INSPECTION REPORT

Plymouth City Council

09 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
• **learndirect** 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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Contents

Summary

Detailed inspection findings

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Plymouth City Council (the council) is a large unitary authority, created under the local government reorganisation of April 1998. The Plymouth adult and community learning service (the service) is located in the directorate for children's services and has an assistant director who is supported by a principal adviser, and a senior adult education officer. In 2004-05, the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) withdrew funding for adult and community learning accredited provision from the local further education colleges, and incorporated it into the service's contract. The service offers courses in 12 sector subject areas.

2. In 2006, the service was restructured significantly. The service centralised all of its business support functions. It devised a new structure with specific emphasis on course delivery and quality improvement. Two senior adult education officers have responsibility for curriculum commissioning and development, and quality improvement and service performance. Curriculum commissioning managers have responsibility for sector subject areas. Core teams, which include learning development managers, quality, data and assessment co-ordinators, and learning advisers and team support workers, provide local co-ordination and support at each of the 10 learning centres. The service employs approximately 230 tutors.

3. The service delivers its courses through 10 internally subcontracted learning centres which include the five community colleges of Eggbuckland, Estover, John Kitto, Lipson, and Stoke Damerel. Two area teams, the North West Plymouth adult and community learning team and the Plym adult and community learning team operate mostly from other community college and secondary school sites. The Swarthmore is a free standing adult learning centre providing specialist adult and community learning, and the family and parent learning team and the Plymouth learning links team provide family learning and skills for life, supporting the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language.

4. The service also has links with local employers, trades unions, community and voluntary groups, and local organisations which provide social support and counselling.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS   Grade 3

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** Leadership and management and the service's arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. The service's approach to equality of opportunity is good. The quality of provision in information and communications and technology (ICT), languages, literature and culture, preparation for life and work, and family learning is satisfactory.

6. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is inclusive and takes into account the views of learners, tutors and partners. The self-assessment report accurately identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses, and contains mostly critical and evaluative judgements which

are supported by much good evidence and analysis of data. In some areas, however, the report does not analyse weaknesses sufficiently. Inspectors' findings closely matched those in the self-assessment report, as did the grades.

7. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** The service improved the overall quality of its provision after its inspection in January 2003, when it was judged inadequate, to adequate at the April 2004 reinspection. Since then, the service has restructured its management arrangements to improve the quality of the learners' experience. It has improved its collection, use and analysis of data. The quality improvement plan contains sufficient detail and actions to resolve weaknesses. The service regularly collects and analyses the views of its learners. However, it does not set differentiated targets for quality improvement throughout all learning centres. At the time of the inspection, the service had maintained, but not improved, the quality of its provision. Arrangements to monitor performance are not established well enough, neither are the processes for recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement. The service acknowledges that the quality of implementation of some of its procedures varies considerably throughout its learning centres. Recent initiatives to improve the retention of learners have been successful.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL:

- maintain the responsiveness of the provision
- maintain the good initiatives to promote social inclusion
- improve success rates
- improve initial assessment
- improve target-setting for learners
- improve arrangements for recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement
- strengthen arrangements to monitor performance
- extend the use of information learning technology (ILT)

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality improvement	3

Information and communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
ICT for users		*3*
Adult and community learning	513	3

Languages, literature and culture		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other languages, literature and culture		*3*
Adult and community learning	726	3

Preparation for life and work		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
ESOL		
Adult and community learning	141	3
Literacy and numeracy		
Adult and community learning	574	3
Independent living and leisure skills		
Adult and community learning	90	3
Employability training		
Adult and community learning	27	3

Family learning		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning		*3*
Adult and community learning	202	3

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. The inspection took place between February 5 and February 9, 2007. The sector subject areas selected for inspection represented the most significant numbers of learner enrolments. Languages, literature and culture, and family learning had been inspected previously. ICT and preparation for life and work had not been inspected before.

Number of inspectors	8
Number of inspection days	40
Number of learners interviewed	225
Number of staff interviewed	148
Number of subcontractors interviewed	4
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	16
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	13
Number of visits	1

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good strategic planning and management
- good management of change
- good initiatives to promote social inclusion

Weaknesses

- poor target-setting
- insufficiently established arrangements to monitor performance
- insufficiently established processes to measure and record learners' progress and achievement

Information and communications technology

ICT for users

Strengths

- much good teaching
- very responsive courses to meet the needs and interests of learners

Weaknesses

- insufficiently developed initial assessment to meet individual learners' needs
- insufficient target-setting for learners

