

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Solihull Council**

**17 October 2003**



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 Jobcentre Plus programmes. 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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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.

## Overall judgement

Where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Solihull Council

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Solihull Council (the council) provides adult and community learning services to rural and urban communities across Solihull borough through a subcontracting arrangement with a local further education college. The provision includes non-accredited recreational courses and accredited family learning programmes, and is the responsibility of the libraries, arts and lifelong learning division of the community services directorate of the council. The council's main lifelong learning strategic objective is to sustain a culture of learning which supports personal development as a lifelong learning goal, encourages progression and improves people's quality of life.

2. The council's head of community services is responsible for the co-ordination and strategic development of adult and community learning, which is funded by Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC). He reports to the director of community services and works with the subcontracted college's director of community education to plan and deliver the provision. The director of community education at the college manages a team of four key co-ordinators, seven subject co-ordinators and 10 part-time heads of centre.

3. The population of Solihull borough is almost 200,000. The south of the borough is relatively affluent and is home to the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham International Airport and a number of major multinational companies. The north of the borough has a much higher population density than the south and significant areas of deprivation, with four of the wards among the top 10 per cent of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. Two-thirds of the borough are rural and consist of worked farmland. A quarter of the adult population is aged over 65. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of the borough's population from minority ethnic groups is 5.4 per cent, compared with 6.9 per cent of the population nationally.

4. Courses take place in more than 60 venues across the borough, including local primary and secondary schools, youth centres and church and community halls. Most take place in the week, during the daytime and evenings. Courses range from one-day workshops and 10-week courses to a full academic year. Just over a quarter of the 5,643 enrolments in 2002-03, for all accredited and non-accredited adult and community learning programmes offered by the college, were for courses in visual and performing arts. Just under a quarter of enrolments are men, which is in line with the national average, and a similar proportion are aged over 65. Almost 10 per cent of adult and community learners in 2002-03 declared some form of disability.

### SCOPE OF PROVISION

#### Land-based provision

5. Seventy-eight learners are currently enrolled on flower arranging and floristry courses.

## SOLIHULL COUNCIL

The main aim of the provision is to encourage adults from deprived areas in the north of the borough to take the first steps back into learning, and the numbers of learners have risen significantly over the past three years. Almost three-quarters of the current learners are on courses leading to an accredited qualification. Courses are available at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Accredited foundation and intermediate courses run for 30 weeks and advanced courses are offered over two years. Non-accredited courses take place over five or 10 weeks. Most classes include learners studying courses at different levels. All courses take place either during the day or evenings in the week, at 10 different sites across the borough, including community rooms in local schools. The college also offers family learning courses based on floristry, specific courses for industry, and summer and winter taster programmes aimed at children. The full-time subject co-ordinator is supported by five part-time tutors.

### **Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**

6. With more than 40 sport and leisure courses available, this is the council's second largest area of non-accredited adult and community learning provision. Just over 200 learners are currently enrolled at the subcontracted college on courses including yoga, badminton, belly dancing and keep fit. Almost 70 per cent of learners are female and very few learners are from minority ethnic groups. In 2002-03, just over 500 learners were enrolled on sport and leisure courses, an increase of 15 per cent on 2001-02. All courses are non-accredited and most last between 10 and 30 weeks, taking place in the evenings. Courses are offered at 15 venues across the borough, including local primary and secondary schools, village halls, community centres and church premises. Course tutors work part time for between two and six hours each week and are managed by a key co-ordinator responsible for curriculum planning and management. There is no subject co-ordinator for this area of learning.

### **Health, social care & public services**

7. Seventy learners are enrolled on complementary therapies courses, and just over 150 are following classroom and teaching assistant courses that the council began offering through the subcontracted college in 2002-03. Learners are recruited through direct enquiries to the college, and from local schools, parents' evenings and a range of promotional events. The classroom and teaching assistant courses take place over 30 and 34 weeks, respectively, while the complementary therapies courses are offered over 10-week periods throughout the year.

