

Buckinghamshire County Council

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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
- Leisure, travel and tourism
- Arts, media and publishing
- Languages, literature and culture
- Preparation for life and work

Description of the provider

1. Buckinghamshire County Council delivers its adult and community learning through Buckinghamshire Adult Learning (BAL), a directly managed local authority service. Courses take place in 199 locations, including dedicated adult learning centres, and school, community and employer premises. They are largely from entry-level to level 3, with teaching qualification courses at level 4. Courses are available daytime, evening and weekends. A residential summer school operates from Missenden Abbey. BAL has developed its provision to include national vocational qualifications (NVQs), Train to Gain, and tailored courses for employers. The service has a subcontract from Milton Keynes College to offer skills for life courses in the community, as part of an Offender Learning and Skill Service (OLASS) contract. BAL offers substantial **learndirect** provision, but this was not inspected.
2. Adult and community learning and the Train to Gain provision is funded by the Thames Valley Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In 2007/08, 16,036 learners made nearly 25,000 enrolments, across 2,576 courses. Around 74% of learners are on non-accredited courses. During the week of the inspection, there were 6,245 learners across 730 courses.
3. Buckinghamshire is largely an affluent county. The south of the county borders London and is largely made up of commuter communities. The north is largely rural with small market towns, although extensive house building is planned in the next twenty years. Unemployment is low, but there are residents in urban and rural areas who experience significant localised deprivation and social disadvantage. Eight per cent of the county's population are from minority ethnic groups, rising to 12% in High Wycombe.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Work-based learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Work-based learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Work-based learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Work-based learning	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care	Good: Grade 2
Information and communication technology	Good: Grade 2
Leisure, travel and tourism	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Arts, media and publishing	Good: Grade 2
Languages, literature and culture	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Preparation for life and work	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

Adult and community learning
Work-based learning

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of provision is good. Provision is good in: health, public services and care, information and communication technology (ICT) and in art, design and media. It is satisfactory in: leisure, travel and tourism, languages, literature and culture, and in preparation for life and work. Achievement and standards are good. Learners' achievement of their own personal learning goals, their attainment of skills and their standards of work are often good. Overall success rates for non-accredited provision are consistently high. For the smaller number of accredited courses, success rates are of mixed quality and some are low, but they have improved in the last year. They are high for the significant number of NVQ learners.
5. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Learning sessions are often good, but most teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the best learning sessions, learners are appropriately challenged and tutors have high expectations. Weaker learning sessions are often characterised by poorer planning to meet learners' needs with insufficient checking on learning. Tutors are well qualified and resources are satisfactory. The assessment and monitoring of learners' progress is satisfactory overall. It is good in work-based learning.
6. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. They have good access to a wide range of provision which has been successfully reshaped and extended. The participation of learners from disadvantaged areas has grown. Good partnership working and a sound knowledge of local community needs are used well to develop the provision. Links with employers are good.
7. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Initial guidance and recruitment, and on-course guidance are satisfactory. Tutors and other staff support learners well. Childcare facilities are good. Facilities for learners with disabilities are well promoted. Learners' additional support needs are well identified, but the take up of support by learners is low.
8. Leadership and management are good. Strategic planning is very good. Internal and external partnerships are very effective. The management of staff, including communication is good. Management actions are based on a good understanding of what needs to be done to further improve the provision. Quality improvement is satisfactorily enabled and the self-assessment process is satisfactory. The scheme for the observation of teaching and learning is extensive, but not yet sufficiently thorough. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

9. BAL has demonstrated that it has good capacity to make further improvements. Since the previous inspection, the effectiveness of steps taken to promote improvements has been good. Achievement and standards are now good and where there are causes for concern appropriate actions are leading to improvement. Two of the six curriculum areas inspected have been awarded higher grades and the others have maintained their grade, during a period when the curriculum has been successfully remodelled and extended. Teaching and learning have improved since the previous inspection. These outcomes build upon the findings of the Ofsted monitoring visit in 2007, when in all of the six themes inspected, significant progress was noted. Good leadership and management have established a culture where making improvement is seen as a matter of routine for all levels of staff. The thoroughness and accuracy of the self-assessment process is satisfactory and action planning leads to quality improvement.

Key strengths

- Good development of learners' skills and confidence
- High level of responsiveness to learners' needs through the wide choice of courses
- Skilful implementation of strategic plans for the benefit of learners
- Very effective partnerships
- Good management of tutors

Key areas for improvement

- Low number of learners in receipt of additional learning support
- Insufficient thoroughness of the observation of teaching and learning scheme
- Service-wide application of systems to recognise and record learners' progress and achievement
- Use of data to manage and improve provision