Languages, literature and culture

Other languages, literature and culture

Strengths

- good use of the target language to develop learners' skills
- good initiatives to improve the quality of learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- low retention on accredited courses in 2005-06
- insufficient use of assessment in the planning of learning

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- good development of learners' literacy, numeracy and language, and personal skills
- responsive provision to meet learners' needs
- effective management of change

Weaknesses

- low retention on many courses
- weak recording of progress and target-setting for some learners
- insufficiently thorough observation of learning sessions

Family learning

Adult and community learning

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence and skills
- good integration of literacy and numeracy on all courses
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough initial assessment
- insufficient target-setting for learners
- poor resources to support learning

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL:

- the patient and helpful tutors
- 'quality time with my child'
- 'the service has helped me to identify problems that previous learning had not revealed'
- the fact that everything is built around learners' needs
- 'the opportunity to do something for myself'
- 'I learnt more than I ever did at school'
- 'the sessions give us the confidence to speak English in our everyday lives'
- 'the tutor e-mails us the homework when we are absent'
- the flexible 'drop in' centres
- the free tuition

WHAT LEARNERS THINK PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL COULD IMPROVE:

- the learning opportunities available in the evenings
- 'more weekly taught hours in ESOL classes'
- the computers - they are outdated
- the available access to computers
- the accuracy of the website
- the publicity material - it is too complex

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT   Grade 3

Strengths

- good strategic planning and management
- good management of change
- good initiatives to promote social inclusion

Weaknesses

- poor target-setting
- insufficiently established arrangements to monitor performance
- insufficiently established processes to measure and record learners' progress and achievement

9. Strategic planning and management are good. The service recognises this strength in its self-assessment report. Senior managers work together well to provide good leadership and to set a clear direction for the development of the service. They take a leading role in the strategic development of adult education in the city. Managers demonstrate a good awareness of local and national priorities for adult learning. They have placed much emphasis on the realignment of courses to meet the priorities of the local LSC. The city council contributes a significant amount of funding to the service. Additionally a number of courses have been converted to full-cost programmes. The service is deliberately located in the children's services directorate of the council in order to promote a co-ordinated approach to lifelong learning in Plymouth. One of the council's main aims is to establish adult and community learning at the heart of its corporate learning agenda to promote regeneration, skills for life and workforce development. The service has improved the curriculum for independent living and life skills, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision.

10. The management of change is good. Managers have skilfully implemented many significant changes since the previous inspection. They have carried out a large-scale and wide-ranging overhaul of the service, which was still in progress at the time of the inspection. Many of the changes have been implemented successfully over a short period of time, and within a complex structure of partnership arrangements. Senior managers have a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of the service, which has successfully changed the nature of its relationship with internal subcontractors through the commissioning process. The service has begun to take effective actions to rectify the problem of too much non-priority provision in some learning centres. Key partners and stakeholders were consulted about the framework for restructuring.

11. Senior managers within the council have supported the service well during negotiations about restructuring. New job roles and opportunities for promotion have been created. Staff motivation has improved. The service has used well-planned strategies to lessen the effects of reduced LSC funding, and to enable the service to maintain a coherent and relevant range of provision. Funding and budget allocations have been reorganised effectively to protect some traditional areas of the curriculum offer,

while developing new business.

12. Management information is used satisfactorily. Arrangements for the use and analysis of data have improved significantly. Managers in learning centres now receive a range of useful monthly reports and graphs. Increasingly, they use management information to make well-informed decisions. However, the system does not yet provide managers with a full range of timely and accurate data.

13. The skills for life strategy is satisfactory. The service does not have a separate skills for life strategy, and plans for the maintenance and appropriate expansion of this area of work are integrated with the service's overall strategic planning. The service has substantially increased its skills for life provision since the previous inspection. Skills for life and the family learning provision are satisfactory.

14. Curriculum management and planning are satisfactory. The service has appointed curriculum managers within the past six months. They have good experience of working in adult education, and have a very positive approach to bringing about improvements in their curriculum areas. Tutors value the expertise of the curriculum managers and the opportunity to meet with staff more regularly to share curriculum information and developments. However, two significant areas of learning do not have a permanent, full-time curriculum manager.

15. Staff development and training are satisfactory. Staff receive a directory of professional development activities each year. This focuses on appropriate priority areas such as equality of opportunity, ILT, and recognising and recording progress and achievement. Training is offered at a range of times to suit the needs of part-time tutors. Attendance at some staff development activities is poor. The service does not monitor the effects of staff development and training on the quality of teaching and learning sufficiently.

