

INSPECTION REPORT

Axia Solutions Ltd

29 September 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*

INSPECTION REPORT

Axia Solutions Ltd

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Axia Solutions Ltd (Axia) is a privately owned limited company formed in 1999. Axia is headed by two directors and two senior managers and has 16 staff. The head office and training centre are located in Stoke on Trent. Axia provides work-based learning in engineering, business administration, retailing, customer service, warehousing and logistics as well as essential skills programmes in preparation for life and work.

2. There are just over 200 ceramics manufacturing companies concentrated within the Stoke on Trent area employing approx 20,000 individuals. The ceramics industry has been in decline over the past decade, resulting in factory closures, redundancies and short-time working practices. These changes have affected the economic status of the region, with Stoke on Trent being ranked as the 17th most deprived area out of 354 districts in the country.

3. The unemployment rate in Stoke on Trent in August 2006 was 3.3 per cent, compared with a national average of 2.6 per cent. The youth unemployment rates were 35.4 per cent and 31.5 per cent respectively for Stoke on Trent and England as a whole.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, Axia's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for quality improvement. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Provision is good in engineering and manufacturing technologies and in preparation for life and work.

5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment report accurately identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. The report is clear and well written and clearly relates to the Common Inspection Framework. Axia gave too low a grade to the occupational areas and did not always include sufficient clear evidence to support some of the judgements. Although the staff had contributed to the process, many were unfamiliar with the document.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Axia has been very effective in carrying out actions to promote improvement and the quality of provision has improved. The action plans to improve quality include specific details and realistic timescales. Plans are monitored and managed well. Axia has been particularly effective in improving success rates in all of its areas of learning.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR AXIA SOLUTIONS LTD:

- introduce more formality into quality assurance measures
- share good practice better
- introduce arrangements for child protection

- continue to improve teaching and learning and refine the observation system
- improve recruitment onto apprenticeships
- continue to improve success rates

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		2

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Engineering</i> Apprenticeships for young people	23	2	
<i>Manufacturing technologies</i> Employer training pilot	62	2	

Preparation for life and work			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Other government-funded provision	66	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The inspection was carried out in a single visit to the provider. Provision in business administration and law and in retailing, customer service and transportation was not inspected as learner numbers were low at the time of inspection.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learners interviewed	35
Number of staff interviewed	7
Number of employers interviewed	24
Number of subcontractors interviewed	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	11
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	2
Number of visits	1

Leadership and Management

Strengths

- good strategic and business planning
- productive engagement of employers
- very good staff performance management
- highly effective quality improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficiently formal quality assurance arrangements
- slow response to implement child protection measures

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Strengths

- good and improving overall success rates on apprenticeships
- good overall success on adult programmes in manufacturing and engineering
- effective use of work-based assessors in manufacturing
- good development of skills in the workplace

Weaknesses

- low overall success rates on advanced apprenticeships

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- good achievement
- good teaching and learning
- good monitoring and recording of learning
- effective programmes meeting the needs of employers and learners
- good links with employers
- good management of provision

Weaknesses

- insufficiently detailed lesson planning to meeting individual learning priorities

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT AXIA SOLUTIONS LTD:

- 'they all make sure you're getting on all right'
- that staff are easy to contact
- the practical training and jobs they get to do at work
- the support from the people they work with in the companies
- going to college on day-release
- the assessments with the engineering assessors
- having good access to tutors
- work linked to their job
- 'this is the start of my new life'
- learning at work in work time
- 'the bosses are interested in what I'm doing'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK AXIA SOLUTIONS LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- the safety clothing - 'it's good, but some of it is second-hand'
- the volume, and repetition, in the national vocational qualification (NVQ) paperwork
- 'I would have liked to go on and do an HNC, but couldn't'
- 'I couldn't do the computer course I wanted'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good strategic and business planning
- productive engagement of employers
- very good staff performance management
- highly effective quality improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficiently formal quality assurance arrangements
- slow response to implement child protection measures

8. Axia has good strategic and business planning. Plans set a clear strategic direction and are well understood by staff. The business plan has been conceived well to deal with an area affected by industrial recession over a number of years. The three-year development plan and the business plan are well co-ordinated and both make good use of the self-assessment to help with planning. Senior managers use a good variety of sources to prepare the plans, including employers' comments and business targets. The plans are well managed. There is a detailed formal presentation of the business plan to the staff by the senior management team and a thorough formal review of the plan with the staff. These meetings help the staff to understand and contribute to the development and improvement of the provision. The business plan is effectively used to derive targets for staff in a variety of areas such as retention, achievement and staff development.

