

INSPECTION REPORT

Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services

11 June 2001



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's *learnirect* provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and New Deal options are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services was formed in 1993 as a result of the careers service moving away from the control of the local authority. It is an independent company and is funded by the government to operate the careers service in Leicester and Leicestershire. The head office is in Groby, near Leicester's city centre. The administration of the Life Skills programmes is carried out across five of six local careers centres. From January 2000, the company has been contracted by the Leicestershire Learning and Skills Council to provide the Life Skills element of the Learning Gateway to young people aged 16 to 18 in the city of Leicester and most of Leicestershire.

Overall judgement

Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services provides satisfactory foundation training for young people on the Life Skills element of the Learning Gateway. However, its leadership and management are less than satisfactory. The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it.

Life Skills

Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services makes good use of its links with local support agencies and training organisations to provide learners with a wide range of learning opportunities. These include a satisfactory range of short courses and the opportunity for learners to be placed with more than one training provider. Most learners make good progress in relation to their prior achievement in education and training. Personal advisers and Life Skills co-ordinators understand the needs of the learners and give good individual support. However, individual training plans and progress reviews are inadequate and progression to further learning opportunities is poor. Training providers are not aware of the progress the young person has made and do not receive adequate information on their progress.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management and the quality assurance of training at Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services are inadequate. Programme co-ordinators and personal advisers communicate well with each other on a daily basis but they do not liaise effectively with the subcontracting organisations. Training providers were not adequately consulted in the development of the self-assessment report. The management information system does not give the appropriate information on learners' retention and achievement rates. Most staff do not understand the quality assurance system, which is narrow in its scope and does not

cover the training process adequately. Learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities in terms of equal opportunities. There is no monitoring of the extent to which Life Skills providers promote equality of opportunity.

GRADES

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	3

Leadership and management	4
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- good retention rates
- wide and varied range of training
- effective support to deal with individual needs
- productive links with external organisations
- good promotion of equal opportunities
- good use of learners' views

KEY WEAKNESSES

- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities
- inadequate management information systems
- inadequate quality assurance systems
- insufficient target-setting
- poor progression to employment and further training
- inadequate processes for reviewing learners' progress

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more involvement of training providers in the self-assessment report
- more monitoring and recording of training

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Service (LCGS) holds a contract with Leicestershire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide Life Skills training to young people. From April 2001, the contract for the Life Skills element of the Learning Gateway was extended to cover most of the county and the city of Leicester. LCGS contracts Life Skills training to the most appropriate providers to meet individual needs. The Life Skills element is designed to offer young people the individual support they need to enable them to move into mainstream education, training or employment. There are 75 learners on the Life Skills programme and they are working on their vocational preparation, basic and key skills and personal and social development. All work with the learners prior to their placement with training providers is carried out through the local careers service in four local county offices and Leicester city. LCGS employs 150 full-time equivalent staff. Two full-time and one half-time Life Skills organisers and approximately 50 personal advisers support the trainees in the Learning Gateway.

2. In May 2001, the unemployment rate in Leicestershire was 2.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.1 per cent. The proportion of school leavers entering government-supported training in 1998-99 was 11 per cent, which was the same as the national ratio for that academic year. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers who gained five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 49 per cent, almost the same as the national average of 49.2 per cent. In the 1991 census, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in Leicestershire including Leicester city was 11.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent. There are two local authority areas. Approximately 46 per cent of the city's school-age population are from minority ethnic groups. The 1998 index of local deprivation ranked Leicester city 32nd out of the 352 local authorities in England.

THE INSPECTION

3. Four inspectors spent a total of 16 days with LCGS in June 2001. Inspectors visited five careers centres and LCGS's head office and carried out 18 interviews with LCGS's staff. They visited 14 Life Skills training organisations and carried out 25 interviews with learners. Inspectors observed and graded two learning sessions. Twenty-five learners' personal files and 14 portfolios of evidence were reviewed. Inspectors examined contracts with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the company's business plan and related policies, such as those relating to health and safety, equal opportunities and quality assurance. They also considered staff training plans and materials, staff handbooks, guidance and operating manuals, minutes of meetings, staff training records and data on learners' achievements.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Foundation programmes	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Total	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Foundation programmes

