

Northumberland Adult Learning Service

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Health, public services and care
- Information and communication technology
- Arts, media and publishing
- Preparation for life and work
- Business, administration and law

Description of the provider

1. Northumberland Adult Learning Service (NALS) is part of the Schools and Family Support Division within the Children's Services Directorate of Northumberland County Council. Provision was previously two services, Northumberland County Council's Adult Learning Service and Northumberland Training Agency. In August 2008 they merged to create one service delivering adult and community and work-based learning. NALS provide courses and training in community venues, children's centres, schools and employer premises. Most provision is directly delivered and classes are available in all sector subject areas. NALS has 5,599 learners. Learners directly inspected were in skills for life; information and communication technology (ICT); arts, media and publishing; health, public services and care, and business, administration and law. They represent 66% of provision. The remainder are spread across all other sector subject areas.
2. A head of service manages NALS with support from three performance and one quality manager. One performance manager and eight locality managers develop the curriculum in the community. A second performance manager has responsibility for work-based learning, with support from six subject specialists. The third manager, with three office staff, has responsibility for management information.
3. NALS contracts with the North East LSC. This comprises further education (FE), personal and community development and learning, work-based learning, Train to Gain and Entry to Employment (E2E), family learning, family language, literacy and numeracy, co-financing as well as some funding from CfBT Advice and Guidance Ltd. Currently 85% of provision is government funded. FE courses, at 42% of the provision, represents the largest part of the contract, work-based learning has 31% with 11% personal and community development and learning courses.
4. Less than 1% of the population of Northumberland are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is considerably below the national average of 9.1%. Many wards in the county have high indices of deprivation, although others are extremely affluent.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Work-based learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Work-based learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Work-based learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Work-based learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Arts, media and publishing	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Preparation for life and work	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Business, administration and law	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Adult and community learning
Work-based learning

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. The overall effectiveness of NALS's provision is satisfactory. Achievements and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management are all satisfactory, as are the arrangements for equality of opportunity.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. The service demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve. The two preceding training organisations worked effectively during a prolonged restructuring period to ensure continuity of provision to learners. The council has taken effective action in merging the two organisations to improve line management and curriculum development significantly. Success rates across most curriculum areas have improved steadily since the previous inspection, for both work-based learning and adult and community learning. NALS took some effective actions to improve provision such as provide improved information, advice and guidance for failing subjects together with increased support. The success rates in AS psychology and GCSE mathematics improved by 15%, GCSE Italian improved from 27% to 85%, the Information Technology Qualification (ITQ) improved significantly from a 42% success rate to 72%.
7. Some weaknesses identified in the previous inspections report remain. Some aspects of quality improvement arrangements are ineffective, particularly the observation of teaching and learning process. The process is insufficiently critical and insufficiently identifies actions for improvement.
8. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. It involves the main partners and senior staff at the council. However, tutors mainly focus on their own areas of learning, and make insufficient contribution to the self-assessment of overall aspects of the provision, such as leadership and management. The report uses learner performance appropriately and leads to a detailed development plan. Inspection findings matched some of the key strengths but the report failed to identify some significant areas for improvement.

Key strengths

- Good development of learners' confidence, motivation and skills
- Wide range of courses across a large geographic area
- Good strategic development
- Good initiatives to target learners from priority groups

Key areas for improvement

- Insufficient use of reviews and target-setting to raise achievement
- Improve teaching and learning
- Insufficient promotion of equality and diversity in teaching
- Some ineffective quality improvement measures for teaching and learning

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Adult and community learning
Work-based learning

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

9. Achievements and standards are satisfactory, as recognised in the self-assessment report. Work-based learning success rates are satisfactory. Overall advanced apprenticeship success rates are satisfactory at 72% in 2007/08. Success rates for apprentices overall are improved and are now satisfactory at 67% in 2007/08, just above the national average of 63%. In health and care success rates for all apprentices were poor. However, the new service no longer offers this provision. Success rates for apprentices in construction are good at 77% in 2007/08, 13 percentage points higher than the national average. Rates for apprentices in business administration are also good at 86%.
10. Train to Gain learners in business administration achieve satisfactorily. However, learners on both health and care and skills for life provision experience slow progress. Learners on E2E provision progress satisfactorily at 65% in 2007/08. They develop good levels of motivation and confidence.
11. FE success rates are satisfactory. In health and care success rates match the national averages. Standards of work are good. Success rates in ICT provision are satisfactory though ITQ courses are good. Learners develop good personal and social skills. In arts, publishing and media success rates are satisfactory. However, standards of work in stained glass, papermaking and life drawing are high. In preparation for life and work learners develop good levels of motivation and confidence. However, success rates on level 1 and short FE courses are low. Business administration learners develop good confidence and employability skills.
12. Retention and progress on personal and community development and learning courses are satisfactory. Half of all curriculum areas have good retention at above 90%. Only science and mathematics has retention less than 80%. Progress within sessions and the standards of work are satisfactory. In arts, publishing and media, which has a large proportion of personal and community development and learning learners, standards of work are good in some sessions with the remainder satisfactory.
13. Success rates for learners with additional support needs are similar to those for learners with no identified needs.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Adult and community learning

