

INSPECTION REPORT

Azure Charitable Enterprises

08 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*

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Azure Charitable Enterprise (Azure), formerly the Shaw Project, is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It has its headquarters in Cramlington, Northumberland. Workstep funding provides 15 per cent of Azure's overall budget and the Workstep programme is managed by its employment services department. The contract with Jobcentre Plus is for 240 places, of which 207 places are currently filled. Participants are employed with mainstream employers and within Azure's businesses, which include printing, plant nurseries, landscaping and a garden centre.
2. Azure provides for people with a wide range of disabilities across the northeast of England. The organisation's mission is to improve the lives of people with a disability, and, through the support services, provide support to allow participants to live as independently as possible.
3. The programme is managed by the employment services senior manager, who is supported by the employment services deputy manager and the Workstep team leader. Six advisers provide participant support and two recruitment specialist advisers help to find jobs for participants, as well as helping them with welfare benefits.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, leadership and management, equality of opportunity and the Workstep programme are good. Quality improvement is satisfactory.
5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The organisation's self-assessment process is effective and identifies most of the key strengths and weaknesses in the area of learning and leadership and management. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process. Azure collects and uses feedback from participants and employers.
6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Azure has made good progress in resolving the key weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Proposed actions to improve quality have been clearly defined. Staff are clear about their role in improving the provision and in the continuous improvement process.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR AZURE CHARITABLE ENTERPRISES:

- improve the development-planning process for participants
- continue to build on the quality improvement agenda
- develop arrangements and staff training to support participants' literacy and numeracy needs

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		2
Quality improvement		3

Preparation for life and work			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Employability training</i>		2	
Workstep	207	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. A team of four inspectors inspected the Workstep provision and leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality improvement. They visited participants employed by Azure and by other employers. The inspection consisted of one four-day visit.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learners interviewed	26
Number of staff interviewed	27
Number of employers interviewed	18
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	22
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1
Number of visits	2

Leadership and Management

Strengths

- good strategic leadership
- good operational management
- good range of activities to promote Workstep to potential participants and employers
- effective actions to overcome participants' barriers to learning
- effective action to establish quality improvement arrangements

Weaknesses

- insufficient staff development in checking and implementing challenging development plans

Preparation for life and work

Employability training

Strengths

- good development of personal, social and occupational skills
- very effective support for participants
- good matching of participants to employment opportunities

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of challenging goals
- insufficient arrangements for identifying and developing literacy and numeracy skills

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT AZURE CHARITABLE ENTERPRISES:

- the attention paid to individual needs
- good opportunities for training and qualifications
- 'they are always there and the adviser phones monthly'
- the opportunity to be in the workplace and to have a full-time job and money
- the shortened working week
- the wide range of support - 'being able to talk to someone'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK AZURE CHARITABLE ENTERPRISES COULD IMPROVE:

- the assessment of participants' literacy, numeracy and language needs
- the amount of information about the organisation
- telephone techniques
- discussions about moving on from Workstep
- the amount of information on the courses that it runs

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good strategic leadership
- good operational management
- good range of activities to promote Workstep to potential participants and employers
- effective actions to overcome participants' barriers to learning
- effective action to establish quality improvement arrangements

Weaknesses

- insufficient staff development in checking and implementing challenging development plans

8. The trustees and senior management team provide good, well-informed strategic leadership. Trustees and senior managers, including the organisation's chief executive, have a very good understanding of the aims and ideals of the Workstep programme, which represents about 15 per cent of Azure's overall business. Four of the 10 trustees have either first-hand experience or a professional background in supporting people with disabilities. A briefing paper has recently been prepared for new trustees which gives a clear and helpful explanation of Azure's Workstep programme and background. Financial management is sound. Senior managers and trustees receive regular detailed reports covering all income and spending streams, accompanied by clear and helpful summaries. The organisation has taken decisive action on several occasions to deal with underperforming areas of the business, in some cases leading to closure of activities or programmes. At the time of the previous inspection, 80 participants were placed with host companies but not employed by them. This had improved to 31 participants by the reinspection, and is currently 18, 11 of whom are placed in two companies.

9. Operational management is good. All staff are appraised annually, and also have individual, less formal meetings with their line manager every three months. Induction for new staff is appropriate and includes shadowing and coaching opportunities. Internal communications continue to be effective. E-mail and internet access is now readily available, supported by an on-site information technology technician, and the organisation uses the intranet effectively to share key documents. Staff meet regularly and frequently in teams to discuss a range of matters, including programme performance and quality improvement. Staff and programme targets are appropriately chosen and well monitored in the monthly team meetings. Staff have a good understanding of these targets and their contribution to meeting them. Following the most recent self-assessment report, the organisation created a number of subgroups to plan improvements in development planning, equal opportunities, staff induction and pre-employment training for participants. Workstep staff are well supported. However, a few advisers have heavy caseloads, particularly where they are also taking part in more extended staff development or have other additional roles.