16. The management of resources is satisfactory. The availability and use of teaching and learning resources are satisfactory in most curriculum areas, but poor in family learning. Most staff are well qualified and appropriately experienced. A high proportion of tutors have teaching qualifications. The integration of ILT with teaching and learning is satisfactory.

17. Target-setting is poor. All internal subcontractors have the same overall targets in 2006-07 for retention, achievement and success. The targets do not take sufficient account of each subcontractor's previous performance and are not disaggregated by curriculum area. Targets represent an unrealistic basis for improvement for many of the subcontractors. Target-setting for curriculum areas is weak. Curriculum managers are not set sufficiently specific or measurable targets for their areas of responsibility. All internal subcontractors have the same percentage targets for the development of skills for life and first steps provision.

18. The processes to measure and record learners' progress and achievement are not established sufficiently. The service has identified the development of these processes as a significant part of its strategy, in particular, to recognise the importance and value of the substantial amount of non-accredited learning. Some tutors have been encouraged to develop a range of suitable approaches to assessment for their subject areas, but others

use inappropriate paperwork. Many tutors do not use initial assessment to identify learners' prior experiences, or to set detailed and meaningful learning outcomes. The service does not focus sufficiently on evaluating the extent to which learners fulfil their potential, by setting challenging targets regularly. Procedures to moderate tutors' assessment practices are not effective enough. The service has identified this weakness in its most recent self-assessment report.

Equality of opportunity   Contributory grade 2

19. Equality of opportunity is good. The service has successfully implemented a number of good measures to support the delivery of learning to excluded groups of learners. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups enrolled in the different curriculum areas is higher than that for Plymouth as a whole. More than 30 per cent of learners are men, which is higher than the national average for male participation rates in adult and community learning. The provision is located in the most disadvantaged areas of the city. Skills for life and family learning courses account for a substantial proportion of the service's total enrolments. The skills for life provision is responsive and flexible. The service carries out a detailed audit of accessibility at all learning centres and takes effective action where problems are identified at particular venues. Retention and overall success rates for learners from minority ethnic backgrounds, and for learners with disabilities are above the average rates for all learners in many curriculum areas.

20. A number of successful projects have focused on the needs of adults and young people in the city who have significant barriers to learning. For example, good partnership working has enabled women recovering from alcohol and drug misuse to develop good literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Funding for the 16 to 18 years age group has been redirected by the service to focus very effectively on those young people who are at most risk of not finding work, or not progressing to further training when they leave school. However, the development of provision for adults who are new to learning, or who have not taken part in any formal education for a number of years, is slow in some learning centres.

21. The service's equal opportunities policy is comprehensive and fulfils its obligations under the relevant race relations, disability and equality legislation. Anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies are appropriate. The provider's disability equality scheme is used to ensure the elimination of any discrimination against learners with disabilities. The service is currently producing a DVD to improve tutors' awareness of disability equality. All internal subcontractors receive a copy of the service's equal opportunities policy, which is available in a range of formats such as large print, Braille, audio, and languages other than English. All learning centres have appropriate procedures for recording and rectifying learners' complaints.

22. Staff development and training in equality of opportunity are thorough and take account of general and specialist areas of equality and diversity. The service identifies equal opportunities training as an entitlement for all staff, and attendance at training events is good. The reinforcement of equality of opportunity with learners at induction is appropriate and the promotion of equality and diversity in teaching and learning is satisfactory. Equality of opportunity is not monitored as part of the observation of teaching and learning process. Some tutors do not to reinforce equality and diversity sufficiently through appropriate teaching and learning strategies in the classroom.

Quality improvement   Contributory grade 3

23. Quality improvement is satisfactory. The service's approach to quality improvement is detailed clearly in the quality improvement policy, which is revised appropriately to reflect changes in the structure of the provider. The quality framework for 2006-07 does not incorporate all aspects of the service's quality improvement and assurance arrangements. The service has begun to develop clearer procedures for quality improvement, but some of them are very recent.

24. The service has implemented a number of appropriate actions to improve learners' attendance and retention in 2006-07. Core teams in each learning centre resolve operational problems effectively. Reviews of registers and the processing of withdrawals have improved. Staff in learning centres have ensured greater consistency in the use of policies and procedures. Learning development managers have recently begun to have access to more regular performance reports.

25. Arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning are satisfactory. The grades given by inspectors for teaching and learning broadly match those detailed in the service's most recent self-assessment report. The service has improved its processes for the observation of teaching and learning, and they are now more coherent and thorough. Observers have received appropriate training. Tutors are observed frequently enough, and those who are new to the service are observed shortly after beginning their jobs. Staff value the process and the improvements that it brings to their teaching. Regular moderation meetings ensure that observers' practices are consistent. Insufficient arrangements are made to check that actions identified during observations are implemented.