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

Adult and community learning

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Work-based learning

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

10. Achievement and standards are good. Learners' achievement of their own personal learning goals, the development of their skills, and their standards of work are good. In ICT, learners in the early stages of their courses achieve standards above expected levels. In art learning sessions, learners produce water colours of near professional quality, and on level 1 craft courses, they rapidly develop their technical skills. Learners following NVQ courses in childcare demonstrate very good attainment and practical skills. Learners make good progress and their attendance is good overall.
11. Learners' success rates on non-accredited courses are often high. Over the last three years, the overall success rate has been above 90% and was 93% in 2007/08. For the most substantial areas of provision, success rates for 2007/08, based upon recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) data, are nearly all above 90%. Learners' retention is consistently high.
12. For accredited, further education provision, the overall success rate was 75% in 2005/06, which is around the national rate for general further education colleges. It fell to 61% in 2006/07, but the largely complete data for 2007/08 show an improvement to 66%. Retention has remained consistently good, at above 85%, over the last three years. Most of the fall in overall success rates was as a result of significantly poorer performance on short courses in 2006/07, especially in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), reflecting the national changes to accredited provision in this area. Largely complete data for 2007/08 show significant improvement in ESOL success rates.
13. Success rates are high on work-based learning courses. They are at, or just above, 80% overall for the last three years. Overall success for Train to Gain learners in 2007/08 was good, although the timely success rate was only 28%. Overall retention for all courses is consistently good with no specific differences in learners' achievements, by age, gender or ethnicity.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Adult and community learning

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Work-based learning

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

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14. The quality of provision and of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are good in work-based learning. In health and social care, in arts, media and publishing and in ICT much teaching and learning are good, but in other areas the quality is more mixed, with too little teaching and learning better than satisfactory. In the best learning sessions, particularly in art and craft, and in work-based learning, learners are appropriately challenged, and tutors have high expectations. Weaker aspects of teaching and learning are characterised by failures in planning to meet learners' needs, insufficiently checking on learning and not anticipating possible difficulties learners might have with technical vocabulary or new concepts.
 15. Learners are treated with respect in learning sessions, but the active promotion of equality of opportunity in learning session planning mainly features in those aspects of the curriculum where it is an essential component, such as childcare or citizenship. Naturally occurring opportunities to promote greater understanding of equality are missed.
 16. Arrangements for the identification of learners' additional needs for literacy, language and numeracy support are satisfactory and have been enhanced this academic year. On accredited courses, learners benefit from the routine screening to identify their literacy and numeracy needs. On basic skills courses, all learners have an interview that includes screening, with follow up diagnostic assessment. However, take-up of support is poor.
 17. Learning resources are satisfactory overall. Tutors are well qualified. In sport and leisure, some have significant professional standing in their specialism. The use of information and learning technology (ILT) as a tool for teaching has improved, with the introduction of interactive whiteboards and a virtual learning environment.
 18. Assessment is satisfactory overall. In work-based learning, assessment and verification procedures are good. The use of the outcomes of initial assessment, to develop learning goals and projected outcomes for learners, is insufficient. Despite much training and support for tutors, the use of systems to set targets and record learners' progress and achievement are not sufficiently understood, or used, across all areas of the provision.
 19. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. BAL has maintained a high number of courses in personal and leisure learning across the county. Provision has been successfully reshaped in response to national and local priorities. Participation has been successfully widened in disadvantaged areas of the county. Learners are attracted to enrol on short courses that serve as the first point of return to learning. Discrete provision has also been developed for learners in community centres. 'Smarter Cafes' in community venues, including libraries, have been successful in attracting learners to ICT provision. Progression rates from short courses onto other courses are over 50%. The numbers of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased steadily, from 23% in 2006 to 34% in 2008. The number of new learners overall has increased significantly across all main areas of provision. Courses in preparation for life and work are attracting larger numbers of learners, with many returning to study after a significant gap in their learning. The volume of work-related provision in childcare has increased.
 20. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Initial guidance and recruitment are satisfactory, with a range of recruitment methods matched to courses. Course leaflets are now much clearer and much more accurate. Learners have benefited from improvements in

recruitment. For example, success rates on GCSE mathematics have improved since recruitment processes have included taster sessions. On-course guidance has also improved, with visits by guidance staff to courses in disadvantaged areas, and BAL works with other partners to provide guidance on courses where open or supported employment are possible destinations for learners.

21. Tutors and other staff support learners satisfactorily. Learners receive a useful handbook which includes information about complaints and is available in a range of formats and languages. Learners are encouraged to complete satisfaction forms. Focused meetings with learners to elicit feedback about the provision have recently been introduced. BAL funds 400 crèche places across the county. BAL ensures that facilities for learners with disabilities are well advertised in publicity materials, and the accessibility statement outlines clearly the adjustments that can be made, including hearing loops, materials in different formats and adapted keyboards. Learners in receipt of support achieve as well as other learners.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Adult and community learning