## Visual & performing arts & media

8. Visual and performing arts courses form the largest area of non-accredited adult and community learning in the borough, with almost 1,500 learners enrolled on courses in 2002-03, representing more than a quarter of the total provision. Most learners follow non-accredited courses such as painting, drawing, interior design, pottery, calligraphy, lacemaking and needlework. Accredited programmes are offered at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Most of the provision is in arts and crafts, with a smaller number of performing arts courses. Courses are offered at the main college campus, as well as in local church halls, community centres and primary and secondary schools throughout the borough. Most classes take place for two hours a week over 30 weeks, but there are some five- and 10-week courses. More than 85 per cent of learners are women, and 40 per cent are aged over 60. Two subject co-ordinators at the college manage the provision and the part-time tutors, who work between two and 14 hours a week.

## Family learning

9. In 2002-03, over 1,000 learners were enrolled on a combination of accredited and non-accredited family learning courses. The council allocates almost half of its annual budget for adult and community learning to family learning. Provision is mainly targeted at adults and their children in the north of the borough. Classes take place at a number of venues, including libraries, community centres and those primary schools identified as being in most need of support. All courses are designed to provide opportunities for adults to take the first steps back into learning, and most last between 10 and 30 weeks. Examples of courses offered include family literacy and numeracy, programmes to help parents support their children's literacy and numeracy development, model making, and skin care and make-up. Most learners enrolled on family learning courses are women, but an increasing number of men are joining the programmes.

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	12
Number of inspection days	60
Number of learner interviews	380
Number of staff interviews	15
Number of subcontractor interviews	131
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	45
Number of partner/external agency interviews	10

## OVERALL JUDGEMENT

10. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the quality of provision in floristry, complementary therapies, classroom and teaching assistant training, and family learning is good. For visual and performing arts, it is satisfactory, but for sport and leisure it is very weak. The council's leadership and management and arrangements for equality of opportunity are

satisfactory, but its quality assurance is unsatisfactory.

## GRADES

*grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak*

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

Land-based provision	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	5
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	5

Health, social care & public services	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

Visual & performing arts & media	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Family learning	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievement and standards

11. **The standard of learners' work is good on floristry and flower arranging courses.** Learners develop good practical skills, which they combine with their creative abilities to produce good-quality flower arrangements and designs. **Many learners progress to** higher-level courses, both in floristry and other subject areas. **Retention is good**, with a retention rate of over 80 per cent on all courses in 2002-03.



12. Attendance is good on most sport and leisure programmes. Retention is satisfactory with a 65 per cent average retention rate over the past two years. Most learners demonstrate appropriate practical skills, specialist knowledge and use of technical language. They appreciate the positive physical and psychological benefits achieved through many classes, as well as the social interaction with other learners.

13. **Achievement rates are good for learners on classroom and teaching assistant training courses.** The subcontracted college began offering the programmes in 2002-03, and 92 per cent and 84 per cent of classroom and teaching assistants, respectively, achieved a qualification. **Complementary therapies learners achieve the learning objectives set for them,** and receive a college certificate of attendance on completing the course.

14. **Retention rates are good on visual and performing arts programmes,** standing at 81 per cent for 2002-03. **The quality of learners' practical work is good in most classes.** Many develop their work outside of the class, using their craft skills within their local community, for example to sell their work at craft fairs.

15. **Learners' achievements are very good in all family learning programmes.** In 2002-03, achievement rates were over 90 per cent for many courses leading to qualifications. Learners make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills. Parents are more confident in helping and understanding their children's learning processes.

## Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Land-based provision	0	2	4	1	0	0	0	7
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	1	6	4	1	3	1	16
Health, social care & public services	0	1	6	1	0	0	0	8
Visual & performing arts & media	1	4	11	0	2	0	0	18
Family learning	1	0	3	1	1	0	0	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>55</b>

16. **Most of the teaching and learning on flower arranging and floristry courses is good.** Tutors have good demonstration skills and learners have a thorough understanding of how to create their own designs, which they can then use outside the classroom.

17. **The flower arranging and floristry courses successfully attract adults from the local community back into learning, or to courses for the first time.** Courses appeal to different communities and local advertising is planned well.

18. **Learners on flower arranging and floristry courses are supported well.** They are offered free childcare at all venues, which is particularly appreciated. Many learners receive financial support to enable them to purchase flowers and other materials. Those with additional literacy needs are given appropriate assistance, particularly in compiling

their portfolios of work.