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Work-based learning

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

14. The quality of provision is satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, again identified in the self-assessment report. Some teaching is good, particularly in preparation for life and work and ICT, but too much teaching and training across provision is satisfactory. NALS changed the observation of teaching and learning scheme since the previous inspection and use the new version across the amalgamated service. New guidelines for staff are in place. However, the scheme insufficiently identifies significant areas of improvement.
15. Initial assessment is satisfactory. In some programmes staff use initial assessment successfully to determine individual goals but in some instances they fail to set challenging targets.
16. Monitoring of learners' progress is satisfactory overall, but in some work-based learning programmes progress reviews are insufficiently effective. On Train to Gain programmes in the care sector progress is slow and reviews are inadequate. The range of resources to support learning, including a virtual learning environment, is satisfactory.
17. NALS meets the needs and interests of learners, employers and local communities adequately, as recognised in the self-assessment report. A wide range of provision exists to meet the needs of hard-to-reach learners. They develop good multi-agency partnership arrangements, for example with health professionals, employers and Jobcentre Plus. They work well with local schools, SureStart and children's centres to develop family learning, enabling learners to grow in confidence and self-esteem as well as gaining employability skills. The service uses many venues across the county, including schools, community centres and public houses. Learners in both urban and rural settings are able to access adult learning readily. Appropriate opportunities exist for progression from pre-entry to level three courses. However, much of the provision is outdated in nature with insufficient planning of the curriculum offer to provide coherent progression pathways for learners. Under the newly restructured service, plans are in place to take a strategic approach to developing the curriculum in a more holistic way.
18. Information, advice, guidance, and support for learners are satisfactory, as recognised in the self-assessment report. Information, advice and guidance are good for E2E learners but satisfactory for other areas of learning. Many staff are working towards qualifications with some already trained to level three standard. The provider is planning to gain Matrix accreditation for the new service. The NALS website is satisfactory and provides helpful information to potential learners. The service has a clear policy and guidelines for staff relating to

additional learner support. Retention and achievement rates for learners with identified support needs are in line with other learners. Discretionary financial support is available where learners are unable to afford transport and childcare costs. NALS gives specialist help to learners with dyslexia. Arrangements for physical access to buildings are satisfactory and the service continues to improve access to premises in line with the access audit report. Learners receive good personal support from tutors who work hard to ensure that they remain on programme. Training officers on work-based learning support learners well with frequent visits and high levels of individual support. Arrangements for the support of learners with skills for life needs are satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Adult and community learning

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Work-based learning

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

19. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The strategic development of the service is good as was partially identified in the self-assessment report. Following a detailed analysis of the structure of its two training organisations, the council recently merged them, forming the current service. The new service responds well to the council and LSC strategic priorities. It has greater clarity in provision planning and accountability, though some historic provision remains. Managers and staff successfully re-organised provision using little funding to maintain coverage across the county. The service now offers self-funded courses, personal and community development and learning, FE, work-based learning and bespoke courses for employers. Partnership working is increasingly more effective with the primary care trust, community groups, volunteer organisations and schools in attracting hard-to-reach groups. For example the service uses personal and community development and learning courses well to support the worklessness strategy and offers courses in a number of children's centres.

20. Curriculum management is satisfactory. The restructuring of the service provides a more coherent management structure. However, some staff are not fully familiar with the changes in their roles and responsibilities. Communication is effective. Directly employed staff receive satisfactory appraisals in relation to their new job roles. However, improvement targets agreed during these meetings are insufficiently challenging. Managers receive good management skills training. Management of subcontracted provision is satisfactory. The service receives appropriate information on recruitment, attendance and retention rates that meets the terms of their service level agreements.

21. The use of learner performance information is adequate. NALS has implemented a web-based management information system to which staff have satisfactory access. The system produces adequate information about learners' retention, achievement and success rates, although not all tutors use this information.

22. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. The service uses its funds well to offer provision for many hard-to-reach learners within rural communities. These include learners with learning difficulties, older learners and learners at the risk of unemployment. It prioritises funding of courses for learners in disadvantaged areas. The service fulfils its obligations under the relevant race relations, disability and equality legislation. Access to venues for learners with restricted mobility is satisfactory. Learners have appropriate information about their rights, how to complain and how to deal with bullying and harassment. The service systematically monitors the impact of its policies and practices on different groups of learners, but the actions to eradicate any differences are not always effective. For example, male apprentices' success rates are significantly higher than female success rates and council actions to correct this situation have yet to make any impact. The services' focus on promoting equality and diversity is insufficient. Staff have received training on equality and diversity but this is not recent. Tutors insufficiently reinforce equality and diversity in teaching or training sessions or in work-based learning reviews. Some learners have insufficient understanding of equality or diversity.
23. Arrangements for safeguarding meet current government legislative requirements. The service follows the policy and procedures of the council and has a designated child protection officer. All relevant staff have an enhanced criminal records bureau check.
24. Some aspects of quality improvement arrangements are ineffective. This was partially identified in the self-assessment report. A clear schedule of quality assurance activities exists and a manager is responsible for the co-ordination and management of quality improvement processes. The analysis of learner and employer feedback is appropriate and NALS have made some good improvements using this information. The service has updated its quality procedures to cover all aspects of provision, including the observation of teaching and learning. However, this process is ineffective. Not all tutors are observed and the schedule of observations is unclear. The process focuses on teaching rather than learning. It does not consistently identify areas for improvements. Monitoring of individual learning plans and progress review forms did not identify areas for improvement found at the inspection. Best practice is insufficiently shared. The process for recognising and recording progress and achievement on non-accredited provision is appropriate. However, tutors apply it inconsistently across provision.

What learners like:

- Good training officers who explain things clearly
- Working at own pace
- Good opportunity to develop career
- Good teachers
- Very friendly classes
- Local classes that are accessible
- 'You don't know how much progress this is for me. I can get a qualification while I am working'
- The encouragement to do as well as you possibly can
- Flexible, free training

What learners think could improve:

- 'Don't like the paperwork'
- Some rooms get too hot
- 'I'd like more handouts to take home'
- Machine malfunctions
- 'When we have to wait too long for our printouts'
- 'Some of my time is wasted doing things that are too easy'
- 'Learning materials that make no sense whatsoever - they just don't seem relevant to the questions'
- 'We would like time away from the work station when the assessor visits'

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

25. NALS offers early years programmes at levels 2 and 3, and Train to Gain programmes in adult care at levels 2 and 3. Other programmes include drug awareness level 2 and counselling at levels 1, 2, 3, and 4. The curriculum is managed by three full-time tutors with the further support of 17 part-time tutors. Currently 91 learners are on adult and community learning programmes, 87 FE learners and 23 Train to Gain. Women constitute 82% of all learners, 4% of all learners have a disability and less than 2% are from minority ethnic communities. NALS base most learning at Hepscott Park together with schools and community centres across Northumberland. They recruit learners through the Connexions service, direct application or referral by employers. NALS also works in partnership with other organisations to provide early years training funded by SureStart. Care learners have placements in a range of approved settings including schools, nurseries, and in adult residential and day care organisations.

Strengths

- Good standard of learners work
- Well-planned teaching and training sessions
- Effective team-working

Areas for improvement

- Slow progress on Train to Gain and childcare programmes
- Inadequate reviews for Train to Gain learners

Achievement and standards

26. Achievements and standards are satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. Standards of learners' work are good. This was not fully identified in the self-assessment report. Files are well organised and most learners are able to very effectively discuss their learning journey. On the Train to Gain and early years programmes learners develop good levels of confidence and employers report good increases in workplace skills. Counselling and drugs awareness courses increase learner knowledge and understanding of personal and community issues well. Learners use these skills to develop career opportunities.

27. Progress for learners on the counselling and drug awareness programmes is also satisfactory. Success rates on FE programmes are satisfactory with achievement on level 1 counselling programme at 88%, and on the level 2 programme at 62%. The drugs awareness level 1 success rates were 73%, with 72% success on the

level 2 course. Overall success rates on the further education programmes in the period 2007/08 are satisfactory at 92%

28. Progress is slow on the Train to Gain and early years programmes. This was not identified in the self-assessment report. On the Train to Gain programmes during the period 2004/05 timely achievement was 25% with an overall achievement of 50%. In 2005/06 timely achievement fell to 13% with overall achievement remaining at 50%. Rates improved during 2006/07 with timely achievement rising to 50% and overall achievement to 67%. On the early years programmes during 2006/07 success rates were low at 40% with some improvement in the period 2007/08 to 50%.