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Work-based learning

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

22. Leadership and management are good. Strategic planning is very good and is particularly effective in ensuring the delivery of the LSC and the County Council's priorities. Planning is based on detailed research to underpin long-term decisions, coupled with good liaison with interested parties. Plans are clear and are properly translated by managers to ensure that the best use is made of resources. For instance, a carefully managed reduction in provision to match funding and meet priorities has also addressed local learners' expectations for a wider variety of courses. The number of tutors has been carefully reduced, helping to ensure a manageable core of tutors, properly recruited, trained and developed. Work-based learning is subcontracted. BAL satisfactorily manages this provision, with appropriate monitoring and communication with the providers.
23. Internal and external partnerships are very effective in improving the quality and range of provision. The 2006 restructuring facilitated closer and more effective working with other county departments. The use of resources is more effective and customers in one service now become learners in another. A peer review group actively assists the improvement of observations of teaching and learning and the self-assessment process. External partnerships are used well to meet local needs. Significant activity to contact many local employers has improved the uptake of training.
24. The management of staff is good. The organisational structure ensures close working between specialist curriculum managers, tutor co-ordinators and part-time tutors. Communication is good. A comprehensive and easy to read tutor handbook helps staff develop and run their courses. Staff development is good. A specialist department offers short courses and longer professional development. Staff development days are well attended and cover a good range of relevant subjects.

25. Quality improvement is satisfactorily enabled through a carefully managed cycle of activities. Necessary changes are identified through such things as extensive learner feedback, the involvement of other providers in peer and course reviews. Identification and sharing of good practice is encouraged, although not consistently exploited. The thoroughness and accuracy of the self-assessment process is satisfactory. It includes a satisfactory range of evidence. The process leads to a reasonably detailed improvement plan, which is reviewed regularly and contributes to raising the quality of provision.
26. The scheme for observing teaching and learning is extensive. All tutors are observed at least once in two years, with new tutors observed more often. The scheme is well documented and supported by appropriate training. Observation grades show steady improvement over the years, but grading is overly generous, despite moderation. Observation criteria are not particularly challenging. The scheme places insufficient emphasis on the main aspects of learning. BAL uses the observation outcomes well as a focus for constructive debate with tutors, but the scheme does not provide a fully objective measure of quality or an action plan for improvement. The RARPA system is insufficiently thorough to comprehensively identify areas for improvement.
27. Data is used satisfactorily in routine work. A service-wide system provides a series of reports that are appropriately used by all levels of management for monitoring and some improvement purposes. However, BAL under uses the extensive detailed information. It does not analyse success rates by particular groups or centres. Trend data is not easily accessible.
28. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. There are many good aspects at the organisational level. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and up to date, and meet current government legislation, including the race, disability and gender equality schemes. Staff training is satisfactory and includes some useful online material with some good guidance in the tutor handbook. BAL has carried out several detailed external reviews to ensure that the provision for those with disabilities is appropriate. Work by the community team, specialist outreach staff, and carefully managed marketing and pricing strategies have been particularly effective in recruiting learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds. BAL has exceeded its targets for recruitment from minority ethnic groups. Success data for these learners are not reviewed regularly enough. Promotion of equality amongst learners is insufficient. Tutors do not routinely use the many opportunities they have to provide examples or promote different approaches to learning to develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity.
29. The service does not fully meet government requirements on safeguarding learners. The main systems, such as criminal record checks and named responsible persons, are in place. However, training and guidance for tutors is insufficient to ensure they can fulfil their obligations.

What learners like:

- Convenient and close centres
- ‘Really good quality tutors and staff’
- ‘The way that we all (the learners) support each other’
- The opportunity to make new friends
- ‘A really thorough interview and assessment helped me start at the right level’
- ‘The friendly tutor helped me overcome my nerves about doing a course after all these years’
- ‘Having an extra assistant in the class is good for our practical exercises’
- The small size of the classes
- Learning new skills

What learners think could improve:

- ‘We would like more hours on our ESOL course’
- The extent of feedback on the points they raise in evaluation questionnaires
- The amount of individual attention in ICT learning sessions
- Snack bar and seating facilities at the Stokenchurch centre
- ‘Provide a rest room at Amersham’

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care

Good: Grade 2

Context

30. A range of provision is offered in health and social care, childcare and complementary therapies, with 555 learners currently attending accredited and non-accredited courses. Six external care training providers are contracted to provide the NVQ in health and social care to 258 learners at levels 2 and 3. These are: Aylesbury Training Group, Care in the Shires, the Fremantle Trust, High Town Praetorian Churches Housing Association, Solutions to Training and the National Society for Epilepsy. Seven learners follow a Train to Gain programme. Some 174 learners attend non-accredited courses in complementary therapies.

Strengths

- High success rates
- Good teaching and learning
- Good assessment
- Good learners' induction

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient sharing of good practice

Achievement and standards

31. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates are high on both work-based learning and adult community learning courses. On accredited courses, which are largely NVQs, success rates have been at, or just above, 80% overall for the last three years. Overall success rates on non-accredited courses have been consistently high and were 92% in 2007/08. The overall success rate for Train to Gain learners in 2007/08 was good, although the timely success rate was only 28%. Retention is consistently good overall. Attendance is good. The standard of learners' work is high. Most learners make good progress and are on target to complete their qualification. They demonstrate high aims and motivation to take their own learning further. Progression to higher learning programmes is mostly good.