10. Azure promotes the aims of Workstep well through a range of activities and events. Publicity materials to promote and explain Workstep to employers are particularly attractive and useful. A quarterly newsletter, leaflets and brochures are all designed and printed in Azure's own supported printing business, which employs Workstep participants and service users. The materials are used well in regular events such as job fairs, careers event and open days, and in information packs provided to new or potential host employers. Communications with Jobcentre Plus are good and Azure is particularly active in inviting disability employment advisers to its staff development activities.

11. Azure has not sufficiently ensured that employment advisers have the necessary expertise to set up and monitor challenging development plans for participants. There has been insufficient staff development in development planning for participants. Work on improving development plans and reviews has focused on documents rather than the structure or relevance of plans. The self-assessment report recognises the need to improve aspects of initial assessment and planning, but action has been slow. However, the organisation arranges extensive and regular training for staff, including management training where relevant, and regular health and safety, equal opportunities and disability awareness-raising events for everyone. All the Workstep advisers have achieved, or are working towards, a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in advice and guidance.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

12. Azure's approach to equality of opportunity is good. It has implemented a wide range of effective strategies to support participants to overcome personal and work-related barriers. The organisation uses the access to work scheme effectively to provide a range of adaptations in participants' workplaces. Participants are provided with very good support and advice to access appropriate adaptive technology. An effective welfare rights service run by Azure provides participants, parents and carers with relevant current information about the range of benefits and other support services that are available. Employment advisers offer an individual service to participants. Support and advice is tailored to participants' specific and changing needs. Text messaging, buddying and simple checklists are used well to support participants to be effective in the workplace. Good working relationships with a range of specialist agencies provide participants with a wide range of support. Participants' reviews are available in accessible formats, including Braille and on disk. Promotional literature about the programme, monthly newsletters and reviews are available in a range of formats, including Braille. These materials clearly demonstrate Azure's commitment to equality and diversity and what that means to the Workstep programme. Azure has established good working relationships across the Northeast to ensure that all information about the programme can be translated into other languages.

13. Equality of opportunity training is mandatory for all of Azure's staff. All staff have received recent training in equality and diversity and relevant current legislation. Ongoing training is planned to ensure all staff remain up to date with current legislation. An equality of opportunity subgroup was formed after the previous inspection. This group has been effective in developing equality of opportunity processes and procedures that fully meet the needs of participants and staff. The equal opportunities policy, which is currently under review, is made available to all participants and staff. A new information booklet on equality and diversity has been produced and trialled with participants. It is too early to judge the effect of this information.

14. Most participants have some understanding of equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity is covered at every participants' review. Concerns raised at reviews are analysed and reported at monthly staff meetings. However, participants' responses are not always fully documented. Currently there is no formal process for ensuring that all issues are followed up. Participants know whom to contact if they wish to make a complaint or need support.

15. The organisation analyses equality of opportunity data quarterly but it still does not include comparative data on, for example, progression. Targets for recruitment of under-represented groups are set and monitored.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

16. Quality improvement activities are beginning to bring about significant improvements, and have been particularly productive in recent months. A subgroup of the Workstep team has been created to lead quality improvement initiatives. Azure has recently introduced a system for observing advisers working with participants, such as in progress reviews. Staff development activities are evaluated by participants and improvements made. Feedback from participants and employers is gathered more systematically than at the previous inspections and recurring comments or concerns are reported to the quality improvement subgroup. A system of quality improvement request forms has prompted several staff to suggest improvements, which are discussed by the quality improvement subgroup. Policies and procedures are reviewed by the subgroup and improvements suggested on an ongoing annual basis. Recent subgroup meetings have included discussion about how to improve participants' understanding of their personal development plans and progression.

17. All staff are involved in self-assessment. Feedback from employers and participants also contributed to the most recent report. The report is particularly evaluative and self-critical. The accompanying action plan is a regular agenda item in the monthly team and subgroup meetings. However, some time was lost between the completion of the self-assessment report and the preparation of the action plan. Some of the improvements identified in both 2005 and 2006 action plans have yet to be completed.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Preparation for life and work

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Employability training		2
Workstep	207	2

18. Azure has a contract with Jobcentre Plus for Workstep for 240 places, of which 207 are currently filled. All participants are referred by Jobcentre Plus disability employment advisers. Ninety-five participants have been recruited directly to the Workstep programme. All the other participants transferred from the supported placement scheme. In the past three years, 10 participants have progressed into unsupported employment.

19. Of the current participants, 148 are men and 59 are women. Participants' disabilities include learning difficulties, restricted mobility, long-term medical conditions, mental health problems, and hearing, speech and sight impairments. Four participants are from minority ethnic groups. Participants are placed with local employers in a variety of occupational sectors, including art galleries, care homes, country parks, florists, garages, garden centres, hospitals and supermarkets.

20. The programme is managed by the employment services senior manager, who is supported by the employment services deputy manager and the Workstep team leader. Six advisers provide participant support and two recruitment specialist advisers help to find jobs for participants, as well as helping them with welfare benefits.