Quality of provision

29. The quality of provision is satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching and training sessions are well-planned. This was partially identified in the self-assessment report. Training officers and teachers plan well to ensure that lessons are interesting, stimulating and appropriate. Learners are well motivated. Learners respond to questions with high levels of confidence. They display good levels of knowledge. In both the classroom and the workplace learners show good understanding, and relate theory to their workplace, home and community well. Training centres are well resourced with a good range of learning materials, textbooks and computers.
30. Assessment is satisfactory. Assessors meet learners in the workplace at least every three weeks, with additional telephone and email contact. Staff plan assessments around the work rota to meet the needs of the learner, their client group and the employer. Training officers and lecturers provide access to a good range of resources and guidance for assessment of learning. Portfolios of work provide a suitable range of evidence.
31. Reviews of learners on the Train to Gain programmes are inadequate and assessors do not sufficiently identify and set measurable targets. This was not identified in the self-assessment report. Monitoring of progress is varied, assessor files identify progress overall but some recording in the individual learning plans is incomplete. However, reviews are satisfactory on the further education programmes, and effective in monitoring progress and planning targets.
32. The range of programmes is satisfactory and meets the needs of learners, employers and the local community. This was identified in the self-assessment report. Programmes are offered in a range of settings across the county. Learners have good opportunities to access training.
33. Advice and guidance are satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. Staff interview learners and give information regarding course requirements to ensure suitability for the programmes. Identification of support for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Learners with identified additional learning support needs are referred to a specialist tutor. Induction for further education learners is

satisfactory and delivered at the start of the programme. However, arrangements for induction on the Train to Gain programmes are not always consistently given. The understanding of equality and diversity by staff and learners is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

34. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Team working between the health and social care staff is very effective. This was not identified in the self-assessment report. Staff work in collaboration to share responsibilities, and develop training. They form some good partnerships with outside agencies. These arrangements provide good training for all concerned. Managers plan continuing professional development at programme level, ensuring teaching and assessment meets awarding body requirements.
35. Internal verification arrangements are thorough. Course, learning and assessment plans and performance are regularly sampled and audited. Standardisation meetings are effective. They are held every month to update assessors and verifiers, sharing and developing good practice. Understanding of equality and diversity by both staff and learners is satisfactory.
36. Staff are adequately involved in the self-assessment report. Inspection findings broadly match those of the report.

Information and communication technology

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

37. A curriculum co-ordinator, two full-time and 57 part-time tutors support 1,491 learners. Currently 92 learners are on adult and community learning programmes, 1,387 are on FE courses with six learners on advanced apprenticeship programmes and six on apprenticeships. Of these two thirds of learners are women, 8% have a disability and less than 3% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Subjects offered include using common information technology (IT) programs and the internet, using IT at work, family history, IT with literacy and numeracy and digital imaging. They range from beginners' taster courses to level 3. Most learning is accredited with nationally recognised qualifications. Provision is in 28 community learning centres, 10 employers' sites, and in up to 70 other venues including pubs and clubs.

Strengths

- High success rates on ITQ courses
- Good development of personal and social skills
- Good range of courses and community venues

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient attention to individual learning needs
- Ineffective quality improvement system

Achievement and standards

38. Achievement and standards for learners are satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. Success rates for the ITQ programme are good at 75% for level 2 and 76% for level 3. This represents 4% of learners. Learners' achievements on other courses are satisfactory and are close to national averages, as partially recognised in the self-assessment. Success rates for all apprentices are broadly satisfactory.

39. Learners develop good levels of personal and social skills. Learners benefit from good tutor support and are well motivated. Many stay beyond the end of sessions to complete their work. Many speak enthusiastically about emailing family and friends, shopping on the internet or extending other interests such as family history. For many isolated learners, the centres and courses greatly add to their quality of life. Learners develop ICT skills that are helpful when they are studying for external qualifications. Employers are enthusiastic about the increasing levels of confidence of apprentices. They work well on their own initiative. A satisfactory proportion of learners progress to further courses, and have greatly improved their quality of life.