19. **Accommodation used in some centres for flower arranging or floristry classes is not suitable.** Some classrooms are too small and chairs and tables in some schools are not suitable for adults.

20. **Good projects in sport and leisure provision effectively develop programmes for learners with particular needs.** An imaginative range of courses is available, including keep fit, dancing and sport. The provision is enhanced through good partnership working with a number of organisations, including social services, care homes, day centres and regular contact with community nurses.

21. **Teaching and learning standards in sport and leisure are unsatisfactory.** Many lessons are poorly planned and tutors frequently participate in activities without giving proper supervision to the class. Tutors give insufficient attention to learners' individual abilities. **Arrangements to ensure the health and well-being of learners are inadequate.** Tutors frequently do not correct poor exercise techniques and have only recently started to carry out health checks with learners before they begin sport and leisure courses. **Monitoring and recording of learners' progress and achievements are poor.** Tutors do not provide sufficiently detailed feedback.

22. **Resources to support many sport and leisure courses are poor.** Learners have to bring their own equipment for many courses and some classes are held in unsuitable accommodation which is badly maintained, poorly lit and too cold for the activities taking place.

23. **Teaching and learning standards are good on complementary therapies and classroom and teaching assistant courses.** Lessons are planned well and learners are constantly involved in a wide range of practical activities. The enthusiastic tutors are appropriately qualified and experienced. Complementary therapies learners use their new practical skills outside the class with their families and friends.

24. **Effective partnerships meet the needs of local learners on classroom and teaching assistant courses.** Courses have developed as a result of local demand. The importance of working with local primary and secondary schools to meet local employers' needs is a priority.

25. **Teaching and learning resources are inadequate in some centres for complementary therapies and classroom and teaching assistant learners.** Classrooms in some venues are cramped, and sometimes there are not enough textbooks and other learning materials on classroom and teaching assistant courses.

26. **Classroom and teaching assistant learners are not given sufficient initial advice and guidance before enrolling on courses.** Learners do not always receive enough guidance regarding the appropriateness of the courses for them, or what outcomes and qualifications they can expect at the end of the programmes.

27. **Teaching and learning in visual and performing arts are good.** Many of the tutors are freelance artists or specialists in their subject area. Tutors use a wide range of teaching styles and give confident and clear demonstrations. Learners are motivated and inspired to extend their range of craft skills.

28. **Resources for visual and performing arts are inadequate at a number of venues.** Some lessons take place in cramped classrooms and storage facilities are sometimes poor. Maintenance is poor in some centres. Some specialist equipment is not sufficiently available and tutors and learners often use their own equipment and materials.

29. **Standards of teaching and learning are good on family literacy programmes.** Courses are planned well and learners are enthusiastic and motivated. They enjoy their classes and support each other well. Tutors have appropriate qualifications and experience. However, the pace of the lessons is too fast in some numeracy classes, and **some family learning courses do not employ sufficient initial assessment.**

30. **The family learning programmes effectively meet the needs of local communities.** Managers have developed good links with a range of other organisations and staff work hard to try out imaginative new courses. Many of the family learning programmes are placed in schools and communities where literacy and numeracy targets are not being met.

31. **Accommodation for family learning courses is inappropriate in some centres.** Sometimes the classrooms are too small and the furniture is not always suitable for adult learners. However, tutors use good-quality course materials to support the imaginative practical activities in classes.

32. Learners with identified literacy, numeracy and language support needs receive appropriate assistance through the comprehensive range of support mechanisms operated by the college. Literacy and numeracy learning is integrated with many courses and forms an important part of much of the provision.

### Leadership and management

33. **The council works effectively with a wide range of internal and external partners to offer learning opportunities to adult learners.** It takes a leading role in recognising the contribution that learning can make to stimulating social regeneration in some areas of Solihull. The council and the subcontracted college are responsible for organising many of the meetings at which local agencies and organisations discuss community planning. The council uses its knowledge of the schools sector in Solihull to successfully identify successfully areas of specific need, and help it plan development and rapid growth, as with the family learning and classroom and teaching assistant courses.

34. **The subcontracted college's management of the curriculum is good in almost all areas of learning.** The college has a strong commitment to community-based learning and widening participation to meet the needs of disadvantaged adults in all areas of Solihull. Teaching and learning are good in most areas of the curriculum. However,

serious deficiencies exist in the co-ordination of sport and leisure courses.

