INSPECTION REPORT

The Skills Partnership Limited

02 February 2007



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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DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Skills Partnership (TSP) was funded in 2005, and is based in Surrey. The provider is privately owned by three individuals and led by the chief executive and the business development director. It provides apprenticeship programmes for learners working in the leisure, fitness and exercise industry. All learners are employed in fitness centres, gymnasiums and similar leisure and recreational outlets. There are currently 138 learners, who are based in 50 locations throughout the country. TSP currently holds its contract with the Surrey regional office of the Learning and Skills Council which funds all of the provision. The provider offers national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in sport, leisure and recreation operations. Within the apprenticeship programmes, TSP provides most of the off-the-job training, key skills and technical certificate training, internal verification, assessment, and learners' progress reviews. The provider works in collaboration with two subcontracted staff to provide off-the-job training. The training programme is led by TSP's quality and operations director, who is supported by a senior tutor. The training team comprises three assessors, one learning support manager, one senior tutor, one internal verifier, and administrative support.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

- 2. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. TSP's leadership and management are satisfactory. Its arrangements for equality and diversity are satisfactory, but quality improvement is inadequate. The provision is satisfactory in leisure, travel and tourism.
- 3. The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process. TSP produced its second self-assessment report in December 2006. Staff were involved appropriately in the process which also gathered some learners' feedback, but the employers' views were not included in the report. Inspectors found that the report was not critical enough. Many inspection findings differed from those of the self-assessment report and the development plan, although the inspection findings matched some of the strengths highlighted.
- 4. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements. TSP has taken several steps in the past year to improve the provision. The dedicated quality improvement director has led the team in the recent review of all key learning processes. The off-the-job training has also improved notably. Learners' progress and framework success rates have been improving continuously in the past six months. The provider is currently implementing the final aspects of its quality improvement procedures, and is planning to formalise a thorough quality improvement cycle of activities.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE SKILLS PARTNERSHIP LIMITED:

• fully implement a quality improvement process

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- improve the consistency of the newly implemented learning processes
- improve assessment practice
- sustain the improved apprenticeship framework success rates

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	3
Quality improvement	4

Leisure, travel and tourism		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Sport, leisure and recreation		3
Apprenticeships for young people	138	3

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. The inspection concerned leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality improvement. The sport, leisure and recreation provision was inspected, and the whole inspection took place over three weeks in January/February 2007. Two visits were made by inspectors.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	18
Number of learners interviewed	10
Number of staff interviewed	18
Number of employers interviewed	4
Number of subcontractors interviewed	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	7
Number of visits	2

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good managerial actions to strengthen the provider's operations
- very good promotion of training to employers

• good promotion of equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

• incomplete quality improvement processes

Leisure, travel and tourism

Sport, leisure and recreation

Strengths

- improving trend in learners' progress and achievements
- good off-the-job training in exercise and fitness programmes
- good range of industry-recognised qualifications to meet learners' needs
- effective action to improve learners' performances

Weaknesses

- very poor success rates for apprenticeship frameworks in 2005-06
- poor assessment practice
- inconsistencies in the monitoring of individual learning

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT THE SKILLS PARTNERSHIP LIMITED:

- the opportunity to gain industry qualifications while at work
- 'assessors are friendly, helpful and easy to contact'
- 'being treated as an adult by the tutors'
- 'it makes me think about what I am doing every day at work'
- the good support from their manager
- 'I have increased my awareness and confidence at work'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK THE SKILLS PARTNERSHIP LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- administration there is too much paperwork involved in the course
- scheduling need for more time to complete the programme
- the clarity of information about the NVQ programme and the evidence-gathering requirements
- 'sometimes the tests are a little bit easy'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- good managerial actions to strengthen the provider's operations
- · very good promotion of training to employers
- · good promotion of equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