9. Axia ensures that its engagement with employers is productive in widening participation, finding placements and helping learners to achieve their qualifications. Employer engagement is recognised as a key strategic priority and business and development planning. This ensures that staff and managers are always aware of the particular importance of employers' support to the success of their learners in the local climate. Historically, many potteries employers have been reluctant to devote any factory time to training. Axia has developed some clever initiatives to promote training. For example, three years ago, a well-known TV personality and celebrity athlete was engaged to visit local businesses giving motivational presentations to recruit learners. All the businesses approached were keen to become involved in the tour. Three years later the same person completed a second tour to present certificates and awards to those who joined the programme.

10. Staff performance management is particularly good. Axia benefits from a good and well-managed appraisal system. The structure of appraisal is appropriate, allowing both parties to contribute to the process and encouraging a co-operative approach to target-setting. Clear, measurable and demanding targets that help the individual and ultimately the organisation to improve are agreed. There is a clear focus on learning and assessment activities. Staff development is good. Development requirements and opportunities are effectively related to the business plan and the targets for the whole

organisation. An appropriate balance is struck between individual and organisational needs. Managers support their staff very well. The support is appreciated by staff and clearly motivates them in their efforts to improve all aspects of the provision.

11. Management of resources is satisfactory. The new training centre provides good, accessible classroom and conference facilities. Accommodation elsewhere is broadly satisfactory. Axia has good equipment and learning materials that it regularly reviews and is constantly developing. Computing resources are satisfactory. Laptop computers, appropriately specified, are effectively used in the training centre and in the workplace.

12. Axia offers a number of non-funded training programmes and a consultancy service to local industry and trade associations.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

13. Axia has a concise and adequate policy for equality and diversity that sets out its approach to equality of opportunity, racial equality and equality for people with disabilities. Staff have a good understanding of the issues and are familiar with the policy, which is displayed in prominent locations within the organisation.

14. Promotion of equality and diversity to learners is satisfactory. A brief but clear training pack helps learners to understand aspects of equality such as bullying, harassment and some aspects of discrimination. Learners are adequately briefed on how to deal with equality of opportunity issues that they may encounter. They know how to complain in accordance with procedures and how and where to get help. A well-documented complaints file shows that few learners formally complain about the provision. In the few cases where learners have complained, Axia took swift and effective action to deal with the issues raised.

15. Axia has improved its efforts to widen participation since its previous inspection and has successfully widened participation. The provider successfully promotes equality and diversity and gives learners good opportunities to develop their potential. Many learning activities promote cultural awareness effectively and most arrangements for courses show respect for learners' cultural and religious backgrounds. All staff have received suitable training in equality of opportunity and disability awareness. Axia is aware that the demand for many traditional hand skills in pottery production has significantly decreased. For example, hand painting requires a high level of artistic skills but does not demand a high level of literacy and numeracy. Many workers are being retrained and now require better literacy and numeracy skills. New and effective provision in essential skills now allows Axia to meet the needs of these and other members of the local community.

16. Arrangements for child protection are not yet fully in place. A number of staff have now received enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks and the process continues. Axia has no designated child protection officer and no staff training has taken place. The provider has no child protection policy. The effect of this is minimal at present as there are no learners aged 14 to 16 and most learners are adults. However, Axia has been slow to respond to the requirements.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

17. The measures adopted by Axia for improving its provision have been highly effective and have contributed to significant and sustained improvements in quality since the

previous inspection. A clear strategy and effective measures for improving retention and achievement have contributed to significant improvements in the quality of provision, including sustained and significant improvements in success rates. For example, overall success rates on all frameworks have improved from 24 per cent in 2003-04 to 35 per cent in 2004-05. Achievement data is still being collected for 2005-06 and the final individualised learner record for 2005-06 indicates that the overall success rate for this period currently stands at 61 per cent. This rate is for all provision, including occupational areas not included in the current inspection.

18. Axia has effectively dealt with most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection through effective self-assessment and quality improvement planning. Management of data is no longer a key weakness and data is used effectively in quality improvement.

19. Axia continues to improve its teaching and learning by developing its quality assurance arrangements. Regular and routine observations are now taking place. However, observers in some occupational areas have no qualifications in teaching and learning. Specialists in essential skills programmes observe most tutors teaching at least once a year. Combined with annual review, this process successfully identifies tutors' training needs. However, it is too soon to measure the effect of the process and identify trends. Information is widely disseminated through good lines of communication such as e-mails and memos.