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	75	3

4. Seventy-five learners are currently on the Life Skills element of the Learning Gateway with LCGS. Most of these learners have experienced a range of social and personal problems and few have academic qualifications. Some have poor literacy and numeracy skills. On the Learning Gateway, young people work with a personal adviser to identify possible education, training or employment opportunities and agree a career action plan, locally known as a moving-on plan. Life Skills co-ordinators work with the young person and the personal adviser to arrange a programme which matches the young person's aims and abilities. LCGS are currently using 22 of the 94 listed training organisations they consider to be suitable for offering Life Skills training. The training organisations cover a range of occupational areas including retailing, information technology, construction and engineering. In addition, they offer activities which are designed to build personal and social skills. Two full-time and one half-time Life Skills co-ordinators manage the training programmes. Learners can work towards certificates in single subject areas. Staff at each training organisation are responsible for assessing learners and monitoring their progress on individual training programmes. Progress reviews are carried out every two weeks. The average length of stay is 20 weeks and most learners attend for a minimum of 16 hours each week. LCGS employs 120 careers advisers and employment training advisers. Approximately 50 of these staff are currently involved as personal advisers in reviewing the progress of learners on Life Skills programmes across the city and county. Personal advisers carry out a progress review with learners four weeks before the end of the programme.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Foundation Programmes										
Foundation Programmes	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							21		186
Still in training							0	0	19	10
Gained job with training/progressed to further training and/or planned learning completed							21	100	135	73
Left without either							0	0	32	17
Gained job with training							7	33	29	16
Progressed to further training							3	14	43	23
Planned learning completed							21	100	135	73

STRENGTHS

- wide range of learning opportunities
- varied and flexible training programmes
- effective support to deal with individual needs
- good retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- poor linking of initial assessment results to individual training plans
- inadequate processes for reviewing progress
- poor progression to further training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better training records
- increased recording of support for learners

5. LCGS uses a wide variety of training organisations who offer a good range of learning opportunities. These include a motor vehicle workshop, an outdoor activity centre and a crèche. Staff are experienced in working with young people and demonstrate a good understanding of the often complex needs of the learners. Learners build on their existing interests and develop new ones, which increases their confidence and motivates them to continue learning. Staff support them through one-to-one and group sessions, which takes place in stimulating and welcoming environments. Resources within most

organisations are at least satisfactory. Learners are working towards an extensive range of nationally recognised occupational qualifications with LCGS and within the training organisations. LCGS identified the range of organisations used as a strength in the self-assessment report, along with the individualised nature of the training.

6. The training covers practical, social and vocational skills. Some learners attend more than one organisation for their training. For example, good use is made of a hairdressing salon and a beauty salon for one learner. Personal advisers work with the training organisations to make arrangements for learners to receive individual help with basic skills, at a range of specialist training centres. Learners are encouraged to record evidence of their Life Skills training. Some produce portfolios which effectively present the activities they have taken part in, but in some organisations, this is done less effectively. Some learners are unaware of how they can present a comprehensive record to demonstrate their achievements and individual progress.

7. The self-assessment report identifies the high level of support given to learners. Life Skills co-ordinators work closely with personal advisers and training organisations to ensure that learning and personal support needs are met. Staff are highly skilled and use their extensive knowledge to find effective solutions to specific problems. For example, LCGS purchased bicycles for two learners who live in rural areas, as public transport is unreliable. In addition, staff gave advice on how to get appropriate insurance and protective headwear. Personal advisers and the Life Skills co-ordinators meet regularly with learners to discuss the support they are getting. LCGS has good links with a range of local agencies who can provide specialist support for learners. Starter packs are often provided for learners who live independently. These include an alarm clock, a watch and a packed lunch. However, the kind of support received is not routinely recorded.

8. Learners spend an average of 17 weeks on Learning Gateway before joining a Life Skills training programme. During this time, personal advisers carry out an extensive range of initial assessments to identify the young person's aims, career goals and level of learning and social support needed. However, the results of these assessments are not effectively brought together to produce a learning plan with specific goals and targets for each learner. Life Skills co-ordinators have started to send a copy of individual learning plans to each training organisation, but this is not yet routine practice. Most individual organisations conduct their own initial assessment when the learner starts their training programme. Some assessments are thorough and accurately identify the learners' needs, others are superficial. Some learners have similar learning plans, despite their very different individual needs. Information which is kept about learners is generally limited to records of contact by personal advisers, or of pastoral support given. Records are not regularly monitored. LCGS is aware of this problem and one careers centre is testing a system for recording and monitoring more relevant information, which is working well. The barriers identified with learners as part of the Learning Gateway are not translated into a measurable plan at the start of their Life Skills training.