32. Learners enjoy learning new approaches and develop good vocational knowledge and skills. They greatly improve their communication skills and grow in confidence. In the workplace, learners take responsibility for a wide variety of tasks and work to high professional standards.

Quality of provision

33. The quality of provision and of teaching and learning are good. Tutors are well qualified, experienced and confident in their roles. Tutors are knowledgeable and link theory and practical work well. Schemes of work and learning sessions are well conceived, with appropriate timings, clear aims and objectives. A range of teaching methods are effectively used to promote and extend learning. Tutors establish a positive working relationship with their learners, who are encouraged to contribute and participate. Tutors give clear answers and explanations to learners' questions. Learners are well motivated and enthusiastic and enjoy their learning sessions. Accommodation at most venues is satisfactory. Training rooms are spacious, bright and fit for purpose.
34. Assessment practices are good. Assessment tasks are well planned and detailed and outline the relevant activity and assessment methods appropriately. Direct observations are well recorded. NVQ portfolios are mostly of a good standard. Assessments are comprehensive and cross-referenced to several NVQ units. Learners receive positive and constructive, verbal and written, feedback on assessment outcomes. Qualified internal verifiers work effectively within a detailed and clear framework, regularly sampling activities and learners' progress.
35. The extent to which the needs and interests of learners are met is good. A good range of courses offer flexible start and teaching times. Staff consult and work in partnership with many organisations, communities and individuals in the health and social care sector to determine their needs and to raise their interest in learning.
36. Support and guidance is satisfactory overall. Induction is good. It is well structured and memorable and provides a good foundation for learners' further activities. The emphasis is on encouraging learners to work together and to ensure they have a full understanding of all aspects of their training. Learners value their induction because it raises their confidence. Tutors and assessors benefit from a good range of current occupational experience and skills. They are easily accessible and responsive, working flexibly to meet learners' needs. Learners are appropriately recruited and assessed for the right course. They value the support they receive very highly and recognise that it helps them to stay on course and achieve.
37. The initial assessment of learners is satisfactory. Learners undergo a basic skills initial assessment scan. If the learner achieves one level below the requirement for the course they are referred to the basic skills team for a full diagnostic assessment and have the opportunity to attend a literacy course. Tutors are also alerted to give extra support. However, during 2007/08, 27 learners were referred but none took up the opportunity for additional support.

Leadership and management

38. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Tutors and managers are well qualified and experienced and work well as a team. Communication is satisfactory with regular staff and provider meetings. The RARPA process is well executed. Equality of opportunity is promoted well across the curriculum area and staff fully understand learners' diverse cultural backgrounds.
39. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Internal verification in work-based learning courses is thorough. Courses are satisfactorily evaluated and learners' feedback collated. However, the analysis of the feedback is used insufficiently to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The self-assessment process is satisfactory overall, but the report does not clearly identify the strengths and areas for improvement. The sharing of good practice is insufficient. Management arrangements do not promote the sharing of good practice.

Information and communication technology

Good: Grade 2

Context

40. At the time of inspection, 196 learners were on accredited courses and 282 on non-accredited courses. Qualifications range from entry level to level 3, with the 'Gentle Introduction' courses attracting the most enrolments. Courses typically consist of either five weekly sessions, each of two hours, or 34 weekly sessions of 2.5 hours for higher level workshop-based programmes. Courses are offered during the day and evening at seven community centres throughout the county and at partnership venues. Most learners are women and 69 % of all learners are aged 50 or over.

Strengths

- High success rates
- High standard of learners' work
- Good teaching and learning
- Good management of tutors

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient learner involvement in progress reviews
- Unsatisfactory implementation of some health and safety guidance

Achievement and standards

41. Achievement and standards are good, with high success rates across the provision. Retention rates are high and have exceeded 90% on all courses for three consecutive years. Success rates for accredited courses are good. Approximately 75% of learners were successful in both 2005/06 and 2006/07. Data for 2007/08 suggest similar outcomes. Success rates on non-accredited courses declined in 2007/08, but remain high at 87%.
42. Learners' work is of a high standard, with some particularly good examples of advanced document preparation and manipulation. Beginners quickly gain confidence in the use of computers and standard software packages. Learners on the popular digital photography courses make rapid progress, confidently connecting their cameras to computers, transferring and editing their photographs. More advanced learners expertly combine clip art, photography, borders and text effects in the production of good quality documentation. Learners enjoy their studies and respond well to their tutors. A good sense of community prevails in learning sessions, with helpful peer support a common feature.

Quality of provision

43. The quality of provision and of teaching and learning are good. In most learning sessions, clearly presented learning objectives show learners what to expect. In the best learning sessions, the objectives are reviewed frequently and tutors involve learners in a variety of interesting activities, using computers, interactive whiteboards and other learning aids. Tutors respond efficiently to learners' request for assistance. Volunteers or assistant tutors ably assist tutors in some learning sessions. These arrangements work well, particularly in

the Smarter Cafes, enabling differentiated support for learners following different activities. Learners receive good quality, colourful handouts. In the Smarter Cafes each learner can access a library of short video clips, accompanied by commentary that provides revision of basic computer operations. In a small number of learning sessions, some tutors occasionally introduce technical terms without sufficient explanation and others miss opportunities to reinforce learning through questioning.