20. The overall arrangements for quality assurance are not sufficiently formal. For example, course reviews are carried out and improvements do occur as a result of the review but reviews are poorly recorded. Some quality improvement meetings are not formally recorded, which does restrict some sharing of good practice between occupational areas. However, staff and managers effectively use the quality improvement policy and procedures. The policy is concise and clear and supported well by a range of procedures covering some aspects of Axia's operations.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Engineering Apprenticeships for young people	23	2
Manufacturing technologies Employer training pilot	62	2

21. There are 18 apprentices and five advanced apprentices on work-based learning programmes. Sixteen of these are completing engineering frameworks, and seven are on programmes in manufacturing. Over 50 adults have started a level 2 NVQ in manufacturing ceramic products, or in performing manufacturing operations, on the Employer Training Pilot (ETP) programme. On engineering apprenticeship programmes, off-the-job training is subcontracted to Stoke on Trent College and assessment in the workplace is subcontracted to North Staffordshire Engineering Group Training Association (NSEGTA). Axia provides key skills training and support for learners. All training and assessment on ETP programmes is carried out in the workplace by Axia. The provider holds monthly progress review meetings with NSEGTA and termly meetings with the college.

Strengths

- good and improving overall success rates on apprenticeships
- good overall success on adult programmes in manufacturing and engineering
- effective use of work-based assessors in manufacturing
- good development of skills in the workplace

Weaknesses

- low overall success rates on advanced apprenticeships

Achievement and standards

22. Overall success rates for apprentices have risen dramatically from 32 per cent in 2003-04, to 44 per cent in 2004-05, and 83 per cent so far in 2005-06.

23. In 2003-04 and 2004-05, the overall success rates at Axia were close to the national average. However, the figure for the most recent year is significantly higher, and there is a clear and improving trend. The previous inspection identified a weakness in key skills qualification achievement. Axia revised its approach to the teaching of key skills, and in the organisation as a whole the achievement rate for key skills qualifications rose to 61 per cent in 2004-05 and to 83 per cent in 2005-06.

24. Over 50 adults have started a level 2 NVQ in manufacturing ceramic products, or performing manufacturing operations, on the ETP programme. Management data shows that 84 per cent have successfully completed, with 11 per cent of learners still on their

programmes. Only three learners have left this programme without achieving the qualification.

25. No learners achieved advanced apprenticeships in 2003-04 and 2004-05. In 2005-06 the success rate rose to 36 per cent, but it was still well below the national average.

26. Learner performance data produced by managers shows that retention across the area has improved significantly in recent years. More advanced apprentices in engineering have been retained since 2004-05, when entry requirements were more strictly applied, and before which engineering apprenticeships were offered to potential learners who were likely to struggle with the higher level of work. The need to further improve retention is also identified in the self-assessment report.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	31	35	48	32	32
		timely	26	12	22	8	13
	2004-05	overall	16	44	52	44	31
		timely	15	33	27	33	19

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

27. Many apprentices on manufacturing programmes are assessed by work-based assessors who also deliver their company training scheme. In one ceramics manufacturing company, for example, there is a good ratio of assessors to candidates. Five on-the-job trainers are qualified assessors, and internal verification is carried out by a supervisor. Assessments are well planned, and learners receive clear feedback. Assessors make good use of questioning to test learners' background knowledge. In the manufacturing companies with no in-house assessors, assessment requirements and verification are completed by Axia staff, who are vocationally experienced.

28. Learners are treated with respect in their workplace and employers deliver good on-the-job training, some in dedicated training areas. Many learners have training plans showing which parts of the company they will be working in during the remainder of their training. Learners enjoy their work and are well supported by their mentors and supervisors. They are also encouraged to work independently and take on more complex tasks.

29. Assessment and verification, overall, are satisfactory. Assessments are fair, assessors and candidates have a good working relationship, and learners receive good feedback. Learners are aware of appeals procedures. Verification sampling plans for qualifications in performing manufacturing operations and manufacturing ceramic products are detailed and comprehensive. Internal verification arrangements for engineering meet the awarding body's requirements, but are insufficiently detailed. For example, they do not identify

names of learners whose work will be sampled, but the number of portfolios to be looked at. In addition, although the verifier checks all completed portfolios, they are only looked at when they are complete and not at various stages during completion. Employers take a close interest in assessment and are very supportive and often involved in the process.