9. The procedures for reviewing learners' progress are inadequate. The information which is recorded lacks content and detail and there are no clear targets on review

sheets. Information from progress reviews is not routinely used to update learners' individual plans. The progress review document has recently been revised in response to learners' feedback. They are required to complete large sections of the review sheet, but many are unwilling or unable to complete this in any meaningful detail. Additional reviews are carried out by personal advisers each month and the learners' supervisor is encouraged to participate. The review process does not provide a comprehensive overview of learners' progress or possible routes to achieving their targets.

10. Retention and achievement rates are high. In 1999-2000, all learners achieved the targets on their individual training plans. They make good progress, often improving their levels of motivation and confidence and their communication skills. Forty-one per cent of learners have their training extended from the basic 15 weeks, with the average length of stay being 20 weeks.

11. There is poor progression to further learning opportunities. Only 23 per cent of learners progressed to further training, or employment with training, immediately after their Life Skills training. Another 20 per cent progressed onto other training, employment or education opportunities, but this was some time after they had completed their Life Skills programme. Nine per cent of learners returned to the Learning Gateway and seven per cent returned to Life Skills programmes.

Good Practice

Three learners with interests in media have produced a lively and interesting Life Skills induction video. They carried out research among staff and learners to decide on the content, developed questions to interview staff, filmed the scenes and helped with the editing process. The video has been shown to other learners and their feedback will be used to help develop a final version of the video. The results will be used to decide on the final edit. Once completed, the video will be part of the induction to Life Skills.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

12. The operations director for development has overall responsibility for the Life Skills programme. One of the two full-time co-ordinators takes care of the day-to-day running of Life Skills and team leaders supervise the personal advisers. All LCGS's staff receive a comprehensive handbook at their induction and the company's policies are available to all staff on an intranet. Line managers use annual appraisal meetings to identify their staff's training needs and individual training plans are updated monthly and six monthly. The company was first accredited with the Investors in People standard in 1996. Managers review the company's policies and procedures annually. The business plan includes a policy and implementation plan for the Learning Gateway. One member of staff has designated responsibility for equal opportunities across the company and also takes responsibility for quality assurance at strategic level. The Life Skills co-ordinators and the operations director prepared the first self-assessment report in November 2000, using the framework of 'Raising the Standard'. The first self-assessment report was published in February 2001.

STRENGTHS

- good business-planning
- productive links with many organisations
- extensive range of training events for staff and associated organisations
- good promotion of equal opportunities
- successful challenging of gender stereotyping
- good awareness of equal opportunities by staff
- effective use of feedback from learners

WEAKNESSES

- no routine management of training procedures
- inadequate management information systems
- insufficient target-setting in Life Skills programmes
- lack of monitoring and target-setting for equal opportunities
- inadequate quality assurance systems
- lack of understanding of quality assurance by staff
- no monitoring of training providers' performance

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more involvement of training providers in the self-assessment process

13. LCGS's business plan gives the company strong strategic direction. The company's mission statement effectively incorporates its strategic aims. These are put into practice through a series of policies and action plans. The board of directors oversees the

consultation process of the business plan developments. The objectives in the policy for Learning Gateway relate to the national objectives. The Life Skills team has used the business plan effectively to identify its own, appropriate, objectives. This good business-planning was identified in the self-assessment report. Internal communications are well managed. Managers effectively co-ordinate a schedule of meetings. Staff are kept informed of developments and issues relating to their own work, associated departments and external organisations.

14. Young people are offered training in a good variety of organisations, including colleges of further education, private training companies and not-for-profit organisations. A booklet gives personal advisers, young people and Life Skills co-ordinators information on the range of learning opportunities which are available in the region. LCGS's staff review the list every four to six months and remove those organisations whom they consider to be no longer suitable. LCGS further supports the business plan by successfully encouraging organisations from minority ethnic communities to offer training. Life Skills co-ordinators have promoted a greater understanding of the Learning Gateway and Life Skills training programmes in these communities.

15. LCGS gives a high priority to training its staff and those of other organisations who provide training in Life Skills. An extensive range of training events raises awareness of a broad range of issues which includes those affecting disadvantaged young people. Most of the training events are well attended and allow time to talk through problems and share good practice. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

16. The Learning Gateway team has prepared a comprehensive handbook, which helps personal advisers understand their role and is an effective reference document for most aspects of their work. However, the work of the personal advisers is not sufficiently monitored to check that procedures are being followed. The support given by personal advisers, Life Skills co-ordinators and training organisations is not effectively co-ordinated. Contracts between LCGS and the training organisations do not specify that the training should meet the individual needs of the young people. Some training organisations do not fully understand the overall purpose of Life Skills or their role in it. They receive little feedback on the quality of the information they provide to LCGS on the learners' progress towards achievement of their learning goals. Some training providers do not carry out initial assessments to build on the information they receive from the Life Skills co-ordinators.