- incomplete quality improvement processes
- 6. TSP is well led and managed by the chief executive, the business development director, and the operations and quality director. The provider has implemented good managerial actions to strengthen TSP's operations.
- 7. The provider began delivering government-funded programmes in January 2005. By September 2005 it had identified a high number of learners who left before completing their programmes, and a significant number of low achievers. TSP employed a dedicated quality improvement manager with specialist knowledge in the area of learning, in order to analyse TSP's operations. Several operational issues were identified as contributory factors, such as poor staff performance and weak data management. The provider began to take action to rectify these problems in November 2005.
- 8. TSP restructured its staffing arrangements. More staff were selected and recruited and some existing staff were promoted internally. Comprehensive staff training was instigated and is continuing currently. As part of the restructure, a key skills tutor was brought in as a dedicated specialist support tutor. The provider has developed intranet resources to allow assessors to access information remotely, and also to update the senior tutor about any relevant issues affecting learner performance. The management of learners at risk was improved by ensuring the involvement of the senior tutor in final decisions. The centralised analysis of data became more thorough and learners' progress documents were designed to monitor progress effectively. Internal communications were strengthened by establishing regular meetings at all levels, which focus on learner performance. A substantial investment was made in resources to support the assessors in the field, with tools such as laptops computers, mobile communications, digital cameras, and recorders, to help with assessment practice.
- 9. TSP promotes training very well to employers. The provider has developed particularly effective relationships with its employers in order to meet the employers' and learners' needs. TSP has designed an online system to carry out training needs analyses of employees, with the aim of raising the workforce's capabilities. The system is learner-led. It gathers information about the employees' training requirements, which highlight to the employer the members of staff who wish to develop through training. Those learners who are not eligible for TSP's training are referred to alternative providers. The system highlights personal training needs such as literacy and numeracy support, and reflects the employees' interests. A best match of qualifications and additional units is achieved within

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the framework. As part of the training needs analyses, the provider is able to monitor the validity of legal licences such as first aid or lifeguard, and is able to support the employer's timely planning for these requirements. In some cases, the provider has been able to identify staff's wishes to develop in other areas of the business. TSP is able to promote this career development opportunity to the employer.

- 10. TSP has an appropriate business plan which is compiled by the chief executive after consultation with the management team. The business plan highlights the commercial objectives and some broad aims which focus on learner achievement and the quality of the learning experience. The business plan is not shared directly with staff.
- 11. The provider has improved the use of data in its decision-making processes. A dedicated data manager ensures that data is gathered centrally and analysed by programme to identify any necessary actions for improvement. These are acted upon appropriately, although they are not recorded or monitored formally to assess their effectiveness.
- 12. TSP makes adequate use of target-setting to manage the team's performance. Each tutor is allocated monthly targets with reference to learners' progress and achievements. These targets are monitored individually by staff by using a progress monitoring document. Targets are reviewed at regular and frequent meetings, and they are modified and updated according to the learners' actual progress.
- 13. The staff appraisal system is satisfactory. Staff receive a yearly appraisal and a six-monthly progress review. They are encouraged to assess their own performances. All highlighted development needs are planned, although they are not always gathered in a centralised document. Staff receive the necessary training to improve their competence in their roles. However, the provider does not make sufficient use of continuous coaching and mentoring to support the needs of new assessors.
- 14. The management of subcontracted staff is adequate. The quality and operations director monitors the subcontracted staff's performances by observing teaching sessions. The provider has worked with the subcontractor to design off-the-job training to meet the needs of employers and TSP's learners. Communications with the subcontracted staff is regular but informal.
- 15. External communications between employers and the provider are adequate. TSP holds monthly meetings with all its employers, to update them on learners' progress and issues affecting their performances. However, these meetings do not record any agreed actions by employers or the provider to rectify poor progress by learners.
- 16. Resources are satisfactory. Learners have access to adequate equipment and accommodation in their workplaces. Off-the-job training sessions are delivered in appropriate environments.
- 17. The identification and support of learners' literacy and numeracy needs is satisfactory. An appropriate testing system is used for identifying learners who might require support. These learners receive assistance from tutors who use helpful resources such as worksheets. The specialist support manager visits those learners who require intensive support. The tutors do not have formal qualifications related to the teaching of literacy

and numeracy, although they do have significant academic qualifications. Staff understand the requirements for literacy and numeracy support, but some of these requirements are not recorded formally.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