Quality of provision

40. The quality of provision is satisfactory. The self-assessment report partially recognised the area for improvement.
41. Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. In good sessions, tutors use a range of teaching techniques to inspire and challenge learners to achieve. In these sessions, learners are encouraged to work in pairs, individually and in groups, and tutors facilitate wide-ranging discussions that enhance learners' understanding. Some learning environments are good. Teachers' support for learning is friendly, patient and sensitive to the age, maturity and confidence levels of their learners, and contributes to the good atmosphere in classes. In a few cases, initial assessment is particularly good though in most it is satisfactory. Training for apprentices is satisfactory. Assessors visit at appropriate intervals. Arrangements for internal verification are adequate.
42. Tutors pay insufficient attention to individual learning needs. They rely too much on workbooks and fail to individualise learning sufficiently. Some more able learners find courses too easy, and their learning lacks pace. Printing facilities on some digital photography courses are inadequate and slow the pace of learning. Many computers in schools still use unreliable floppy discs which are incompatible with learners' home systems. Most tutors insufficiently consider their learners' different aims and abilities in learning or assessment plans. Some tutors set targets but most are too broad for learners to work towards, or to be useful in reviewing progress and identifying potential underachievement. Most learners record their progress regularly but tutors do not use learners' progress to build on their learning plan and to identify and plan new learning goals. In these cases, learners are insufficiently challenged to progress to further courses.
43. The county council offers a particularly good range of IT courses at community venues. Courses range from entry level to level 3. Community centres are well placed in a range of locations across the region, and offer learners an open and welcoming environment where they feel comfortable and motivated to learn. Many learners hear about the centres through word of mouth. Centres offer a range of courses in one place and learners can progress from one course to another. Tutors run courses on week days and in the evening. NALS also offers some open days on Saturdays.
44. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners with skills for life needs are appropriately identified and referred for support. Some IT courses are designed specifically to develop literacy and numeracy skills. Information advice and guidance are satisfactory, and the inspection found that learners were aware of what courses they might progress to. Few learners were on inappropriate courses. Adaptive technology is available and centres make appropriate preparations for learners with disabilities.

Leadership and management

45. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The self-assessment report identified a key area for improvement in the observation of teaching and learning. Staff training is satisfactory. Tutors are offered a wide range of training, including courses on the virtual learning environment and many have taken the opportunity to improve their skills. Links with external organisations are good and the provider works with a range of employers and local councils to widen learner participation. The service promotes equal opportunities appropriately.
46. The self-assessment process is inclusive. Although the report overgraded the curriculum area it was broadly accurate, but insufficiently identified the impact of the issues.
47. Quality improvement is ineffective. Centres respond well to learners' feedback on the quality of accommodation, but course reviews are not aggregated to give an overall picture. Managers observation of teaching and learning are ineffective in some aspects. They have insufficient focus on the quality of learning. Tutors are not regularly observed. The process does not sufficiently improve the quality of teaching. Good practice is not shared well.

Arts, media and publishing

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

48. Arts, media and publishing represent 17% of the total provision. Courses are offered in 26 venues. These include schools, community centres, adult learning centres and village halls. Currently 925 learners are enrolled, of whom 427 are adult and community learners and 498 are on FE provision. Courses include drawing and life drawing, patchwork and quilting, wildlife art, Egyptian dance, community singing, watercolours, stained glass, Northumbrian pipes, acoustic guitar, and photography. Currently 54% of the provision is accredited at level one, two or three. An extensive programme of self-funded courses and clubs, not covered by the scope of this inspection, provide progression into mainstream provision. Most courses are held for two hours each week for ten weeks. Classes are held during the day, twilight and evening. The curriculum is developed by local centre managers supported by 32 part-time tutors. Women constitute 73% of learners, 7% have a disability and approximately 1% are from minority ethnic groups.

Strengths

- High standard of work in stained glass, papermaking and life drawing
- Wide range of courses and venues meet learner needs
- Successful change of the curriculum offer to meet government priorities

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient promotion of equality and diversity in teaching
- Insufficient improvement in weaknesses identified at previous inspection

Achievement and standards

49. Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. However, the self-assessment report inaccurately highlights success rates as a key strength.

50. A high standard of work is evident in stained glass, papermaking and life drawing. Learners develop confidence and enjoy their learning sessions. In stained glass lessons ambitious projects challenge learners' level of experience successfully. In papermaking, learners in a beginner's class participated in a group discussion which raised visual awareness and complemented experimentation to develop ideas.

51. Overall the standard of learners work is satisfactory. Many learners have no prior experience of the visual arts and progress well compared with their prior attainment. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. FE success rates are broadly in line with national averages and are satisfactory

Quality of provision

52. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Inspection findings did not agree with the self-assessment report judgement.
53. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The self-assessment report identified it as good. In the best lessons schemes of work and lesson plans are considered and include a range of activities and tutors clearly challenge learners to do their best. Tutors provide good quality written and verbal feedback to learners both during lessons and through the assessment process. Teachers in beginner's classes often concentrate on the development of an appropriate range of technical skills including basic watercolour techniques, traditional patchwork and card making techniques. However, little development of wider skills exists, such as contextualisation to other artists, experimentation and originality. Many sessions are very traditional in approach and do not fully challenge learners. Tutors do not always identify and record evidence of learners' learning goals and outcomes consistently well. Some individual learning plans contain lists of topics or skills which are insufficiently individualised. Where tutors are good at planning learning goals and setting targets, good practice is not always sufficiently shared.
54. Programmes meet the needs and interests of learners well. A wide range of courses and venues are available, in agreement with the self-assessment report. Learners take advantage of the progression opportunities from full cost and non accredited programmes to a range of accredited programmes at Level 1, 2 and 3. For example, in 2006/07, 100 learners made the transition to accredited programmes after studying on adult and community courses.
55. Advice, guidance and support are satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. Support for learners with skills for life needs is adequate. However, not all learners are aware of the available services for additional learning support and few learners take this up.