26. Inspectors' judgements matched many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The report is critical and evaluative. The self-assessment grades match the grades given by inspectors.

27. Arrangements to monitor performance are not established sufficiently. Performance is not monitored sufficiently at management meetings. Retention and overall success rates were poor in some curriculum areas in 2005-06, but the monitoring of important performance indicators is not a regular item at management and staff meetings. The performances of curriculum areas and some individual internal subcontractors are not monitored sufficiently. Too many meetings are used to share information and to discuss procedures rather than to analyse performance and the quality of provision. Following up action points identified in meetings is not integrated sufficiently with the work of the service. The service's monitoring of internal subcontractors is beginning to improve, but some managers are not sufficiently aware of performances in their curriculum areas, or by individual internal subcontractors.

28. Quality improvement meetings are not used sufficiently to monitor the outcomes of important parts of the service's quality improvement framework, such as observation of teaching and learning grades, audit visits, moderation meetings, and learner satisfaction surveys. Too much emphasis is placed on the implementation of quality assurance systems and not enough attention is given to whether actions bring about quality improvements. Actions identified in the quality improvement plan are not monitored sufficiently. However, some aspects of the provision have improved significantly during 2006-07. The service gathers learners' feedback, but delays have occurred in analysing

the outcomes from 2005-06. The sharing of good practice is not integrated sufficiently with staff development and training activities.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information and communications technology   Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
ICT for users		*3*
Adult and community learning	513	3

29. At the time of the inspection, the service had enrolled 513 learners. Non-accredited courses account for 70 per cent of the provision. Courses include beginners' information technology (IT), basic internet, e-mail and web page design. The remaining accredited provision includes introductory to advanced level courses in ICT and word processing. Courses take place in seven venues throughout the city which include schools, colleges and community centres. ICT courses range in length from short one-day workshops to longer 30-week programmes. Twelve part-time tutors are available for between two and 20 hours each week.

ICT for users

Strengths

- much good teaching
- very responsive courses to meet the needs and interests of learners

Weaknesses

- insufficiently developed initial assessment to meet individual learners' needs
- insufficient target-setting for learners

Achievement and standards

30. Overall success rates are satisfactory. Success rates on non-accredited courses are very good at over 80 per cent. They are satisfactory on accredited courses at just over 50 per cent. Success rates for the examination-based qualification in IT are low, at 42 per cent. They are higher for the diploma in text processing, at 63 per cent. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Most learners produce high-quality and accurate work, such as charts, graphs and websites. Learners often apply their new skills in their communities, or at work. Some of them have designed websites for local community groups. Other learners now make regular presentations at work, using display software. However, in some learning sessions, learners do not follow the correct format for business letters. In one learning session, learners had formatted letters of application incorrectly.

The quality of provision

31. Much of the teaching is good. Many tutors plan their teaching well in order to meet learners' needs. In the better sessions, tutors develop learners' knowledge and understanding well by relating practice to background knowledge. Well-paced learning sessions often include highly effective active learning techniques to involve and challenge learners. Tutors actively encourage peer mentoring and paired work and use handouts

effectively to consolidate learning. They provide good, supportive coaching and practical demonstrations. Tutors exploit opportunities to use technical terms and keyboard short cuts. In the less effective sessions, the teaching is too instructional and learners progress at the pace of the slowest learner. They often have to wait before they can practise their skills. Some tutors do not state clear learning objectives at the beginning of sessions, and do not check learners' understanding at regular intervals.

32. Courses are very responsive and meet the needs and interests of learners well. The service recognises this strength in its self-assessment report. The provider has designed its provision in response to learners' requests. Evening courses are arranged around learners' working hours and provide sessions during the day which include flexible attendance. Many tutors have devised progression courses to further develop learners' skills, especially at level 2. The service has responded well to the needs of local businesses. For example, it delivers accredited ICT courses for employees of a large retail chain. This training has enabled these learners to understand their job roles more clearly. The service plans further sessions in file management and e-mail for all of the retail chain's managers in all the regional stores. In a further example, 15 staff in the health and care sector are taking an accredited course and applying their new skills at work. The service's range of courses is satisfactory. Most of the courses that the service advertises take place.

33. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners with additional learning needs are well supported in learning sessions. Tutors ensure that learning tasks are divided into smaller tasks to help those learners who have difficulty concentrating for long periods of time. The service provides learners with suitable adaptive technology where necessary. Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. Pre-course materials are clear, and show possible progression opportunities.

