

# INSPECTION REPORT

**Mitre Group Ltd**

**16 February 2007**



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

## Mitre Group Ltd

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# INSPECTION REPORT

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Mitre Group Ltd (Mitre) is a private limited company, established in 1992. The company's registered office is in Darley Dale, near Matlock, Derbyshire.
2. Mitre holds European Social Fund (ESF) contracts throughout Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire and mainly delivers vocationally related qualifications (VRQs) in business administration and law with a particular emphasis on management. The courses lead to qualifications at levels 2, 3 and 5 of the national qualifications framework. Learners complete full or part qualifications depending on their learning needs. Customised non-accredited, community development courses are also available. In 2006, Mitre delivered courses to 1,230 learners, most of whom were identified as 'new learners'.
3. Mitre obtained a Train to Gain contract in 2006 to provide national vocational qualifications in business administration. There are four learners on Train to Gain programmes so far, and it is too soon to make judgements about their progress and achievements. Mitre also provides a considerable amount of privately funded work in management training and team building. This was beyond the scope of the inspection.
4. Mitre's managing director owns the company. Two non-executive directors are active in the business and there are 23 members of staff, of whom 14 work full time and nine are part-time associates.
5. Mitre's publicly funded provision is supported by the Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) for Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.

## OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 2**

6. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, leadership and management and the quality of provision in business administration and law are good. Arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement are satisfactory.
7. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is reasonably inclusive of staff. Staff are consulted at team meetings and take part in the process by providing evidence. A focus group has overall responsibility for compiling the report. A board member, who was not directly involved in the process, provides external oversight and validation. The self-assessment report is informative, but overly descriptive and sometimes repetitious. Some strengths are different aspects of the same point, while others are normal practice. The self-assessment report does identify many of the key findings of the inspection, but omits several areas for improvement.
8. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Many aspects of Mitre's quality improvement are very effective. Observations of teaching and learning and evaluation processes have effectively maintained the good quality of

provision over a period of significant change. The processes identify key development points and areas of good practice that have supported improvements. Tutors and learners systematically evaluate each learning session. Tutors self-assessment is used well as a tool to improve programme quality and develop materials. Regular feedback and informal evaluation is sought through debriefings with providers. Mitre responds promptly when areas for improvement are identified. However, the quality improvement arrangements are not sufficiently well co-ordinated. The new business processes document does not include all aspects of established quality improvement activity or an explicit quality calendar that links quality improvement and planning processes.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR MITRE GROUP LTD:

- maintain standards in existing programmes and develop the new programmes to the same standards
- continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- develop and implement a skills for life strategy
- actively promote equality of opportunity
- co-ordinate quality improvement arrangements effectively

## GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

<b>Leadership and management</b>		<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		3

<b>Business administration and law</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b><i>Business management</i></b>		<b>2</b>	
Train to Gain	53	2	

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

9. Three inspectors made three inspection visits to Mitre. Two visits were made to inspect a weekend residential course and community-based provision that were not available during the main inspection week. ESF provision in management training was inspected and graded, but it was too early to make judgements about the Train to Gain programme.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	10
Number of learners interviewed	19
Number of staff interviewed	15
Number of employers interviewed	7
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	8
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	3
Number of visits	3

### Leadership and management

#### Strengths

- good management of change
- particularly effective teamwork
- excellent partnerships with employers

#### Weaknesses

- slow implementation of skills for life strategy
- insufficient promotion of equality and diversity
- insufficient co-ordination of quality improvement

### Business administration and law

#### *Business management*

##### *Strengths*

- excellent success rates in vocationally related qualifications
- good standard of learners' work
- good teaching and learning

##### *Weaknesses*

- no significant weaknesses

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT MITRE GROUP LTD:**

- 'I was listened to about the timing of courses - the half-day courses are very family friendly'
- 'the very knowledgeable and experienced staff - I feel confident about their advice'
- 'the quality of the teaching is good and well paced'
- 'the tailored programmes are very responsive to the needs of learners and businesses'
- 'the post-course support with assignments - staff are very approachable'
- the flexible approach to learning
- the friendly and enthusiastic staff

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK MITRE GROUP LTD COULD IMPROVE:**

- the publicity - 'we only found out about Mitre by chance'
- the amount of form filling at start of the programme
- the opportunities to take on more learning and progress to higher levels



## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 2**

#### Strengths

- good management of change
- particularly effective teamwork
- excellent partnerships with employers

#### Weaknesses

- slow implementation of skills for life strategy
- insufficient promotion of equality and diversity
- insufficient co-ordination of quality improvement

10. Mitre's management of change is good. Business growth and staffing levels have more than doubled since 2004, yet Mitre maintained a clear focus on the good quality of its core training work throughout that time. Consistently high numbers of learners have been successful throughout since 2004. The development from a relatively small and informal organisation to one with formal systems has been very effective. Job functions and responsibilities are clearly defined. A well-established business and operational planning process and report structure sets a clear context for sustainable development in a challenging environment.