Leadership and management

56. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as recognised in the self-assessment report. Change to the curriculum offer to meet government priorities has been successful. NALS increased accredited courses from 35% in 2007/08 to 54% in 2008/09. On these courses good evidence exists of learners' progress through to accreditation. NALS have also managed to maintain most traditional programmes by creating self-supporting groups in community centres rather than continue using government funding. Learners progress from these groups into mainstream provision well.
57. However, improvement in weaknesses identified at previous inspection is insufficient. There is inadequate subject specialist focus in staff development activities and quality improvement strategies. Feedback from observations of teaching and learning does not always focus upon the affect on learning.

58. NALS insufficiently promote equality and diversity within courses, for example, teachers do not set projects that involve the research or development of other cultures. Teachers' and managers' awareness of how to promote equality and diversity is low. Tutors insufficiently consider other cultures or wider social issues in lesson planning or materials.
59. Although course reviews take place regularly no systematic formal input into the self-assessment and quality improvement processes takes place. The curriculum area self-assessment report overstates strengths and does not fully identify areas for further development.
60. Insufficient use of new technologies in art, which was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection, has not been resolved. However, the standard of specialist accommodation and resources is satisfactory overall, most studios have sufficient equipment to enable learners to develop a range of basic technical skills.

Preparation for life and work

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

61. Preparation for life and work, and skills for life courses are offered to learners at 38 community centres and 14 employers' premises. Courses occur during the daytime, twilight and in the evenings. Currently 65 learners are on adult and community learning courses, 463 on FE provision, 84 on E2E courses and 13 on Train to Gain. Women constitute 68%, 12% have a disability while 6% are from minority ethnic groups. A small number of white Europeans attend in the Berwick area. Out of 26 staff, 13 are full-time. All courses now offer nationally recognised qualifications.

Strengths

- Good development of learners motivation and confidence
- Good focus on functional and work related literacy and numeracy
- Good information and advice
- Very effective strategies for reaching priority groups

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates on level 1 and short FE courses
- Insufficient individual planning and target-setting
- Ineffective action to improve teaching and learning

Achievement and standards

62. Achievement and standards are satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. Learners develop their confidence and motivation very well. Tutors use particularly effective strategies to engage learners with low levels of motivation and ability. Learners respond well and actively contribute to discussion, regularly complete homework and enjoy their classes. Learners recognise their developing skills, and this motivates them to continue in learning. Many are more confident to fill out forms in public, apply for promotion at work and to help children with homework. In most cases, learners attend regularly and few withdraw early.

63. Learner progression rates on E2E are satisfactory, and have continued to rise for the last 3 years to 65% in 2007/08. Progress for some learners on Train to Gain is slow. Success rates on level 1, and short further education courses, are low. In 2006/07, 50% of learners passed their level 1 test, compared with the national average of 72%. In the current year, this has improved to 58%, but remains low. Learners on level 2 courses achieve better. In 2006/07, 70% passed national tests at level 2, though this has declined to 60% in 2007/08. Short course pass rates improved from 63%, to 75%. The most recent results for 2007/08 are

incomplete at the time of inspection. The service has recently placed more emphasis on accredited courses, but it is too early to see the affect of this.

Quality of provision

64. The quality of provision is satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and the inspection findings broadly agree with the self-assessment report. NALS' tutors have a good focus on the development of functional and work related literacy and numeracy for learners. Across all programmes tutors provide contextualized material linked to the life and employment needs of learners. They use good questioning techniques and encourage the less confident. Assessment links closely to award requirements and is satisfactory. Though early in the year, many learners are already aware of their progress. Tutors use learning resources well to support learning. This includes appropriate use of web based learning where tutors use differing levels of material to support individuals well. However, in one centre, internet failure significantly delays on line testing on E2E courses.
65. Appropriate initial assessment is carefully carried out and recorded, though the outcomes do not always have a sufficient affect on lesson planning. In mixed ability classes, tutors do not plan for individual needs well enough. More able learners often waste time on activities that are too easy, while less able learners fail to engage. Lesson planning rarely identifies a sufficient range of activities to meet learners differing needs. Questioning is insufficiently tailored to learners' abilities.
66. Courses meet the needs and interests of learners well. This was correctly recognised by the provider in their self-assessment. The course offer is varied and wide, with a good range of accredited learning from pre-entry levels to level 2. The E2E programme effectively uses practical, construction and motor vehicle activities to engage young people in deprived communities. Learning venues are well-positioned within local communities and are easy to reach.
67. Support and guidance for learners is satisfactory. Advice and guidance are good. Effective pre-course signposting helps learners identify the correct programme. Well trained and qualified staff provide good on course support and guidance that helps learners overcome difficulties. Staff give good progression advice and approximately 30% of learners go on to higher level courses. Learners with disabilities are identified early in their programme and are provided with suitable equipment and support. Volunteers work appropriately in several centres. NALS use good links with specialist providers to support learners with disabilities. This includes communicators for the deaf and specialist dyslexia testing. However, analysis of the effectiveness of additional support for future planning is insufficient.