34. There is not enough initial assessment to meet individual learners' needs. The service recognises this weakness in its self-assessment report. Most tutors do not use the results of initial assessment to set sufficient clear and specific objectives for each learner. Tutors set objectives for the whole group. The service has developed a new system for initial assessment that tests learners' skills and knowledge using a series of self-assessment questions. These questions range from health and safety to competence on the keyboard, and knowledge of hardware and software applications. Tutors receive an individual profile for each learner, but few tutors analyse the information to agree individual learning objectives with them.

35. Learners are not set enough targets. The service recognises this weakness in its self-assessment report. Tutors do not use individual learning plans to set short-term targets in accredited learning. Learners on these courses are often unaware of timescales and how much work they need to complete to achieve the qualification. On non-accredited courses, learners have individual learning plans, but tutors do not set them clear targets for completion of activities. Some of the more able learners make slower progress than their initial assessments would suggest.

Leadership and management

36. Communications between learning centres have improved. Roles and responsibilities are clear, and resources are satisfactory overall. In many learning centres, tutors make good use of interactive whiteboards. Accommodation is good in most centres which also have sufficient modern computers. In one learning centre, however, the computers are

out of date and learners cannot always use the fonts or tools that they use elsewhere. The service provides good staff development opportunities. Tutors have taken advantage of assessor training, first aid, health and safety, equal opportunities, sign language and literacy training. Staff are well qualified and demonstrate up-to-date knowledge of their subjects.

37. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. All learners receive a booklet which promotes the service's commitment to equal opportunities and defines appropriate behaviour.

38. Arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. The service accurately assesses the quality of its teaching and learning in ICT through observations which are moderated closely by managers. The self-assessment process is sufficiently inclusive, and the report is suitably critical. Inspectors' findings closely matched those of the service. However, the self-assessment report did not analyse the reasons for some of the weaknesses sufficiently.

Languages, literature and culture   Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other languages, literature and culture		*3*
Adult and community learning	726	3

39. The service offers French, Spanish, Greek, Italian, German, Portuguese, Japenese and British Sign Language (BSL) from beginner to advanced level, including general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) in Spanish and A level in French and German. Courses take place during the day and the evening at six centres and are generally of two hours' duration over 25 weeks. In 2005-06 the service enrolled 1,324 learners, of whom 63 per cent were women and 8 per cent were from minority ethnic backgrounds. At the time of the inspection, 726 learners had enrolled on 54 courses. The service employs 21 sessional tutors.

Other languages, literature and culture

Strengths

- good use of the target language to develop learners' skills
- good initiatives to improve the quality of learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- low retention on accredited courses in 2005-06
- insufficient use of assessment in the planning of learning

Achievement and standards

40. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Overall achievement on non-accredited courses rose from 66 per cent in 2004-05, to 78 per cent in 2005-06. On accredited courses, the overall achievement was 72 per cent in 2005-06. Overall retention on non-accredited courses was 83 per cent in 2004-05, and 77 per cent in 2005-06. The in-year retention rate is 93 per cent. Achievements on GCSE courses are generally very good. Achievements on the GCSE Japanese course were very good in 2005-06, with 91 per cent of learners achieving a high grade. Achievements on level 4 courses are also very good. Learners on the level 4 French and Italian courses had an achievement rate of 100 per cent during the same period. Achievements on the BSL courses are satisfactory.

41. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Many learners demonstrate good use of the target language and enjoy their lessons. Many older learners attend because they want to keep their minds active. Others learn languages for reasons of foreign travel, or because they have a second home abroad.

42. Retention is low on accredited courses. Retention declined from 67 per cent in 2004-05, to 57 per cent in 2005-06. In 2005-06, retention on many beginners' courses was low, although it was generally higher on level 2 courses. Poor retention in 2005-06 contributed to very low success rates for accredited courses. The service acknowledges this weakness in its self-assessment report. There has been a significant increase in

retention for 2006-07, and the in-year retention rate is 85 per cent.

The quality of provision

43. The good use of the target language develops learners' skills. Tutors use the target language consistently and well during language exercises, and when they give instructions and feedback about the use of language. New learners are able to get used to listening to the target language. This enhances effective learning of new vocabulary and grammatical structures. Many learners in these classes demonstrate good development of their spoken language skills. However, in the less effective sessions, tutors do not use the target language sufficiently. Too much time is spent talking about the language in English, rather than using the target language more actively.

44. The use of learning resources is satisfactory. Some tutors make effective use of interactive whiteboards and presentations to promote learning and to bring the outside world into the classroom. However, not all tape recorders produce sound of adequate quality.