17. The Life Skills team cannot easily obtain the information and data they need to manage the programme. LCGS uses databases and management information systems which do not give sufficient relevant information about the training programme. Although the business plan includes some targets for Life Skills, there are insufficient specific targets to help the Life Skills team, personal advisers and the training organisations identify whether they are successful in their work. For example, training organisations are not set targets relating to learners' retention rates or progression to other training. The company did not identify these weaknesses in its self-assessment report.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

18. The promotion of equality of opportunity is part of all the objectives in the business plan. The company's policies are cross-referenced to the equal opportunities policy. A local consortium helps to raise the staff's awareness of the circumstances affecting people's opportunities. Learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Staff challenge inappropriate behaviour effectively. The self-assessment report identifies the company's strong links with groups under-represented in training. The company has used local labour market information well to monitor which sections of the community are not using their services. LCGS has worked successfully with these communities to encourage them to offer training opportunities for Life Skills. However, LCGS does not set targets to measure the success of these strategies. The monitoring of data has led to successful measures to challenge gender stereotyping. Initiatives have involved redesigning marketing materials to reflect that all learning opportunities are available to men and women. Staff are regularly updated on how they can support these prospective learners and have a good grasp of equal opportunities issues.

19. The company does not adequately monitor some aspects of equal opportunities. The quality improvement group for equal opportunities has not met since April 2000 and some of the equal opportunities monitoring procedures have not been fully implemented. The procedures for monitoring the equal opportunities practices of organisations offering training in Life Skills are inadequate. Staff do not have sufficient understanding of how to monitor equal opportunities. No further checks are made on training organisations once the initial agreement to provide training has been made. LCGS's staff rely on learners to raise any problems they may have, during progress reviews. The information packs on equal opportunities, which were developed for new staff, are not effectively monitored. There is insufficient checking and reinforcement of staff's understanding of equal opportunities.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

20. LCGS has recently appointed a member of staff at senior management level to take responsibility for quality assurance at a strategic level and equal opportunities. The quality assurance aspect is supported by a full-time member of staff who dedicates half of their time to this area of work. However, some of the Life Skills team remain unsure about changes which have taken place and managers' expectations of their quality assurance responsibilities. For example, there are currently 47 quality assurance procedures, many of which are duplicate practices. Actions have recently been taken to deal with this, but it is too early to identify any improvement. There is a lack of understanding of quality assurance by staff. Some members of staff do not see their role as involving any key aspects of quality assurance, while others see their role purely at a strategic level. This has led to a lack of clarity across the quality assurance system. While much good paperwork exists to support the Life Skills procedures, staff and training providers do not know what the system is or how it can affect learners' experiences. Training organisations do not receive sufficient detail about the Life Skills programmes to support them effectively, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report.

21. There is effective use of feedback from learners on the Life Skills programme, which is recorded during progress reviews. Also, questionnaires are completed by the learners two weeks before the end of their training. Management respond well to this feedback. For example, learners wanted to improve the methods of communication between staff and learners and management responded to their specific request for the inclusion of text messaging. This is working well. There are no procedures for monitoring and reviewing the training organisations' views about the Life Skills training programmes.

22. That there are gaps in the quality assurance procedures and that these procedures are insufficiently monitored, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. There are few reviews carried out on the effectiveness of the training programmes. There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of data to help identify any problem areas in the training. There is no monitoring of training providers' performance against standards. The management information system used by LCGS has only recently begun to incorporate some of the data on the Life Skills training. The guidelines for procedures do not give a clear overview of the quality assurance system.

23. Assessment practices and internal verification are satisfactory. The assessments are well designed and appropriate to the learners' needs, but learners do not receive adequate feedback on the quality of their work. Training providers are not fully informed of the internal verification procedures.

24. LCGS produced its first self-assessment report in February 2001. The self-assessment report identifies strengths but it fails to identify significant weaknesses in the Life Skills programmes. The Life Skills team contributes to the development of the self-assessment report, but training organisations are not consulted.

Good Practice

In October 2000, LCGS put on an event to share and develop their understanding of principles and procedures in assessing young people's needs. The event was well attended by a wide range of organisations who are involved in working with young people. Ten workshops on relevant topics gave useful background information and opportunities to share good practice and debate various subjects. The event has led to the setting up of a working group, led by LCGS, to agree common principles and practices on assessment within the area.