35. **The council's strategic management of adult and community learning is weak.** Targets set for the subcontracted college by the council are not sufficiently challenging and do not fully reflect the objectives set out in the adult learning plan. No process has been established by the council to manage the subcontracted provision. **Curriculum planning is inadequate in visual and performing arts and sport and leisure.**

36. **Learners' achievements are celebrated well by the council and the subcontracted college.** A learner of the year awards ceremony held annually, is valued greatly by the local community. The wide range of categories for awards recognises the different types of achievements made by adult learners. Awards have been given to learners who have overcome significant personal difficulties to achieve their individual learning goals.

37. **The council does not set the subcontractor sufficiently challenging equality and diversity promotion targets.** No targets have been set for recruiting learners from particular parts of the local community, or from some under-represented groups.

38. **The subcontractor's arrangements to quality assure teaching and learning on its courses are incomplete.** A number of systems are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, but they are not all used as part of a continuous process to bring about improvements. Learners' views are not used sufficiently to improve the provision. The monitoring of health and safety is unsatisfactory in some curriculum areas.

39. **The council does not carry out enough formal monitoring of the quality of the subcontractor's provision.** It relies too much on the college's systems and does not currently have its own mechanisms to ensure that the college's quality assurance arrangements are effective.

40. Internal verification arrangements for courses leading to qualifications are satisfactory throughout most of the provision.

41. The council does not have a satisfactory self-assessment process which clearly brings together all areas of the adult and community learning provision, to produce a co-ordinated and coherent report. Key members of the council, college staff, learners and important partners are not involved in the process. The most recent report does not place enough significance on achievements, or the quality of teaching and learning.

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- responsive and effective partnership arrangements
- good curriculum management by the subcontractor in most areas of learning
- good celebration of learners' achievements

### **Weaknesses**

- weak strategic management of provision
- insufficiently challenging targets to widen participation
- incomplete arrangements to ensure the quality of the subcontractor's teaching and learning
- inadequate monitoring of subcontractor's provision

### **Land-based provision**

#### **Strengths**

- good retention rates
- good attainment and progression into further learning
- good teaching and learning
- successful initiatives to attract new learners from the local community
- good support for learners

#### **Weaknesses**

- inappropriate accommodation in some centres

### **Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**

#### **Strengths**

- good initiatives to develop programmes for learners with particular needs

#### **Weaknesses**

- unsatisfactory teaching and learning in many classes
- inadequate arrangements to ensure learners' health and well-being
- poor resources
- ineffective monitoring and recording of learners' progress and achievement
- inadequate curriculum planning
- poor operational management
- weak quality assurance arrangements

## **Health, social care & public services**

### **Strengths**

- good achievement rates
- good retention rates
- good teaching and learning
- successful partnerships to meet the needs of the local community

### **Weaknesses**

- inadequate resources in some centres
- insufficient initial advice and guidance for classroom and teaching assistant learners

## **Visual & performing arts & media**

### **Strengths**

- good attainment
- good retention rates
- good standards of teaching and learning

### **Weaknesses**

- poor accommodation and resources in some centres
- inadequate curriculum planning

## **Family learning**

### **Strengths**

- very good achievements
- good teaching and learning on literacy courses
- particularly effective partnerships to identify and meet the needs of local communities
- good curriculum management and leadership

### **Weaknesses**

- inappropriate accommodation for some learners
- insufficient initial assessment on some family learning courses

### **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SOLIHULL COUNCIL:**

- opportunities to study courses in their local community
- the supportive and friendly staff
- the balance of doing practical tasks and studying background knowledge - 'first-class teaching'
- the good social, health and lifestyle benefits
- the confidence they gain in coming to the main college campus
- that they are treated as individuals

### **WHAT LEARNERS THINK SOLIHULL COUNCIL COULD IMPROVE:**

- the scheduling of classes so they are not interrupted by school examinations
- the provision of storage space for their work
- the range of daytime courses
- the publicity material for advertising courses
- the opportunities to exhibit their work