Leadership and management

68. Leadership and management and equality of opportunity are satisfactory. NALS partially recognised the strengths and areas for improvement in the self-assessment.
69. NALS has very effective strategies for reaching priority groups. They make good use of programmes, venues and partnerships to engage priority groups. Programmes are carefully planned and respond very well to the needs of local communities, and strategic partners. NALS have excellent links with a local hospital and use these well to provide on-site literacy and numeracy support to young people with mental health disorders. NALS has good links with employers and learning is responsive to employers' recruitment and staff development priorities. Support for staff is satisfactory. Tutors are part of an effective network of local and county-wide support. Staff training and development is satisfactory. Resources are adequate.
70. Some actions to improve the quality of provision are ineffective. Two areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection remain. The observation of teaching and learning has not identified any key areas for improvement. Managers use course review and learner feedback locally. However, they are not adequately used to develop service-wide improvement plans. The self-assessment report insufficiently recognised some of the areas for improvement identified at inspection and some strengths are no more than normal practice.

Business, administration and law

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

71. NALS has 488 learners in business administration and law. Of these 58 are young apprentices, 42 are apprentices, 27 are advanced apprentices and 23 are Train to Gain learners. Currently 328 learners are on FE programmes, 81% of all learners are female, 2% have a disability and less than 3% are from minority ethnic communities. Provision is managed by a curriculum leader, with seven full-time and 26 part-time tutors or trainers. Learners are working towards qualifications in customer service, business administration, accounting, information technology and law. Work based learners are placed with approved local employers, such as local authorities, schools, emergency services and local tourist attractions, who provide training and work experience. Adult and community learning learners attend classes, at local schools, during afternoons and evenings.

Strengths

- Good development of confidence and employability skills
- High success rates on apprenticeship programmes
- Good strategies to engage 14 to 16 year old learners

Areas for improvement

- Insufficiently effective progress reviews and use of targets in work-based learning
- Insufficient reinforcement of equality and diversity throughout learners programmes

Achievement and standards

72. Achievement and standards have improved and are satisfactory, as recognised in the self-assessment report. Confidence and the acquisition of employability skills for all learners are good although the service has not recognised this sufficiently in the self-assessment report. Adult and community learners demonstrate increasing development of practical vocational skills such as the use of information technology, book-keeping and accounts. Work-based learners acquire effective workplace behaviours and attitudes such as working as a team. Most learners take on increasing responsibility and more complex tasks as learning progresses. A total of 35% of apprentices have further enhanced their skills through the achievement of additional qualifications such as word and text processing.

73. Overall success rates on apprenticeship programmes are high. Advanced apprenticeship rates are 86% in 2007/08 and have been consistently well above national averages for the previous three years. Apprenticeship rates were high in 2004/05 but gradually declined to around national averages in 2006/07. Rates

have significantly improved to 85% in 2007/08. Timely success rates on apprentice and advanced apprenticeships have been historically low but have steadily improved and are now close to national averages. Progression into employment for apprentices is good at 82% in 2007/08.

74. Overall success rates for Train to Gain are satisfactory having improved from 73% in 2006/07, to 83% in 2007/08, although timely success rates are low. Success rates on accredited provision in adult and community learning are satisfactory overall. They demonstrate significant improvement from historically low rates, particularly on long courses which have risen to 69% in 2007/08. The progress and standards of all learners' work is satisfactory.
75. The first cohort of young apprentices, who are halfway through their two year learning programme, are making satisfactory progress. Almost all have achieved the technical certificate in business administration and most have achieved one or two NVQ units.