44. Tutors are suitably qualified and experienced. Physical resources are generally satisfactory but, at some centres, seats and computer screens are not adjustable. Most centres have good access for learners with restricted mobility. However, at one centre a narrow staircase forms the only access to learning sessions. Computers are fit for purpose but during the inspection some network connections were slow, causing frustration for learners. Most centres are suitably equipped with data projectors and interactive whiteboards together with a useful range of adaptive technology.
45. Learners' involvement in progress reviews is insufficient. Learners lack sufficient ownership of their own progress. Although they complete an initial self-assessment of their knowledge, tutors often do not use the outcomes to assist short-term target-setting or to provide the basis for an ongoing record of progress against the course objectives. The mid-course review of each learner's progress does not result in action planning. Some tutors have modified the standard documentation to include an action plan, but this practice is not generally adopted.
46. The extent to which the needs and interests of learners are met is satisfactory. ICT provision provides a reasonable range of courses with suitable progression from entry level to level 3. Promotion of community involvement through the Smarter Cafes initiative is effective, with waiting lists at some centres. Community partnerships such as the Healthy Living Centre are proving successful in improving work-related skills in areas of social deprivation. Learners' requests for further courses receive a good response, with special courses prepared.
47. Advice, guidance and support are good. Each course has a clearly-written information sheet. Responses to learners' questionnaires indicate very high levels of satisfaction with their courses and the support they receive. Arrangements for identifying learners' additional support needs are clear. Volunteers and assistant tutors provide good in-class additional support.

Leadership and management

48. Leadership and management are good. Tutor coordinators support and manage their tutors well. They maintain good communication and share good practice effectively through frequent e-mail contact and the new virtual learning environment. The well documented monthly meetings of the ICT management team sometimes lack a clear time frame for the actions identified. Staff development is effectively encouraged. Part-time tutors receive a payment to attend the annual staff development meeting. Themes such as active learning techniques and the promotion of equality and diversity have successfully impacted upon delivery of the provision. Equality of opportunity is satisfactorily promoted.
49. Quality improvement systems are satisfactory but occasionally lack sufficient monitoring of recommended actions. The self-assessment process is satisfactory, although part-time

tutors' understanding of the significance of self-assessment is poor. The self-assessment report identifies some of the strengths identified during the inspection but overstates others. The key areas for improvement identified during the inspection were not in the report. The overall grade awarded for the provision is the same as that in the self-assessment report.

50. The implementation of some health and safety guidance is unsatisfactory. A generic risk-assessment covers the tutor's role, but this fails to take into account some specific duties of lone workers, such as the securing of learning centres at night and the transport of sets of laptops by private vehicle. Tutors do pay particular attention to alerting learners to the health and safety implications of computer use, but a small number of centres have physical resources that prevent learners from adopting best practice.

Leisure, travel & tourism

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

51. Mostly non-accredited courses are offered in sport, leisure and recreation at a wide variety of centres throughout the county. At the time of inspection, 79 courses had 742 enrolments in areas such as yoga, bridge, tai chi, pilates, fitness, golf and badminton. One course leads to a national accredited qualification in exercise to music. Just over 80% of learners are female and 2% of all learners are from minority ethnic groups. Provision is available throughout the daytime and evening. Some is also available at weekends and during the summer months.

Strengths

- Good development of learners' skills and their fitness
- Particularly good professional expertise amongst tutors

Areas for improvement

- Poor individual target-setting
- Insufficient use of performance data
- Weak scheme for the observation of teaching and learning

Achievement and standards

52. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. The development of learners' skills and their fitness is good. Learners achieve a good range of skills in their techniques and demonstrations. Programmes enable learners to become more confident and more independent in their daily activities. Overall fitness levels are maintained or improved. For example, learners recovering from operations increase in confidence and improve in mobility. The social benefits of attending courses are particularly important for many learners. Many have been able to reduce their visits to specialists, such as physiotherapists or their doctor. Learners' individual needs, county healthy community targets and national agendas, such as tackling obesity, are being met.
53. Success rates on the non-accredited provision are high, but in the expected range for the courses offered. Retention rates overall are satisfactory. Most courses last for ten weeks, with many learners enrolling again for the next term. These courses usually retain most learners. Attendance is satisfactory on most courses, at over 70% overall. Learners enjoy taking part in their courses and demonstrate high levels of satisfaction.

Quality of provision

54. The quality of provision and of teaching and learning are satisfactory. Many tutors plan learning sessions very carefully and produce detailed advance documentation to assist them. They work well with learners and help them to feel at ease. However, many tutors do not effectively evaluate the outcomes of their learning sessions, including the extent to which learning has taken place.
55. Tutors have particularly good professional expertise. All tutors work on a part-time basis and still work as fitness or leisure professionals. They are well qualified in their subject area and undertake a good range of ongoing professional development. Some tutors have represented their sport at a professional level and have a good understanding of the latest aspects of good practice. Learners benefit from tutors' good links and networking in their occupational fields at international, national and local level.
56. Accommodation is satisfactory. It includes facilities that are of a professional standard. Most centres have appropriate access for people with restricted mobility. Parking, lighting and signs at most centres are adequate. Teaching areas are safe and comfortable. Risk assessments of these areas have been adequately undertaken by tutors. However, one classroom was too small for the group size.