- 18. TSP promotes equality of opportunity well within its organisation through a variety of activities. A director of the company has clear responsibilities for monitoring and promoting equality of opportunity. He does this partly through annual equality of opportunity action plans. The plans cover appropriate matters, such as staff training, reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality, and the use of data. Aspects of equality of opportunity are routinely and usefully reviewed at the main directors' and managers' meeting. Topics have included a discussion of the treatment of a learner by an employer and the effects of age-related legislation on potential applicants for training.
- 19. TSP is involved in a large project which identifies the backgrounds of people employed in the leisure industry. The aim is to use the information to confirm that learners on courses at least reflect the industry profile, and eventually to help the industry recognise any mismatches between their employee groups and the customers they are serving.
- 20. The provider's equality of opportunity policy is satisfactory, as are its procedures for matters such as dealing with harassment and bullying. The main elements of the policy are covered well in comprehensive induction material for learners. This material is being revised to make it even clearer and more interesting to learners.
- 21. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Topics are covered well in the mandatory technical certificate training. Further reinforcement takes place as part of some of the routine assessment and training. Discussion of equality of opportunity is an appropriate part of learners' regular progress reviews. Tutors use a series of questions to prompt discussions. The questions are narrow in scope, but some prompt good debates about matters of current interest. Employers' policies and their support for equal opportunities are subject to appropriate checks by TSP's staff.
- 22. Staff training is adequate. Most of the staff are relatively new to TSP, but all tutors have been trained about dignity at work. Further training, to include courses about disability awareness, is planned for later this year.
- 23. Advertising materials and other corporate literature used by TSP are carefully neutral in terms of images and language but, where appropriate, take a positive stance. The recently introduced newsletter celebrates the success of a wide range of learners and staff.
- 24. The provider is developing relevant equality and diversity impact measures. Currently, their main objective is to establish rates of representation and success for various groups. This will be followed by the setting of targets for improvement. It is too early to judge the effects of this work. Thirty-eight per cent of the TSP's current learners are women. In the main companies that TSP supports, approximately 61 per cent of the staff are women. Current work does not identify clearly what will be done in terms of examining and resolving this discrepancy.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 4

- 25. In June 2006, the quality and operations director conducted a full review of the key learning processes and identified several opportunities for improvement. TSP reviewed the training methods used by its tutors. Lesson plans and schemes of work have been redesigned by the quality and operations director, and the quality of the training delivered by TSP is now good. Learners' progress and achievements have also improved in the past five months.
- 26. The learners' individual learning plans have been modified to ensure that they become a continuous document, reflecting learners' individual training. The focus of assessment practice has been changed to increase its effectiveness in establishing learners' competence levels. Learners' progress review forms have been adapted to allow target dates and progress to be recorded. They now also offer learners the opportunity to reset their targets. However, inspectors found several inconsistencies in the implementation of the new processes.
- 27. Staff have received training and support for the implementation of the new processes, and the quality and operations director monitors compliance with the new systems. However, it is too soon to be able to assess their full effects on the quality of the learners' experiences.
- 28. TSP has a quality improvement manual which highlights its policies and procedures, although not all of these are currently valid. The provider plans to update them and make them accessible and meaningful to staff and learners. The internal quality audit process is not well established. The first internal audit has been carried out very recently, but the process does not focus on ensuring that quality improvement procedures are being followed consistently.
- 29. During the past year, the provider has focused on assuring the quality of all the key processes that affect learning. TSP's quality improvement processes are still not complete. There are no formalised quality improvement processes to review the provision in a consistent and thorough manner. TSP does not have a centralised quality improvement plan in which analyses from sources such as data, teaching and learning observations, internal verification and feedback are compiled and prioritised to ensure continuous improvement. The provider has, however, begun to plan for the implementation of a thorough quality improvement cycle.
- 30. The system for observations of teaching and learning is not fully established. Completed observation forms contain feedback points, although some assessors did not know what the outcomes of their observations were. The provider does not monitor actions for improvement formally in order to evaluate their effectiveness in raising the quality of teaching and training.
- 31. The sampling procedure for internal verification is incomplete and does not detail which assessors are going to be included in the plan. Internal verification documents contain valuable comments about issues affecting the quality of assessment practice, but they do not highlight corrective actions. Many internal verification forms are not signed or dated. Currently, TSP has only one internal verifier. The scope of the planned verification activity is excessively small considering the geographical distribution of learners, and the

intricate components of the programmes. However, this point has been recognised by TSP, and the senior tutor is being trained to become an internal verifier. Formal standardisation meetings do not take place, although best practice is shared informally at team meetings.