Quality of provision

76. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, which was reflected in the self-assessment report. In work-based learning, learners receive individual coaching in the workplace and sometimes in the training centre. Assessment is satisfactory and assessors use a good range of assessment methods. In work-based programmes much of the assessment process is assessor led, and assessors do not always cross reference evidence effectively. Teaching and learning in FE programmes is satisfactory. In the better lessons, activities are varied and challenging. However, in other sessions learners are not always sufficiently stimulated and activities do not always suit their individual needs.
77. Progress reviews and use of targets in work-based learning are insufficiently effective. No long-term targets are set on individual learning plans. Medium-term review targets are not always specific or sufficiently challenging, and often relate mainly to assessment. Few targets for personal and skill development are apparent. Employers are not always sufficiently involved in planning and monitoring learners' programmes. Initial assessment is satisfactory across the provision.
78. The range of provision is satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. The programmes offered meet the needs of learners and employers. The service provides appropriate progression opportunities to higher level qualifications.
79. Support for learners is satisfactory. Additional learning support and information advice and guidance adequately meets the needs of the learners. Pastoral support is satisfactory with appropriate intervention, when required, to ensure learners remain on programme. Induction is satisfactory as is support for skills for life.

Leadership and management

80. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. The strategy to engage 14-16 year old learners is good. It responds well to the local LSC identified priorities arising from the strategic area review. The service also recognised its own declining recruitment to apprenticeship programmes. The curriculum manager effectively uses their involvement in local strategic partnerships with Connexions, LSC and local employers to further promote and develop work-based learning through the young apprenticeship programme. The service provides very good information, advice and guidance to schools, pupils, parents and employers through a wide range of media including presentations at open evenings. Three schools participated in the initial project and this has now expanded to seven schools with an increase from 20 to 58 learners.
81. Accommodation and equipment are satisfactory. The progress towards use of e-learning has been slow but the service has recently purchased a new system to implement e-portfolios in business administration. In work-based learning, vetting and monitoring of workplace is appropriate.
82. Internal verification is satisfactory. The observation of teaching and learning covers all aspects of learning but the system focuses more on teaching than on learning. Actions are not always specific enough nor followed through adequately. The collection and use of learner and employer feedback is adequate. The self-assessment process is broadly inclusive but the report is insufficiently judgemental.
83. The reinforcement of equality and diversity throughout learners' programmes is insufficient. Learners receive adequate information during induction, learner handbooks and online learning. Assessors do not adequately check or raise awareness of learners understanding and application of employers' policies in the workplace throughout their programmes. Many learners demonstrate awareness and understanding that is inadequate or too basic. NALS have provided insufficient recent training to ensure staff are trained to reinforce equality and diversity with learners. Promotion of equality and diversity is insufficient in teaching and training sessions across the provision.

Learners' achievements

Annex

Success rates on work-based learning, Train to Gain and NVQ programmes managed by the provider 2006 to 2008

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	2004/05	overall	67	51%	48%	34%	34%
		timely	65	23%	31%	17%	22%
	2005/06	overall	61	57%	53%	44%	44%
		timely	68	25%	34%	19%	27%
	2006/07	overall	69	62%	64%	51%	58%
		timely	55	29%	43%	25%	37%
Apprenticeships	2004/05	overall	213	51%	51%	48%	39%
		timely	219	24%	29%	24%	22%
	2005/06	overall	281	53%	58%	47%	52%
		timely	280	35%	38%	32%	34%
	2006/07	overall	178	64%	65%	57%	61%
		timely	163	43%	47%	40%	44%

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** Provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the Individual Learning Record (ILR)

When available and validated by the LSC

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by the provider 2006 to 2008

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain NVQ	2006/07	overall	41	78.0%
		timely	28	68.2%
	2007/08	overall	71	78.0%
		timely	56	61.5%

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** NVQ qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the provider before inspection

Outcomes on Entry to Employment programmes managed by the provider 2005 to 2008

Year	Number of leavers in the year	Achieved objectives rate* (%)	Progression rate** (%)
2005/06	187	30%	44%
2006/07	204	52%	45%
2007/08	173	49%	65%

* These are key objectives identified for each learner following an E2E programme

** Progression is measured in terms learners' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period.

Note: E2E 'achieved objective' and 'progression' rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the college/provider before inspection

Learners' achievements in FE funded, accredited provision offered by adult and community learning providers

Success rates on accredited entry and level 1 (combined) and level 2 qualifications, by length, expected end year and age.

2006 to 2008, compared with the national rates for GFE colleges.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	19+		National Rate	Diff
		Starts – Transfers	ACL Provider Rate		
1 long	2006/07	2018	61.5	72.0	-10.5
	2007/08*	679	64.6		
2 long	2006/07	1279	61.4	69.5	-8.1
	2007/08*	471	68.1		
Short**	2006/07	477	69.6	81.9	-12.3
	2007/08*	605	63.1		

* ACL provider data not validated (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

** Courses over 5 weeks long