11. Teamwork is particularly effective. Internal team targets are monitored regularly each week and are generally met or exceeded. Prompt action is taken when improvements are needed. Good team-level involvement in the development of policies and procedures is well supported by focus groups. Staff have good understanding of the aims and focus of the business. Thorough new staff induction promotes effective integration through work shadowing and observations of experienced staff. Staff are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for exploring and evaluating new business development ideas. Planning for team continuity during change is good. Internal communication is very effective and is becoming more formalised. The frequency and structure of meetings has been improved to reflect the growth of organisation and ensure greater relevance to individuals and teams. Discussion at meetings is recorded adequately, in detailed minutes for full-team meetings and informal notes for weekly operational meetings. Action points are followed up, but the follow-up is not always clearly recorded.

12. Mitre's partnerships with employers are excellent. The company has a very good customer focus and well established, productive working relationships with employers. Links and external communication to support programme planning are very good. A detailed briefing process with employers ensures that courses meet employers' and employees' particular needs. Mitre is very flexible in its course delivery, and will customise both timing and location. Employers are very supportive of their staff. In some cases employers attend the training themselves to support employees and promote team building at all levels. All employers interviewed are very satisfied with the quality of provision and the very positive effect of training on their staff and organisations. Mitre

follows up training systematically to evaluate its effectiveness and help identify possible development activities for other staff. Employers especially value Mitre's responsiveness to requests for advice, and many form a solid base of repeat business requests.

13. Staff development and appraisal are satisfactory. Appraisal follows a regular annual cycle. The process is thorough and identifies clear personal and organisational targets. Targets are reviewed and action plans for improvement developed. Staff development is satisfactory. An annual programme of core training ensures that key topics such as health and safety and first aid are updated. One member of staff, preparing to move into a more senior management role, completed an outstanding range of development activities in the period preceding the inspection. Mitre adopts a wide range of mechanisms such as mentor and coaching support for staff who are promoted or move into new areas of work.

14. The management of health and safety is satisfactory. All venues and outside activities are risk assessed. Participants on outdoor team activities complete a thorough health questionnaire and are well supported by staff with current outdoor and first aid qualifications. A very strong focus is placed on safe practice during outdoor activities.

15. The collection and use of management information is satisfactory. Data for contract monitoring against LSC targets is thorough and accurate. Attendance and assignment completion is monitored and learners are followed up if there are any problems. The number of learners this applies to is very small. The achievement data that Mitre analyses for the inspection was initially insufficiently detailed. Mitre recognises that its current management information system will not adequately support the growing organisation, and a new system is in development.

16. Mitre has been slow to implement a skills for life strategy. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Mitre has no strategy to meet the potential literacy and numeracy support needs of the small number of Train to Gain learners who have already been recruited, or of other level 2 learners. The current learner self-assessment arrangements are insufficiently thorough to identify support needs. Mitre recognises this shortcoming and has recently appointed a new member of staff to develop the strategy. All staff have had basic skills awareness training, and work has begun to explore partnership arrangements for basic skills support with local specialist providers.

## **Equality of opportunity**

## **Contributory grade 3**

17. Mitre has recently updated its comprehensive equality and diversity policy. The clear organisational values and the company mission are outlined well in the staff handbook and learner charter. Staff and learners are treated with respect and consideration. A very knowledgeable and supportive board member has a specific watching brief for equality and diversity. Course delivery times are family friendly and respond effectively to the needs of people with care responsibilities. The company works hard to remove barriers to learning by providing courses in accessible locations. In one voluntary sector group, with many first-time learners, this was essential in enabling attendance. The company targets particular groups within its contract criteria, in particular in the voluntary and community sector or in minority ethnic groups, through links with specialist partner organisations.

18. Equality of opportunity is insufficiently well promoted. Equalities training is part of the core annual training for staff but is very brief. It raises awareness of key concepts and legislations, but is insufficiently detailed to develop staff skills and confidence in actively putting these into practice in their work. Staff awareness is generally at a common sense level. Learners are treated well as individuals and inspectors saw no instances of discrimination, but all three inspectors independently observed instances where staff did not take up opportunities to promote equality of opportunity. Most of these related to unconscious stereotyping, but in one case, course content provided a rich source of material related to workplace equality that was not mentioned at all. The company systematically collects and analyses equality of opportunity data to meet contract requirements. However, it does not compare data with demographic or sector profiles to enable overall judgements to be made about recruitment patterns in different areas or to show the spread of various groups of learners across programme levels.

## Quality improvement

## Contributory grade 3

19. Many aspects of Mitre's quality improvement system are very effective. Observations of teaching and learning and evaluation processes have effectively maintained the good quality of provision over a period of significant change. Tutors are observed at least once a year. The process identifies key development points and areas of good practice that have supported improvements. Some staff have been supported through the observation of more experienced colleagues. Tutors and learners systematically evaluate programmes each session. Tutors' self-assessment is used well as a tool to improve programme quality and develop materials. Regular feedback and informal evaluation is sought through debriefings with providers. Mitre has recently produced detailed business processes documents to define standards for contract compliance and other aspects of quality improvement activity. These were previously completed less formally, or have resulted from more recent requirements such as inspection. Mitre responds promptly when areas for improvement are identified.