- 32. Learners' feedback is not gathered consistently. Feedback is not formally analysed and used in a quality improvement plan. TSP has not implemented systems to gain feedback from employers.
- 33. The self-assessment process is inclusive, but the self-assessment report is not critical enough and it overstates some of the provider's strengths. The report focuses on quality assurance, rather than on quality improvement. The development plan is weak and does not contain sufficient detail about how weaknesses are being resolved. Inspectors agreed with some of the highlighted strengths in the self-assessment report, but they found further weaknesses.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Leisure, travel and tourism

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Sport, leisure and recreation		3
Apprenticeships for young people	138	3

- 34. TSP offers apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in fitness and operations programmes. Learners achieve NVQs in operational services, operations and development, instructing physical activity and exercise, or instructing exercise and fitness. At the time of inspection, there were 70 apprentices and 68 advanced apprentices. Of the 138 learners, 57 are following exercise and fitness programmes, and 81 are following the operations programmes. Learners also complete a range of industry training courses. TSP contracts mainly with two national sport and leisure employers which have learners at more than 61 sites. Currently, 38 per cent of learners are women. Fewer than 2 per cent of the learners are from minority ethnic groups, and none has a declared disability.
- 35. All of the learners work in the industry, in public and private sector leisure centres, gymnasiums or sports centres. Learners are recruited by TSP or are referred by their employers. All learners receive an induction that includes details about the training programme, assessment and appeals procedures, equal opportunities and health and safety. Each learner has an individual learning plan. All assessors and internal verifiers are the provider's trained staff. TSP also works in collaboration with a contractor to deliver certain aspects of the fitness and exercise training. Assessors maintain regular contact with learners and carry out progress reviews every four weeks.

Sport, leisure and recreation

Strengths

- improving trend in learners' progress and achievements
- good off-the-job training in exercise and fitness programmes
- good range of industry-recognised qualifications to meet learners' needs
- effective action to improve learners' performances

Weaknesses

- very poor success rates for apprenticeship frameworks in 2005-06
- poor assessment practice
- inconsistencies in the monitoring of individual learning

Achievement and standards

36. TSP has been offering apprenticeship programmes for the past 18 months. In the past six months, the number of learners completing apprenticeship frameworks has increased significantly. In the exercise and fitness programme, the overall framework success rate

has improved from 25 per cent to 77 per cent.

- 37. In the operations programme, apprenticeship completions have improved from 4 per cent to 45 per cent, and the advanced apprenticeship completion rate has improved from 7 per cent to 38 per cent. Learners are making good progress with their programmes. Most learners are now on target to achieve within the scheduled timescale. In many cases, learners have already completed their frameworks ahead of their planned end dates.
- 38. Learners develop a good working knowledge of current industry practices in the use of exercise equipment, and the planning and teaching of fitness training and exercise to music sessions. Learners demonstrate good development of safe and effective exercise and fitness techniques. They acquire a good understanding of health and safety in the workplace and in the leisure centres. Learners also have the opportunity to work in a range of operational roles. Employers comment positively about the improved confidence of learners, and their increased sensitivity when working with customers. Some learners have been promoted to senior leisure supervisor roles since training with TSP.
- 39. The standards of learners' work are satisfactory. Portfolios contain a good variety of evidence to illustrate the learners' competence. Good use is made of photographs to capture examples of fitness exercises and movement. Learners also gather information and handouts received during the off-the-job training as reference to bones and muscles theory.
- 40. The success rates for learners on apprenticeship frameworks in the year 2005-06 were very poor. Of the 18 advanced apprentices who left the programme, none achieved the framework or the NVQ. Only 34 per cent of the 108 apprentices achieved their framework.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced	2005-06	overall	18	0	46	0	34
Apprenticeships	2005-00	timely	27	0	28	0	19
Apprenticeships	2005-06	overall	108	34	5 <i>7</i>	34	48
		timely	114	22	36	22	30

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

The quality of provision

41. The quality of off-the-job training in exercise and fitness is good, with some outstanding features. Training staff are well qualified, highly experienced and knowledgeable. They are trainers in the fitness industry and bring great enthusiasm to their work. Tutors use a good range of learning activities and are able to simplify complex physiological content to meet the needs of all learners. Regular and effective summaries are used to check and develop learning. Background knowledge and practical teaching are integrated skilfully. Practical demonstrations are good. Learners are confident and

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contribute actively throughout learning sessions. Health and safety has a high priority, and tutors closely monitor learners' techniques and perceived levels of exertion during practical work. Tutors provide a good level of accurate technical information.

