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Ms L Fairhurst  
Head of Service  
Lifelong Learning Oldham Council  
Level 9 Civic Centre  
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Oldham  
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Dear Ms Fairhurst

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: numeracy - tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 and 15 June 2010 to look at your work in numeracy.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with senior staff, tutors and learners; four observations of numeracy teaching and learning sessions; and a review of the supporting documents you provided.

Overall, The Oldham Lifelong Learning Service is outstanding at tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives.

### Key findings

- The service has a clear Skills for Life strategy which focuses successfully on recruiting learners from the most disadvantaged areas in the borough to numeracy provision. This has included using external funding to help learners on provision in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to gain the language skills they need to progress to numeracy programmes. However, the self-assessment report did not fully evaluate numeracy as a separate subject.
- The service has developed strong and very effective partnerships with schools, colleges and voluntary groups to support the planning of new numeracy provision and to evaluate and improve existing courses. Work with children's centres and the teams implementing the 'extended schools'

agenda has been particularly successful in raising awareness of the importance of developing numeracy skills to community partners who have a key role in referring potential learners to numeracy courses. Take-up of numeracy provision is good and the number of new learners continues to increase each year.

- Staff teaching numeracy are very well qualified. All of them have or are working towards a specialist qualification in teaching numeracy at level 5. The programme of staff training in numeracy provides good support for all staff supporting learners' development of numeracy, including tutors teaching vocational subjects, such as childcare, information and communication technology (ICT), and arts and crafts. Tutors make very good use of the service's intranet to share learning materials and ideas of how to teach specific numeracy skills. A well-managed mentoring scheme supports new staff very effectively.
- Teaching and learning observed were at least good or better. Tutors used an excellent range of activities to teach and assess learners' understanding of mathematical concepts. Learning materials were outstanding. Learners enjoyed using good-quality practical and homemade resources, including games and interesting prompts, to help them develop their skills in solving number-related problems. Learners also made excellent use of computers to support their development. Tutors were particularly supportive and patient and had very good expertise in helping learners to overcome previous barriers to learning numeracy.
- The service uses its comprehensive initial assessment process very effectively to identify learners' levels of numeracy and prioritise targets for development. Most of the individual learning plans reviewed had appropriate targets and learners interviewed understood their learning goals and the progress they had made.
- Retention rates have increased for discrete numeracy provision and family numeracy programmes and are good in 2009/10. Achievement of qualifications has also increased and was outstanding in 2008/09. Learners interviewed said they had overcome their fear of mathematics and were more confident in using mathematics in their daily lives. Examples they cited included applying their skills to shopping, managing money and working out ratios. The service is developing an excellent scheme to enable learners to become 'numeracy champions'. A significant number of learners have been inspired to become volunteers. As role models and advocates for learning, they provide language support to help learners develop the English they needed to support their development of numeracy skills.

There are no significant areas for development.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at The Oldham Lifelong Learning Service.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to the Skills Funding Agency and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN

for your organisation. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Blackaby  
Additional Inspector