30. Learners' progress reviews are regular and frequent, with the frequency depending on need. Learners are visited more frequently at the start of their programmes, and learners on ceramics manufacturing programmes are seen more frequently as managers have identified that there is higher risk of them leaving early. Employers' involvement is good, and all parties sign and receive review documents. Target-setting is generally good, but targets are also set by NSEGTA's staff following NVQ assessments. Employers and learners see these targets as more relevant. Axia's staff are not vocationally experienced in engineering, and during their reviews they focus on generic aspects of monitoring progress. Coverage of equality and diversity is generally satisfactory. Learners are issued with a comprehensive guide to equality of opportunity, and reviewers have a list of questions covering different aspects of the booklet. This ensures that a range of topics is covered over time. However, the coverage is sometimes superficial and learners do not know which areas are to be covered at their next review, so are unable to prepare. Literacy and numeracy support for manufacturing and engineering learners is satisfactory. A range of support is available. In one ceramics manufacturing company, learners benefit from literacy and numeracy evening classes run on-site, in the evenings, by the local college.

31. As recognised in the self-assessment report, Axia has experienced difficulties in recruiting learners on to manufacturing programmes during the continued decline in the ceramics sector. Factory closures have also affected retention. In addition, the number of learners recruited on to advanced apprenticeships in engineering has been very low. Only 11 advanced apprentices have been recruited over the past five years, and no learners joined during 2003-05.

Leadership and management

32. The self-assessment report is well written and comprehensive, and the self-assessment process is inclusive. Grades in the self-assessment report are close to those given by inspectors, and not too optimistic. However, the links between the report's bullet points and the sections of text containing evidence are unclear.

33. As part of Axia's quality improvement system, staff are regularly observed delivering training. This includes observation of teaching and training delivered by the subcontractor's staff. This system has not been established long enough to identify improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Staff completing the observations are vocationally experienced but do not hold an appropriate teaching or training qualification. In other respects, staff qualifications and experience are satisfactory for ceramics manufacturing, but Axia relies too much on the subcontractor's staff with regard to management and quality improvement of subcontracted provision. Learners do not recall being asked by Axia to complete a survey of their perceptions of the training, although several have completed company health and safety questionnaires. However, learners' views are sought during progress reviews, and one of Axia's directors recently completed a telephone survey to collect learners' views.

34. Some aspects of management in the area of learning are overly complex and there

are inconsistencies in management systems. For example, the systems, procedures and documents used by the subcontractor, NSEGTA, are different from those used by Axia's staff. Quality assurance of the subcontractor's internal verification is limited to the monitoring of the external verifier's reports. Managers are currently reviewing verification systems following external consultations. Progress reviews within the learners' workplaces are carried out by staff from Axia and separately by the subcontractor. This places additional demands on the time of employers, which participate in both sets of reviews.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Other government-funded provision	66	2

35. There are 66 learners on literacy and numeracy programmes and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programmes. These programmes are reported and graded on together.

36. In addition, Axia offers additional support for learners undergoing apprenticeship courses and ETP programmes. Staff from this area of learning provide the key skills training for the rest of the provision. Key skills qualifications are offered in application of number and in communication at level 1 and level 2, in information and communications technology (ICT) at levels 1, 2 and 3, and in working with others and in improving own learning at level 2. Six learners are receiving additional support.

Strengths

- good achievement
- good teaching and learning
- good monitoring and recording of learning
- effective programmes meeting the needs of employers and learners
- good links with employers
- good management of provision

Weaknesses

- insufficiently detailed lesson planning to meeting individual learning priorities

Achievement and standards

37. Learners benefit significantly from attending essential skills courses. All of the learners work towards nationally recognised qualifications in literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

38. In 2004-05 there was a 75 per cent success rate for literacy and numeracy qualifications. Current data indicates that this rate of achievement will be maintained in 2005-06. Key skills qualification attainment is satisfactory, with 65 per cent of learners achieving their qualification in 2004-05 and 77 per cent remaining on their courses for their duration. Data for 2005-06 indicates a significant improvement in key skills results, with 90 per cent of learners remaining on programme for the scheduled duration and 73 per cent so far achieving their qualifications.

