment to the courses is from a variety of sources. Locally based courses enable applicants to attend. There is no promotion of equality of opportunity during the course. The collection and analysis of feedback from learners is satisfactory. Feedback is collected during the review process and at the end of the course. Arrangements for quality improvement of the learndirect courses follow those for the main programme. However, Careconnect has not carried out any quality monitoring visits since the start of the contract.