57. The extent to which the needs and interests of learners are met is satisfactory. Programmes and activities are satisfactory and include a variety of courses with sufficient progression for learners. Learning sessions are delivered in good range of locations throughout the county.
58. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners derive much benefit from the unfailingly supportive approach of tutors. They receive detailed course information. An appropriate induction informs learners of their entitlements. Initial assessment, including health screening, is effectively carried out and used to plan for individuals. The arrangements for assessing and supporting learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills are satisfactory.
59. Individual target-setting for learners is poor. Few learners identify specific measurable learning goals. When learning goals are set they are often very general. The setting and monitoring of overall course learning outcomes is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

60. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Operational management is satisfactory. A dedicated team of managers coordinates and develops the provision satisfactorily. Communication with, and support for, part-time tutors is satisfactory. Staff meetings for part-time tutors are mostly well attended and most tutors have individual meetings with managers.
61. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Learners and staff have sufficient awareness of equal opportunities procedures. Some successful attempts have been made to develop links and widen participation. For example, effective partnership work has been undertaken to develop provision to attract under-represented groups.
62. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. Most stakeholders have been involved in the process and know the outcomes. The draft self-assessment report for 2007/08 does not identify most of the strengths and areas for improvement noted by inspectors and awards a higher grade.
63. Performance data is insufficiently used to monitor quality improvement and to set targets for further improvement. Analysis of performance data is insufficient and does not include progression rates, course by course comparison and equality and diversity outcomes.
64. The scheme for the observation of teaching and learning is weak. The reporting of key teaching and learning themes to raise standards is not clear. Many learning sessions are over graded and moderation is ineffective. The use of sport specific documentation to record observation findings detracts from arriving at sound overall judgements about the quality of learning sessions.

Arts, media and publishing

Good: Grade 2

Context

65. Most of the 123 courses currently offered are non-accredited. At the time of the inspection, 1,493 learners were enrolled, most of whom were female. Two thirds of learners are aged over 50 and 2% are from minority ethnic groups. Subjects offered cover art and design, crafts, music, dance and creative writing. One course is offered through the family learning. Courses take place at centres throughout the county and include weekend and residential courses at the nationally renowned Missenden Abbey.

Strengths

- High success rates on non accredited courses
- Good standards of learners' work
- Rapid development of technical skills on level 1 craft courses
- Challenging teaching in most learning sessions
- Successful redesign of the curriculum
- Good leadership and support for tutors

Areas for improvement

- Inconsistent completion and submission of course documentation
- Insufficient sharing of good practice

Achievement and standards

66. Achievement and standards are good. Learners enjoy their courses and achieve well. Overall success rates on non-accredited provision have been consistently high, at 97% over the three year period and many of the accredited courses achieve 100% success rates.

67. Standards of work are high. Two learners are gold medal winners from a prestigious national awarding body and the quality of paintings on display in the gallery at Missenden Abbey nears professional standards. In a level 2 water colour learning session, learners exhibited a mastery of techniques considerably in excess of expectations for this level. Level 1 craft learners display rapid and good skills development in their confident use of tools and techniques. In a jewellery class, learners, three weeks into the course, successfully complete a silver ring project, demonstrating good techniques of engraving, hammering and soldering. Learners are keen and support each other well. In an upholstery learning session, improvers help beginners to achieve mastery of skills. Attendance throughout the inspection was good at 85%.

Quality of provision

68. The quality of provision and of teaching and learning are good. Most tutors are confident practitioners, displaying secure subject knowledge. In the most successful learning sessions, learners are consistently challenged to produce work of high standard. Learners respond well and enjoy the opportunity to take on new challenges. In a patchwork and quilting learning session, learners with no previous experience of computing were thrilled with the potential they had discovered in using a specialist computer software programme. Assessment is good overall, but is insufficiently consistent for non-accredited provision.

69. Resources are good. Classrooms and studios are well equipped and often feature attractive wall displays that enhance learning. In one learning session, a shortage of specialist tools impeded learners' progress.

70. The extent to which needs and interests of learners are met is good. Enrichment activities are good and include regular visits to galleries and other events. The Stokenchurch exhibition, at which learners' work is celebrated, is extensive and valued by both tutors and learners. Curriculum development is good and meets the needs of learners and national priorities. Following the previous inspection, a wider range of courses is now offered in the north of the county. Increasingly successful initiatives to widen participation have been taken. Overall fewer courses have been cancelled and the volume of learners has been maintained.

71. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners receive appropriate advice and guidance before and during their courses. Tutors provide good support. Information on fees is unclear. Course descriptors for different levels lack consistency. Learners do not receive direct feedback from surveys. They are, however, notified in the learners' handbook of the processes in which their views are collected.