45. The service provides a satisfactory range of courses. Clear progression routes have been established from beginner to advanced level. The service has consolidated its provision and now provides a more coherent programme which has clearer progression routes. However, the service combines some level 3 and 4 groups when enrolments are low, and some level 3 learners find the standards too high.

46. Guidance and support are satisfactory. The pre-course information sheets provide clear information to potential learners about the content of language courses. Learning advisers advise on specialist equipment for people with disabilities, such as hearing loops. They work closely and effectively with tutors to contact learners whose attendance is poor.

47. Tutors do not make sufficient use of initial and continuous assessment in planning for learning. The service recognises this weakness in its self-assessment report. Although some tutors produce good analyses of the target language, the findings from initial assessments are hardly recorded. The analysis of assessment activities does not support the planning for individual and group learning. Individual learning plans on non-accredited courses do not have measurable targets, and progress reviews are not effective. Lesson evaluations do not reflect on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. They do not identify how well the learners managed the activities and how to improve learning for learners having difficulties. This situation affected learning even in the better lessons, where teaching strategies were not sufficient to deal with the wide range of learners' abilities.

Leadership and management

48. The service has recently implemented good measures to improve the quality of the learners' experiences. Managers have substantially improved the use of data to monitor the quality of the provision and to improve retention. Communications between managers and tutors have improved significantly.

49. Arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning are satisfactory. Many of the observation reports produced in 2005-06 were descriptive, and the grades given often did not reflect the comments made in the text, but more recent observation reports

contain judgements and grades that are appropriate. However, action points are often not specific enough, and their implementation is not carried out thoroughly. The internal verification process for externally accredited qualifications is stronger and the service has developed a good support pack to help tutors with assessment. Most tutors are qualified to an appropriate level. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and evaluative, and most of the self-assessment report's findings match those of the inspection.

50. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Learning session plans contain suitable references to equal opportunities, but do not identify how learners' understanding of equality and diversity will be developed.

Preparation for life and work   Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
ESOL		
Adult and community learning	141	3
Literacy and numeracy		
Adult and community learning	574	3
Independent living and leisure skills		
Adult and community learning	90	3
Employability training		
Adult and community learning	27	3

51. The service provides preparation for life and work courses with nine partners in over 20 community venues. A team of 14 co-ordinators, which are managed by the curriculum commissioning manager, supporting 57 tutors. The provision includes skills for life courses, access to higher education, and provision for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In 2005-06, 1,829 learners enrolled on skills for life courses and included 565 adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and 280 learners enrolled on ESOL courses. Two partners provide access to higher education courses for 206 learners.

52. At the time of inspection, 913 learners had enrolled on courses in preparation for life and work, including 574 learners on literacy and numeracy courses, 90 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on accredited and non-accredited courses, and 81 learners on access to higher education courses. One learning centre provides most of the courses for 141 ESOL learners. The service also provides training for 27 unemployed young people who were previously not in employment, education or training.

53. Female learners account for 72 per cent of the profile, and learners from minority ethnic backgrounds account for 16 per cent of enrolments. Approximately 25 per cent of learners have declared a disability.

Strengths

- good development of learners' literacy, numeracy and language, and personal skills
- responsive provision to meet learners' needs
- effective management of change

Weaknesses

- low retention on many courses
- weak recording of progress and target-setting for some learners
- insufficiently thorough observation of learning sessions

Achievement and standards

54. The development of learners' literacy, numeracy, language and personal skills is good. Most learners on literacy courses gain confidence and enjoy discussions, role-play and

reading aloud. Learners are proud of their work and the progress that they make. In numeracy, learners demonstrate good levels of confidence in working through calculations correctly. ESOL learners have developed the confidence to use English at work and in their leisure time. The standard of work is very good in most learners' files. Adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on art courses achieve very high standards, with good attention to detail and presentation.

55. Overall success rates are generally satisfactory. Success rates for ESOL learners fell from 67 per cent in 2004-05, to 60 per cent in 2005-06, due to the removal of funding for this provision by the LSC. Literacy and numeracy pass rates fell during this period from 94 per cent to 52 per cent. Success rates for access learners are satisfactory, but have fallen from 76 per cent in 2004-05, to 66 per cent in 2005-06. Success rates are very good for adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Progression is satisfactory overall.