39. Learners make good progress in developing their literacy, numeracy or language skills and are more independent as a result of learning. For example, learners on literacy and numeracy courses improve their accuracy in spelling, decoding words and doing calculations. Learners are more confident in carrying out tasks involving literacy and numeracy in front of other people, such as helping their children with homework, reading

manuals or health and safety signs at work, and understanding weights and measures. For example, one employer said that his employees had significantly improved their skills and were more employable. Similarly, many learners on ESOL courses significantly improve their pronunciation, accuracy in grammar and command of vocabulary, appropriate to the levels of their courses. Learners improve their ability to communicate more effectively in English in situations critical to their economic and social wellbeing.

The quality of provision

40. Teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy and ESOL are good. All classes are workshop-based with learners attending once or twice a week. There is a thorough initial and diagnostic assessment process. All learners undergo diagnostic assessment using a commercial package. Tutors analyse the results with the learners. Individual programmes of learning are negotiated through private interviews. Tutors are proficient at developing learners' skills in the context of topics that are relevant to learners' work and everyday lives.

41. Resources to support learning are satisfactory. There is a range of resources to stimulate and promote learning. Learners benefit from a good range of textbooks and learning materials, computers, specific literacy, numeracy and language skills software, games for numeracy concept development, journals, magazines and audiovisual resources. All ICT equipment is up to date and well maintained. There are coloured screens for learners with dyslexia, adaptive keyboards and tracker mice for people with disabilities. Current teaching and learning resources are available at all sites and are used well. A satisfactory range of learning and support materials is available for individual and taught sessions. All tutors have appropriate experience teaching in their subjects. Teaching accommodation is satisfactory. All venues have appropriate areas for tutors to carry out confidential interviews with their learners.

42. Learners make good progress in improving their levels of literacy, numeracy and language skills. Learning is monitored and recorded well. Progress is recorded well also, by tutors and by the learners themselves. Progress reviews take place every four to six weeks. Tutors prepare appropriate materials for all ability levels and adapt them for each group of learners. They have a good understanding of learners' difficulties in grasping concepts. They provide good explanations and adapt their teaching methods to help learners understand fully the concepts and methods they are learning. Learners enjoy the lively and challenging lessons and are actively involved. Lessons include group teaching, small-group activity, paired work and individual programmes of study.

43. Programmes meet the needs of employers and learners. Learners take classes in work time. They are very appreciative of the involvement and support of employers to allow their skills to be updated. Learners are able to read and understand signs and production instructions, and are able to help their children or grandchildren with schoolwork. Feedback from employers and learners is being used to help learners to progress from literacy and numeracy skills to ICT skills and onto NVQ courses.

44. Links with employers are good. Employers are actively involved with Axia to develop the skills of their workforce. Axia has used its connections with employers to encourage learning under the ETP programme. Employers understand the need to develop literacy and numeracy, but Axia has demonstrated that the benefits to the workforce can be a

major influence on recruitment and retention of employees.

45. Advice and guidance are satisfactory. Learners receive advice and guidance when they join a programme. Learners on essential skills programmes benefit from individual support, receiving information about the skills they need for work and pastoral support. Teaching staff have made monitoring learners' attendance on all courses a priority. They are particularly sensitive as they follow up poor attendance and many learners are successfully encouraged to continue their programme.

46. Lessons are not sufficiently planned to meet learners' identified individual learning priorities. Lessons are currently planned against the course criteria and are not linked to individual learning plans. Targets with achievable steps identified are not set for literacy, numeracy and language, or for work skills. In literacy and numeracy, learners are not always aware of their individual targets and what they need to do to improve their skills. Initial and diagnostic assessment results are recorded but the individual skills that learners need to acquire are not recorded on the individual learning plans.

Leadership and management

47. Essential skills programmes have a high profile within Axia. A member of the senior management team has specific responsibility for this area of work and represents Axia on local and national initiatives. Strategic direction is good, with local plans that effectively implement national and local strategies. Managers have developed particularly good partnerships with the National Probation Service and with local employers. They use these links well to begin to develop learning programmes for employees new to learning. Axia's staff are developing courses in isolation. However, it will take time to involve employers to develop established learning materials and design schemes of work. There are a number of very effective projects with local employers, which are successfully helping employees develop skills for work. Managers recognise that learners need more help with progression to further training or employment opportunities. Progression is recorded and is used to develop programmes. There is a good induction process for new staff which includes mentorship and co-tutoring. Staff are well qualified. All of Axia's staff have taken part in training in the national curriculum and level 3 literacy, numeracy or ESOL teaching assistants' qualifications. Tutors teaching on essential skills programmes, volunteer tutors and volunteer support workers have good opportunities to develop their skills. Participation in relevant training and development is good.