Leadership and management

72. Leadership and management are good. In particular, the leadership and support for tutors is good. The largely new management team have a clear vision for creative studies and are particularly responsive in redesigning the curriculum. Tutors are well supported. The good continuing professional development activities are monitored by both tutors and managers.

73. The completion and submission of some important course documentation is inconsistently thorough. The quality of learning session planning varies considerably. Several tutors continue to use their own approaches which frequently lack essential detail, such as differentiated learning needs and an evaluation of the learning session. Initial assessments of learners' needs are not always used effectively to inform course planning. Submission of key course documentation for quality assurance is often late.
74. Quality improvement is satisfactory. The self-assessment report is mostly accurate in the identification of strengths and areas for improvement. Occasionally the text does not match the judgement. The process is now more inclusive and includes the incorporation of learners' views. The observation of teaching and learning provides tutors with constructive feedback. However, some of the grades awarded are over generous.
75. The sharing of good practice is insufficient. Too few formal opportunities exist for tutors to present examples of their developmental work and for others to consider its use in their own teaching. Tutors do not share good practice examples in the use of the virtual learning environment.
76. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Key data on equality are monitored but there is little evidence of active promotion in learning sessions.

Languages, literature and culture

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

77. Nearly 150 classes are offered in languages most of which are non-accredited. In 11 languages, learners have opportunities to progress to levels above beginners. The service offers a wide range of languages, including English and British sign language at 20 centres across the county. Learning sessions take place in the daytime, evening and at weekends. Sixty per cent take place in the evening. The courses range from one day to 28 weeks and most run for two hours each week. Currently 1,409 learners have enrolled. Of these, two thirds are women and nearly 60% are aged over 50. The percentage of learners from a minority ethnic background is 3%.

Strengths

- High success on non-accredited courses
- Good progression to higher level courses
- Wide choice of courses
- Successful measures to recruit new learners
- Good support for tutors

Areas for improvement

- Much teaching which is no better than satisfactory
- Insufficiently thorough target-setting and progress reviews
- Inconsistency in the content and difficulty of courses

Achievement and standards

78. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners' success rates on non accredited courses are high. In 2007/08, the success rate was 87% with good retention at 89%. Attendance in the learning sessions observed during inspection was good at 92%. The overall success rate for the 18 accredited courses in 2007/08 was low at 53%.

79. In most learning sessions, learners develop their skills at an appropriate level and many demonstrate increased confidence in speaking the language with good improvement in the use of tenses and the acquisition of more sophisticated vocabulary. Many learners progress to higher level courses on completion of their first course.

Quality of provision

80. The quality of provision and of teaching and learning are satisfactory. Tutors display a sensitive and supportive approach to learning. Some adopt a dynamic style with good presentation skills that holds learners' interest and incorporates a good variety of challenging activities in their learning sessions. In foreign language learning sessions,

they make effective use of the target language and the pace of the learning sessions matches the learners' level. However, much teaching is satisfactory. Activities lack pace or are tutor-centred for long periods of time. The planning for some learning sessions does not cater for the differing needs of learners and the tasks set for learners do not always give scope for progression.

81. The standard of teaching materials has improved since the previous inspection with many well produced, up-to-date handouts and visual stimulus. However, the use of these materials is insufficient. Tutors have increased their use of information and learning technology (ILT) in learning sessions.
82. All tutors are appropriately qualified to teach their subject and the selection procedure for new staff has become more thorough. Classroom accommodation overall is of a satisfactory standard but some teaching equipment is out of date.
83. Target-setting and progress reviews are insufficiently thorough. All tutors conduct initial assessment to determine the starting point of learners but the results of this do not always result in identifying suitably challenging learning objectives or determine the content of future learning sessions. Where objectives are set, the recording of learners' progress is not always clear. Written feedback to learners is often minimal.
84. The extent to which the needs and interests of learners are met is good. Learners benefit from an extensive choice of courses. Languages taught include the common European languages, including GCSE English, British Sign Language and other languages including Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Polish, Russian and Latin. The service promotes these courses well and imaginatively.
85. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners are able to sample courses and transfer if necessary between levels to ensure they are on an appropriate course. Support for learners with additional learning needs is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

86. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Actions to recruit new learners have been successful with a 38% increase in new learners in October 2008 as compared with the same month in 2007. The range and location of programmes has been redesigned and a new fee structure promotes reduced fees for beginners' courses. Publicity has improved, learners have been encouraged to "Bring a Friend", and more taster courses have been scheduled. The content and degree of difficulty in courses, described as the same level, varies across the county and some learners find this confusing. BAL is developing a framework to ensure consistency in levels.
87. Tutors are well supported. Communication between tutors and their managers is good. The induction of new tutors is well managed and they receive individual support and mentoring with priority for observation of their teaching. Since the previous inspection, BAL has put in place more effective monitoring of tutors' performance to identify training needs. Opportunities for professional development, taken up by many tutors, are good.
88. Managers have a clear view of the quality improvements needed. Sharing of good practice between tutors has increased through informal quality review meetings. The recent peer

review project has raised awareness of the need for greater objectivity and challenge in self-assessment. The current self-assessment report identifies most of the key strengths and areas for improvement found during inspection.

89. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. During learning sessions, learners and tutors display respect for each other but little promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity is evident in learning session content and course materials.

Preparation for life and work

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

90. Provision includes courses for literacy and numeracy, family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN), ESOL, and for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Courses take place across the county in many contrasting community locations. They are offered during the day and evening, with a few weekend courses. During the inspection, 978 learners were enrolled including: 549 on 78 ESOL courses, 185 on 25 literacy

courses, 169 on 27 numeracy courses and 75 on 19 courses for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most skills for life provision is managed by a basic skills development manager, with coordinators for numeracy, ESOL and literacy, and for the OLASS provision. The family literacy and numeracy provision is managed as part of the wider family learning programme.

Strengths

- Effective initial guidance to recruit learners onto courses
- Good range of provision to meet the needs and interests of learners
- Good partnership working
- Strong leadership in family literacy, language and numeracy

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient differentiation of learning methods in teaching
- Ineffective setting of learners' goals and targets
- Insufficient support for part-time tutors

Achievement and standards

91. Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Learners' success rates are high on the provision for learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for courses in FLLN. In 2007/08, overall success rates for these courses were 81% and 97% respectively. Overall success rates for literacy and numeracy improved slightly in 2007/08, but some remain below national averages. The nature of ESOL provision has changed markedly over the last few years, especially with the move towards accredited courses. Some very poor outcomes in 2006/07 have been improved in 2007/08, with some success rates in excess of 70%, at entry and level 2. Retention is good.
92. Overall standards of learners' work are satisfactory. Learners enjoy their courses. They develop their skills well and often achieve national qualifications. For many, it is the first formal qualification they have achieved. Increased confidence and the ability to transfer learning into other contexts, such as the workplace, and in the home, helping their children with homework, has increased their employability and their ability to progress in learning.

Quality of provision

93. The quality of provision and of teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best learning sessions, tutors build their teaching on the identification of individual learning goals and targets, based on initial assessment. Differentiated active learning methods are used, based on group and individual activities. Effective record keeping enables tutors to monitor learners' progress weekly. In the less effective learning sessions, learning is impeded by insufficient attention to learners' individual needs and some inappropriate teaching methods. The thoroughness in setting and recording initial goals and targets and the completion of learners' individual learning plans is ineffective. Dates for review of progress are unclear and weekly learner record sheets are incomplete.
94. The team of largely part-time tutors is appropriately qualified and experienced. Resources to support teaching and learning are satisfactory. Several centres have a good range of

paper-based resources with good virtual learning environment access. The use of ILT in learning sessions is insufficient.

95. The extent to which the needs and interests of learners are met is good. Learners benefit from a good range of courses available at many community venues including family literacy and numeracy, courses for single parents, for those not in education, employment or training and for those on probation. Valuable drug and alcohol rehabilitation support is also available. Workforce development programmes have also been developed, including working with the RAF and nursing staff at Stoke Mandeville hospital, and with County Council staff for literacy and numeracy.
96. Support and guidance are satisfactory. Learners receive good initial guidance and screening. Learners are successfully placed on appropriate courses, facilitated by the strong links with community outreach workers, family literacy teams and other community stakeholders and groups. Links between the various provider teams and key external partners are effective. Regular contact is maintained with Jobcentre Plus. The take up of additional learning support is low, as identified in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

97. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leadership is strong on the provision for family literacy, language and numeracy. It is well planned and successful programmes are delivered in a good range of venues. The programmes are highly relevant to the FLLN needs of parents and retention and achievement are good. Leadership and management in literacy, numeracy and ESOL are satisfactory. The team of coordinators meets regularly to review enrolment and success trends and to plan developments. Links between the basic skills department and the FLLN team are effective, with the former providing progression pathways from the FLLN provision.
98. The self-assessment process is satisfactory and inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, although not with all grades for the various elements of this area.
99. Partnership working is good. Good links between the service teams and community groups has resulted in the development of provision to meet the needs of learners. Programmes have been developed with the YMCA, Saunderton Hostel, the Town Coffee Bar, Youth in Action, the Oasis project, Women's Aid and many other organisations. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory and is reflected in a wide range of courses for hard to reach groups.
100. The support for part-time tutors is insufficient. Induction is not systematically comprehensive and some tutors are unaware of key service policies and procedures, especially in the provision for learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Arrangements for lone working at centres, especially during the evenings, are unclear.

Annex

Learners' achievements

Learners' achievements in FE funded, accredited provision offered by ACL providers

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

2006/07, compared with the national rates for GFE colleges.

National Level	Exp End Year	19+			
		Starts – Transfers	Provider Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 long	06/07	1822	62.5	72.0	-9.6
2 long	06/07	942	67.0	69.5	-2.5
Short**	06/07	921	49.4	82.1	-32.7

** Courses over 5 weeks long