56. Retention is low on many courses, particularly ESOL courses, and literacy and numeracy and access courses. The service has identified this weakness in its self-assessment report. For 2004-05, retention for ESOL courses was 33 per cent. This rose slightly to 43 per cent in 2005-06. In literacy and numeracy, retention fell from 89 per cent in 2004-05, to 58 per cent in 2005-06, due to the removal of funding for this provision by the LSC. For access learners the rate fell from 93 per cent in 2004-05, to 73 per cent in 2005-06. Recent strategies to improve retention have been effective. At the time of inspection, retention had improved to over 90 per cent in ESOL, and literacy and numeracy courses.

The quality of provision

57. The provision is responsive and meets the needs of learners well. The service has identified this strength in its self-assessment report. Courses take place in over 20 venues in the most deprived areas of the city. Most ESOL learners attend classes at learning centres which offer learning at all levels and at most times of the day. A comprehensive range of literacy and numeracy courses is offered. Learners are able to progress through a range of local courses, which is devised to meet their needs from pre-entry level to access to higher education level. The service plans to provide skills for life courses over the summer period, and provides such courses, on employers' premises, which are designed to meet employees' needs.

58. Standards of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. In the good sessions, the teaching challenges learners to extend their skills in realistic, adult contexts. In one ESOL session, the tutor used a local newspaper article to stimulate discussion as the basis for grammar development. Some sessions are not challenging and do not stimulate learners. In these sessions, the planning does not take account of learners' individual learning needs and relies heavily on tutor-directed teaching. In other sessions, learners have little chance to experiment with language in a variety of contexts. Initial assessment is satisfactory and identifies learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs well.

59. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. The new learning adviser posts are already making a significant impact. The advisers support tutors by giving advice and information. Advisers make class visits at an early stage in courses to encourage learners to think about progression. They follow up absentees and help learners to overcome

barriers to learning. The learner induction is satisfactory. The handbook for learners is comprehensive and tutors simplify it for learners, but not enough publications are simplified for those with low literacy levels. Some learners do not receive sufficient pre-course guidance, and some wait too long for responses to their enquiries. Staff work effectively with local agencies. They link with Connexions and community staff to support the progression of learners who were previously not in employment, education and training.

60. The recording of some learners' progress and target-setting is weak. The service has identified this as an area for improvement. Most learners receive support to complete their learning logs, but many tutors do not record learners' progress against a set of individually agreed targets. In some cases, when learners have achieved their goals, they have to wait too long before they negotiate new targets. On many courses, the service has not fully implemented arrangements to recognise and record learners' progress and achievements, despite training sessions to support their introduction. Tutors do not always record effectively the skills that learners gain on non-accredited courses.

Leadership and management

61. Management of change is effective, and curriculum leadership is good. The new management structure and the overall planning strategy have improved the quality of provision. In ESOL, improvements to initial assessment have ensured that learners are now placed on appropriate courses and retention has improved significantly. Access and the provision for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been reviewed to improve the learners' experiences. Tutors now attend working groups to review curriculum planning.

62. Quality improvement is satisfactory overall. Staff meet frequently and share good practice well within learning centres, but good practice is not shared sufficiently between learning centres. The service recognises that the quality of initial assessment and the completion of individual learning plans vary considerably throughout the provision. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and includes the views of partners. The self-assessment report is not evaluated enough and did not identify all the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors. Development action plans are clear and focus on improvements in the learners' experiences.

63. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory overall. The service includes an equal opportunities presentation in induction and learners know about their rights and responsibilities. Schemes of work and lesson plans do not contain sufficient references to equality and diversity. The observation of teaching and learning does not include the promotion of equality and diversity in learning sessions. Accessibility for learners with restricted mobility is good.

64. The observation of learning sessions is not thorough enough to raise the quality of teaching and learning. The service has a well-established process for the observation and moderation of teaching and learning, but written feedback to tutors is not thorough enough to improve the weaker aspects of teaching and learning. The grades given to some sessions are too high. Managers do not always ensure that tutors complete the action plans that they have agreed on, following the observations. The service does not measure the effects of training on the quality of its teaching and learning.

Family learning   Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning		*3*
Adult and community learning	202	3

65. At the time of the inspection, 202 learners had enrolled on 26 family and parent learning courses at 13 venues throughout the city of Plymouth. The service delivers family learning courses in schools and community and family centres, mostly in areas of high deprivation within the city. Courses include first steps, family ESOL and skills for life. The service offers accredited courses in literacy and numeracy at entry level and level 1 and 2. ESOL accreditation is available at entry level. The first steps provision includes a range of non-accredited courses, which include short first aid and creative art courses. Community partners include Sure Start, health clinics, children's centres, the speech therapy service and Plymouth learning links. The skills for life curriculum commissioning manager leads the family and parent learning provision. A learning development manager manages a team of three full-time, two fractional, and four sessional tutors.