Employability training

Strengths

- good development of personal, social and occupational skills
- very effective support for participants
- good matching of participants to employment opportunities

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of challenging goals
- insufficient arrangements for identifying and developing literacy and numeracy skills

Achievement and standards

21. Participants progress well in their job roles. Employers regularly monitor the progress, competence and capability of participants in the workplace to ensure that they develop their skills to do their job effectively. Azure's staff or the employer provide individual job coaching when participants start employment to enable them to learn their jobs quickly and settle into employment. This is continued throughout employment to enable them to improve their skills and progress within their job role. Many participants progress to senior roles in the workplace. For example, two participants have been promoted to team

leaders in the landscaping service. Participants improve their confidence, self-esteem, motivation, communication skills and teamwork through their work. They also develop work-related skills and knowledge such as manual handling, health and safety, food hygiene and the use of new equipment.

22. Vocational training courses are arranged to meet the job development needs of participants and employers, such as lift-truck licences, a wide range of NVQs, including cleaning and print qualifications, manual handling and health and safety. All participants who are employed in the print workshop have achieved industry specific NVQs in printing, including graphic design and print reception. Progress into unsupported employment is low. Azure has identified this issue and has recently introduced a more comprehensive process for identifying, monitoring and supporting participants who may be ready to progress.

The quality of provision

23. Participants are well matched to employment opportunities. Before participants are accepted onto the programme, Azure's staff meet with the participants to discuss their employment requirements and assess their commitment to finding work. The organisation uses the pre-employment stage effectively to identify barriers to employment and overcome them. Workstep staff negotiate with employers on behalf of participants to ensure that the job meets their needs. The recruitment advisers are very active in finding employment that is suitable and meets the needs of the participants. Analysis of participants' skills often identifies employment routes not previously considered. Links with local employers are very good and advisers have a good understanding of vacancies available. They also search local newspapers, check job adverts and have very good links with local jobcentres. The range of employment opportunities available to participants is wide-ranging, from large and small retailers, horticulture, garden centres, catering, museums, banks and hotels.

24. Participants receive very effective support with personal, financial, welfare and employment-related issues from employers and Azure's advisers. Advisers visit at least three times a year to review participants' progress in detail and to assess their future goals and development needs. They make good use of access to work funding to make workplace adjustments, such as adaptive technology and adaptations to work-stations. Azure is effective in monitoring participants' changing needs and negotiating changes in working conditions to meet these needs. When participants experience difficulties, good additional help is given by advisers through telephone contact or personal visits. For example, one participant experienced extreme personal hardship as well as difficulties in her work. Her adviser visited her at home and in a local café, as well as in her workplace, to help her to overcome the problems. This effective support enables participants to remain in employment and to progress. Participants are particularly appreciative of the help they receive and the contribution it makes to their personal well-being and occupational development.

25. Development plans and goals arising from the initial assessment and pre-employment phase are insufficiently focused and challenging. Initial assessment is satisfactory and participants receive good support during the pre-employment phase to find employment quickly and to overcome barriers to employment. However, actions agreed are not clearly documented and goals are not sufficiently specific to enable the participant to

understand what they need to do to remain in employment and eventually move into unsupported employment. Development plans are sometimes used to record actions the participant has already achieved rather than to plan what the participant needs to do next to progress in their employment. Although progress is monitored regularly by advisers in the workplace, goals agreed are not always sufficiently challenging. They do not always focus on what the participant needs to do to make progress from one review visit to the next, or what support is needed from the employer. Development planning was identified as a weakness in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report and the process is currently under review.

26. Arrangements for identifying and developing participants' literacy and numeracy needs are insufficient. New participants are screened for literacy and numeracy needs, and are offered support through the First Steps programme. However, there has been no systematic assessment of the literacy and numeracy skills of participants who transferred from the supported employment programme. Participants with low literacy and numeracy levels receive too little encouragement to develop their skills. Unless a participant expresses an interest in improving their literacy and numeracy skills, development needs and goals are not discussed in detail at reviews, or documented in the development plan. A few participants have attended training programmes to improve their literacy or numeracy competences, but achievements are not always recorded in development plans and employers are not always aware of these achievements. Most training is not linked to the literacy and numeracy skills that participants need in their workplace. A wide range of literacy and numeracy learning resources is available at Azure, but few participants are aware of these resources. A member of staff with literacy and numeracy qualifications and experience has responsibility for the development of literacy and numeracy within Workstep, and a strategy is currently being developed. Azure's staff have not received sufficient training in assessing and supporting participants' literacy and numeracy needs.

Leadership and management

27. Operational management is good. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced in working with participants with a range of support needs. Staff have clear roles and responsibilities, but some staff have heavy caseloads and support more than 35 participants. Staff are well informed about the Workstep programme and attend regular meetings at which relevant programme and participant issues are discussed. Staff development opportunities are frequent, relevant and effective. All staff are working towards NVQs in information, advice and guidance at levels 3 and 4.

28. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and self-critical. It includes most of the key strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspection team.