20. The self-assessment report produced for the inspection is Mitre's second. The self-assessment process is reasonably inclusive of staff. Although led by a focus group, other staff were consulted at team meetings and took part in the process by providing evidence. A board member, who was not directly involved in the process, provided external oversight and validation. The self-assessment report is informative, but too descriptive and repetitious in parts. For example, some strengths were different aspects of the same point, while others were normal practice. The self-assessment report identifies many of the key findings of the inspection, but omits some areas for improvement.

21. Quality improvement arrangements are the responsibility of two managers and are not sufficiently well co-ordinated. A quality steering group is proposed but not yet established. The new business processes document does not include all aspects of established quality improvement activity, such as observation of teaching and learning and evaluation processes. Self assessment is identified as an aspect of the inspection process, but not as a key quality improvement tool for the company's own use. Managers have begun to map out the relationships between the different processes, but there is no explicit quality calendar that links quality improvement and planning processes. For example, key developments such as differentiation are mentioned in business planning but not in self-assessment. Evaluation is systematic and has led to improvements but the purpose of some of the paperwork lacks clarity. Some 'evaluation' documents relate

#### MITRE GROUP LTD

more to learners' self-assessment of learning. Others mix assessment and course evaluation. The provider is in the process of developing these further to improve and refine the quality of the information they generate.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Business administration and law

### Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Business management</b>		<b>2</b>
Train to Gain	53	2

22. Mitre's key roles are to engage new learners through business improvement programmes and to encourage learners to progress to and complete full VRQs in management. During 2006, Mitre delivered a range of these programmes to 1,230 learners. Most of them completed one or more modules of full qualifications. Individual modules include building a team, managing change and appraisal skills. Two hundred and fifty-seven learners progressed to complete the full qualification at levels 2, 3 or 5. Forty-six learners started and completed non-accredited bespoke management and business development programmes.

23. During the inspection, there were 53 learners on VRQ programmes. Two learners were at level 2, 32 at level 3 and 15 at level 5. Mitre has recently introduced a Train to Gain programme in team leadership, to which four learners have been recruited so far.

24. Most learners are referred by their employers. Programmes are delivered during the daytime, evenings and at weekends in good learning venues across the region, in the workplace and, in some cases, through outdoor pursuits.

25. During 2006, 44 per cent of learners were women, 2 per cent self-declared a disability and 5 per cent of learners were from ethnic minorities.

### **Business management**

#### *Strengths*

- excellent success rates in vocationally related qualifications
- good standard of learners' work
- good teaching and learning

#### *Weaknesses*

- no significant weaknesses

### **Achievement and standards**

26. Success rates on VRQ courses are consistently excellent. In 2006, the success rate for full level 3 VRQs was 95 per cent and for level 2 and level 5 VRQs was 100 per cent. Learners on VRQ programmes make appropriate progress. Train to Gain learners have not been on programme long enough to make a judgement regarding their achievements or progress. Nearly all learners who attend individual unit or non-accredited programmes achieve the course outcomes.

27. The standard of learners' work is good. Learners on VRQ programmes complete detailed assignments linked to their workplace. The work is detailed and is directly linked to improving business performance. Employers state that learners' business skills have significantly improved after they completed their programme.

### **The quality of provision**

28. Teaching and learning are good. Teaching is very well planned with a clear focus on responding to employers' business development aims. Tutors generally use a broad range of teaching methods, although at times they spend too much time talking through subject matter. Learning resources such as handouts, presentations and presentation notes are of a highly professional standard. Teaching takes place in a range of good learning environments. Tutors have good subject knowledge and adapt their teaching to meet learners' needs. Background knowledge is effectively linked to practice and to learners' work although in some cases there is insufficient acknowledgement of learners' previous experience or knowledge. Tutors have limited understanding of individual learners' literacy and numeracy abilities.

29. Train to Gain learners have a thorough work skills assessment and any gaps in knowledge are closed through well-planned off-site training.

30. Assessment practice is satisfactory. There is clear standardisation of marked work and double marking to ensure appropriate grading. However, the standard of feedback to support learners' understanding of grading and areas for further improvement varies from good to weak. In non-accredited courses, tutors make sure that learning objectives are fully covered and all learners have a good understanding of course content.

31. Programmes are matched well to learners' and employers' needs. Learners report that they are very pleased with the range of programmes that focus on developing business skills. Employers are particularly involved with many aspects of the planning of training, and Mitre works well to maintain partnership arrangements.

32. Support for learners is appropriate to their needs. Tutors are approachable, flexible and give good guidance on the completion of written assignments. All learners are allocated a mentor at the start of their programme.

### **Leadership and management**

33. The management of teaching and learning is good. Staff are appropriately qualified or working towards relevant qualifications to support assessment practice. Internal verification is satisfactory. Overall, equality of opportunity is satisfactory, although it is not sufficiently promoted. Learners evaluate all teaching sessions and their comments are used to make further improvements. The area of learning self-assessment report reflects many of the key strengths found during the inspection but omits some areas for improvement.