**KEY CHALLENGES FOR SOLIHULL COUNCIL:**

- review and update the provision in some curriculum areas
- improve the standards of accommodation in many centres, while maintaining a wide range of accessible community venues
- review health and safety arrangements in many areas of the provision
- improve the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning
- set clearer targets to attract more people from under-represented groups into the subcontracted programme
- carry out closer monitoring of the subcontractor's performance
- improve all aspects of quality assurance carried out by the council and the subcontracted provider



## Language of the Adult and Community Learning Sector

Terminology varies across the range of education and training settings covered by the *Common Inspection Framework*. The table below indicates the terms appropriate to Adult and Community Learning

Single term used in the framework	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning	
<b>Provider</b>	<b>Provider</b>	Any organisation providing opportunities for adults to meet personal or collective goals through the experience of learning. Providers include local authorities, specialist designated institutions, voluntary and community sector organisations, regeneration partnerships and further education colleges
<b>Learner</b>	<b>Learner</b>	Includes those learning by participating in community projects, as well as those on courses. Learning, however, will be planned, with intended outcomes.
<b>Teacher / trainer</b>	<b>Tutor</b>	Person teaching adult learners or guiding or facilitating their learning.
	<b>Mentor</b>	Person providing individual, additional support, guidance and advice to learners to help them achieve their learning goals.
<b>Learning goals</b>	<b>Main learning goals</b>	Intended gains in skills, knowledge or understanding. Gains may be reflected in the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications. Or they may be reflected in the ability of learners to apply learning in contexts outside the learning situation, e.g. in the family, community, or workplace. Learners' main goal/s should be recorded on an individual or, in some cases, group learning plan. Plans should be revised as progress is made and new goals emerge.
	<b>Secondary learning goals</b>	These may include planned-for gains in self-confidence, and inter-personal skills. These should also be included in learning plans where appropriate.
<b>Personal and learning skills</b>	<b>Personal and learning skills</b>	These include being able to study independently, willingness to collaborate with others, and readiness to take up another opportunity for education or training.

## Other terms used in Adult and Community Learning

	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning
<b>Unanticipated, or unintended learning outcome</b>	Adults often experience unanticipated gains as a result of being involved in learning. These include improved self-esteem, greater self-confidence and a growing sense of belonging to a community. Gains of this kind should be acknowledged and recorded in any record of achievement.
<b>Subject-based programme</b>	A programme organised around a body of knowledge, e.g. the structure and usage of the French language or ceramic glazing techniques. Students could be expected to progress from one aspect of the subject to another, to grasp increasingly complex concepts or analyses or to develop greater levels of skill or to apply skills to a new area of work.
<b>Issue-based programme</b>	A programme that is based on the concerns, interests and aspirations of particular groups, for example members of a Sikh Gurdwara wanting to address inter-faith relations in their town, or parents worried about the incidence of drug abuse in their locality. Issue-based learning tends to be associated with geographically defined communities, but the increasing use of electronic means of communication means that this need no longer be the case. Progress is defined in terms of the group's increasing ability to analyse its situation, to access new information and skills which will help it resolve its difficulties and generate solutions and its growing confidence in dealing with others to implement those solutions.
<b>Outreach provision</b>	Provision established in a community setting in addition to provision made at an organisation's main site(s). Outreach programmes may be similar to courses at the main site(s) or be designed to meet the specific requirements of that community.
<b>Neighbourhood-based work</b>	The provider's staff have a long-term presence in a local community with a specific remit to understand the concerns of the local residents and develop learning activities to meet local needs and interests.
<b>Community regeneration</b>	The process of improving the quality of life in communities by investing in their infrastructure and facilities, creating opportunities for training and employment and tackling poor health and educational under-achievement. Community regeneration requires the active participation of local residents in decision-making. Changes and improvements are often achieved either directly or indirectly as a result of the adult learning activities which arise from this.

<b>Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning</b>	
<b>Community capacity building</b>	The process of enabling local people to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to take advantage of opportunities for employment, training and further education and to become selfmanaging, sustainable communities.
<b>Active citizenship</b>	The process whereby people recognise the power they have to improve the quality of life for others and make a conscious effort to do so: the process whereby people recognise the power of organisations and institutions to act in the interests of the common good and exercise their influence to ensure that they do so. Adult learning contributes to active citizenship.