- 42. A good range of industry recognised qualifications is available to meet learners' needs. Employers make a good contribution to training, and learners have access to a wide range of employers' training programmes. Company training takes place frequently and covers aspects such as national pool lifeguard, control of substances hazardous to health, pool plant, fire training, health and safety, child protection, customer service, playwork, equality and diversity and various coaching courses. These courses are offered by TSP in addition to the NVQ, technical certificates, and the requirements of the apprenticeship programme.
- 43. Learners are supported effectively by managers who arrange time for them at work to complete evidence gathering and off-the-job training. Duty and learning centre managers work well in some centres as mentors, as well as taking part in learners' progress reviews. In the most effective centres, employers take an active part in monitoring learners' portfolios, and are fully aware of their employers' apprenticeship programmes. Practical training resources in the workplace are good. Learners are able to access a wide range of good, up-to-date equipment to develop their skills and job effectiveness. In this environment, learners are able to develop a broader range of skills.
- 44. Learners receive satisfactory guidance and support. They are provided with initial advice and support in order to get them started on their apprenticeships. Some learners who are identified as having additional learning needs receive individual and specific support. Learners experience a supportive learning atmosphere in their workplaces. Key skills provision is in the early stages of integration with the main programmes. Induction is satisfactory and learners are provided with a comprehensive information pack. However, some learners do not receive sufficient information about significant issues, at an early stage in the programme.
- 45. Staff support the learners appropriately in overcoming personal problems that might affect their ability to learn. This support includes such things as changing target dates for a learner who was coping with serious illness in his family, or offering advice and support to learners who were in danger of giving up their courses because of emotional difficulties.
- 46. Some assessment practice is poor. Planning for assessment is not always recorded in detail. Some portfolios do not contain sufficient evidence to support the completion of units, and evidence is not clearly cross-referenced. There is too much reliance on assessors' checklists. Assessments are not signed and dated routinely. Unit monitoring documents and assessor observation records do not always match. Assessors' observation records do not provide adequate details of the range or context of assessments. In some portfolios, there is no evidence of extended knowledge questioning and learner responses. Insufficient internal verification takes place to identify inconsistencies in the assessment process.
- 47. The monitoring of individual learning is inconsistent. Many individual learning plans are incomplete and do not inform the assessment process adequately. They do not indicate learners' programme start dates. In many cases, summative targets for unit completions have not been met. Literacy and numeracy skills results and planned actions

are not recorded consistently in the learning plans. Progress review documents are blank in many individual learning plans. The recording of unit completions is not clear, and not all tutors are recording learners' progress accurately on the tutors' monitoring database. Some learners do not understand the progress they have made in their programmes.

Leadership and management

- 48. A senior tutor provides adequate support to the more remotely based tutors. Effective actions have been taken to improve learners' performances. TSP has appointed a quality improvement director and has increased the number of tutors. The provider has focused on raising standards. Tutors caseloads have been reduced and they have been provided with more learning resources. More regular visits to the workplaces and regular team meetings now take place. Communications and teamwork have improved. A review of the key learning processes has taken place with the development of learner documents. Some strategies have been developed to identify learners at risk of leaving the programme before completion. Significant progress and improved numbers of framework successes have occurred in the past six months.
- 49. Learners and staff have adequate awareness of the procedures relating to equal opportunities. Most staff have attended equality and diversity training. The promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory.
- 50. Staff are aware of the importance of the self-assessment process. However, the self-assessment report is not critical or evaluative enough and the quality improvement plan is insufficiently detailed. Inspection findings for this area of learning differed to most of those in the self-assessment report and the development plan.