Adult and community learning

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence and skills
- good integration of literacy and numeracy on all courses
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough initial assessment
- insufficient target-setting for learners
- poor resources to support learning

Achievement and standards

66. Learners develop their confidence and skills well in supporting their children's learning needs. Learners develop their self-esteem and take much pride in their own learning and achievements. For example, they improve their understanding of the use of children's games to support their children's learning and developmental needs. An improved understanding of the school curriculum has encouraged parents to spend more time improving their numeracy skills in order to help their children with homework. Most parents listen more readily to their children reading. Many parents support the development of their child's creative skills at home by using 'messy' play techniques. Learners improve their literacy skills in family learning literacy and numeracy sessions, and demonstrate good use of adjectives and adverbs. In first-aid sessions, learners develop their knowledge and skills well, and most of them achieve a certificate in first aid. In 2005-06, retention on wider family learning courses was satisfactory, at 80 per cent. In-year retention for 2006-07 suggests that retention has improved by seven percentage points. Progression by learners to further courses is generally good.

The quality of provision

67. Tutors integrate learners' development of literacy and numeracy skills well on all courses. Schemes of work and lesson plans contain clear references to literacy and numeracy skills. Tutors ensure that learners spend almost half of the session time developing and improving their literacy, numeracy and language skills. They plan listening and speaking activities into most sessions with clear links to numeracy skills. For example, in one session on healthy eating, learners calculated the cost of school meals for one week, and analysed the calorific content of certain food products, practising a range of numeracy skills. During a session on jewellery making, learners improved their understanding of decimals by measuring the length of silver coil in relation to the gauge and size of beads. Tutors reinforce most practical activities with well-designed handouts. Assessment opportunities are varied and verbal feedback is good. Sixty per cent of the sessions observed were good. Tutors use a wide range of active learning techniques. Sessions are well paced, presenting good challenges to learners.

68. Support for learners is good. Learning advisers plan and deliver information, advice and guidance well, often within the fifth week of the course. Clear information leaflets promote the role of the guidance service and all of the courses that family and parent learning offers. Learning advisers provide support in many areas which include finance, individual career and learning interviews, and identifying employment opportunities. The service directs learners appropriately to other support agencies. All learners receive free crèche and transport facilities where necessary.

69. The range of courses, including partnership arrangements, is satisfactory. Courses occur at times which are convenient to learners, and all sessions take place within the community. Learners on family and parent learning courses can take advantage of useful links with many primary schools, especially in areas of high social deprivation. However, some school partnerships have ceased following the increase in emphasis on literacy and numeracy and the recruitment of learners who possess qualifications below level 2.

70. Initial assessment is not thorough enough. All learners receive an initial assessment. The initial assessment process does not identify learners' individual literacy and numeracy needs sufficiently. Initial assessment results are not used in session planning to support learners' individual literacy and numeracy needs. The two diagnostic tools used in numeracy indicate different learner needs.

71. There is not enough target-setting for learners. Tutors do not set sufficient targets in learners' individual learning plans. Targets often relate to confidence building and do not contain specific objectives to improve learners' practical, parenting, and literacy, numeracy and language skills. Individual learning plans do not have timescales which are linked to specific activities and measurable outcomes. Some learners make slow progress towards the completion of their learning goals. Learners do not always evaluate their own progress, and tutors do not record individual learners' progress as a matter of routine. Some individual learning plans remain incomplete.

72. Resources to support learning are poor. Tutors do not have sufficient access to modern IT resources such as laptop computers, interactive whiteboards and data projectors. Tutors' participation in training to use ILT is low. In learning sessions and in handouts, tutors make little reference to online resources and internet sites. In some

venues, tutors do not have the use of whiteboards or flipcharts, and they have to place notes on the wall.

Leadership and management

73. Communications between the family and parent learning team and the partner schools are good. The provider now uses link tutors. Communications with schools have improved. The team uses newsletters well to explain to partners any changes in strategy. Tutors have regular meetings and attend joint meetings with the skills for life team to share good practice. Staff have suitable qualifications, with relevant experience. Staff development support prioritises skills for life teaching qualifications at level 4.

74. Arrangements to risk-assess learning centres are satisfactory. Some accommodation is not easily accessible to learners with restricted mobility. The service is aware of this and has suitable alternative arrangements. Some accommodation is unwelcoming, and, in one case, very untidy.

75. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and includes the views of the team and partners. The self-assessment report does not contain sufficient critical evaluation and supporting evidence. It does identify most of the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors.

76. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The service targets priority areas well. However, male carers are currently under-represented in the provision and there is not enough inter-generational work.