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

#### Strengths

- responsive and effective partnership arrangements
- good curriculum management by the subcontractor in most areas of learning
- good celebration of learners' achievements

#### Weaknesses

- weak strategic management of provision
- insufficiently challenging targets to widen participation
- incomplete arrangements to ensure the quality of the subcontractor's teaching and learning
- inadequate monitoring of subcontractor's provision

42. The council works effectively with a wide range of internal and external partners to offer learning opportunities to adult learners. This strength is identified in the council's self-assessment report. The council has a strong commitment to partnership working and takes a leading role in recognising the contribution that learning can make to stimulating social regeneration in many areas of the borough. The council and the subcontracted college are responsible for organising many of the meetings to discuss community planning, involving local community and voluntary organisations, social services, libraries and other education providers. Feedback from these meetings is effectively used by the college to plan programmes, particularly in family learning. These strong partnership arrangements improve understanding of the council's key objectives. The council's head of community services chairs the local lifelong learning partnership, which has carried out a number of useful surveys of adult learners to assist in the planning of adult and community learning, particularly in the deprived areas in the north of the borough. The council uses its knowledge of the schools sector in Solihull to successfully identify areas of specific need and to highlight those wards where few adults take part in learning. This has been particularly useful in planning the development and rapid growth of family learning and classroom and teaching assistant courses.

43. The college's day-to-day curriculum management is good in most areas of its adult and community learning provision. This strength is partly identified in the council's most recent self-assessment report. The college has a strong commitment to community-based learning and widening participation to meet the needs of disadvantaged adults in all areas of Solihull. It has appropriate operational management structures in place to supervise the curriculum areas, although some serious deficiencies exist in the co-ordination of sport and leisure courses. Key co-ordinators and subject specialist co-ordinators are supported well by heads of centres who manage the main community

venues. These arrangements result in effective team working and good communications between tutors and heads of centres in outreach locations. College managers respond quickly to requests from the council to offer new courses to meet the changing needs of local communities. In some areas of the curriculum, for example visual and performing arts, imaginative planning takes place to allow good integration of accredited and non-accredited courses in the same learning sessions. This helps to reinforce progression opportunities and maintain classes when enrolments are poor.

44. Resources to support adult and community learning programmes are generally satisfactory. A wide range of community venues is used, including primary and secondary schools and community centres. The informal atmosphere and convenient location of these centres helps to attract reluctant adults back into learning, although in many cases the small classrooms and low-level furniture are not appropriate to the needs of adult learners. Most tutors are experienced and appropriately qualified, but staff do not possess the required qualifications in some areas of the curriculum, for example sport and leisure. The college offers staff training and development to all tutors, although not all staff are aware of the available programme of training activities. Part-time staff who teach for fewer than six hours a week do not receive a formal appraisal of their performance, but meet with a head of centre to discuss their personal development needs.

45. The council and the college both recognise the importance of helping learners with their literacy, numeracy and language support needs. The arrangements to manage this support for learners on most adult and community learning courses are effective. Learners with identified support needs receive appropriate assistance through the comprehensive range of support mechanisms operated by the college. Literacy and numeracy learning is integrated with many courses and forms an important part of much of the provision. A number of non-accredited recreational courses are imaginatively titled to encourage learners back into a non-threatening environment to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

46. The council's strategic management of the adult and community learning provision is weak. It did not identify this weakness in its most recent self-assessment report. Targets set for the college by the council are not sufficiently challenging and do not fully reflect the objectives set out in the adult learning plan. Part of the funding received by the council from the LSC is targeted specifically at family learning. However, not enough guidance is given on how the remainder of the funding is to be used by the college. The service level agreement between the council and the college is weak. The contract has not been updated for a number of years and is not sufficiently detailed. It does not identify how the college will receive guidance, or how its performance will be monitored.

47. The council has no established process for the management of the college. Regular meetings are held between the council's head of community services and the college's director of community education, but are not used systematically to direct the council's lifelong learning strategy. Actions identified through informal discussions are rarely recorded and are not planned to specific timescales, or with defined management

responsibility. The college regularly produces data on adult and community learning, but there is no formal process for submitting it to the council to direct strategic planning.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 3**

48. The council has a corporate equal opportunities policy, which was last reviewed in August 2000, but does not have a specific policy relating to the subcontracted adult and community learning provision. It has produced a detailed draft scheme in response to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 which has been approved by council cabinet members. Neither of these documents has been shared with the college, which has its own comprehensive equal opportunities policy and detailed complaints and appeals procedures. Most learners have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities, which are covered during induction. Equality of opportunity is monitored by the college and equal opportunities data are collected and analysed on a regular basis.

49. The council and the college celebrate learners' achievements well. A learner of the year awards ceremony, held annually and sponsored by a major national retail company, is publicised well and is valued by the local community. The wide range of awards categories recognises the different types of achievement made by adult learners, and not just the successful completion of qualifications. There are categories for learners who progress into employment, take first steps back into learning and contribute to the community. Awards have been given to learners who have overcome significant personal difficulties to achieve their individual learning goals. **Detailed case studies written about many of the prizewinners are successfully used to promote adult and community learning courses to potential new learners in the local community.**

50. Support for learners is satisfactory. Childcare is provided free of charge in the north of the borough, and can be flexibly arranged for learners on courses set up at short notice. The quality and convenience of this childcare is valued by learners. Financial support is given to some learners to enable them to purchase the appropriate materials for courses, but many tutors and learners have to bring their own equipment to classes.

51. Learners with restricted mobility have satisfactory access to the wide range of community venues. The council is working with the college to fulfil the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and has allocated a specific sum of money this year to improve the facilities at three venues.

52. Adult and community learning targets set by the council for the college in relation to equality of opportunity and diversity are insufficiently challenging. The adult and community learning plan contains targets for the recruitment of male learners, those from minority ethnic groups, adults with learning difficulties or disabilities, and those aged over 60. However, there are no other targets relating to learners from particular areas of the local community or under-represented groups. The targets set are insufficiently detailed to provide the college with clear, specific objectives for each area

of its adult and community learning provision. Target-setting does not always encourage the college to increase its efforts to widen participation. For example, the recruitment target set by the council for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities in 2003-04 is 2 per cent when the college had already managed to attract 8 per cent of learners in this category into adult and community learning courses in 2002-03. Some promotional material used by the college does not contain positive images to attract new learners from under-represented groups in the local community.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Contributory grade 4**

53. The college's arrangements to ensure the quality of teaching and learning on its adult and community learning courses are incomplete. The college has well-established quality assurance systems, but some staff responsible for adult and community learning programmes are unsure of their roles and responsibilities regarding quality assurance. The collection and analysis of feedback from learners' questionnaires is not standardised across the areas of learning and meaningful comparisons are difficult to make. The quality of teaching and learning is not systematically monitored through lesson observations, and some teaching staff on adult and community learning courses have never been observed. Monitoring of targets does not take place in all parts of the curriculum. The effect of these incomplete quality assurance arrangements is reduced in some areas of learning by the commitment of individual members of staff to their own informal checking of the quality of their teaching and learning. Health and safety arrangements are unsatisfactory in some areas of the curriculum. In some centres, accommodation is unsuitable for adult learners, and learners' medical histories are not sufficiently monitored before they join sport and leisure courses. Inspectors identified examples of poor practice in health and safety, particularly in relation to sport and leisure, which put learners, and in some cases tutors, at risk of injury.

54. The council does not carry out enough formal monitoring of the quality of the college's provision. It relies too much on the college's systems and the LSC's requirements. The council does not have its own mechanisms to ensure that the college's quality assurance arrangements are effective. The college is not required to forward to the council important information such as feedback from teaching observations, or the outcomes from the termly subject reviews. The service level agreement between the council and the college does not make any reference to how the council will quality assure the adult and community learning provision it funds.

55. The arrangements for the internal verification of accredited adult and community learning courses are satisfactory. Meetings are held for some curriculum areas to share good practice in assessment. Internal verifiers have, or are working towards, the qualifications required to carry out their role.

56. The council's most recent self-assessment report was written by the college's director of community education. Key members of the council, college staff, learners and other important external and internal partners were not involved in the process. The report does not show grades, or identify key strengths and weaknesses, for any area of the college's adult and community learning provision. The council's development plan is

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not detailed enough and does not contain enough specific actions or measurable outcomes to ensure that the council meets key objectives based on the report's judgements.



## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Land-based provision

### Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	78	2

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

#### Strengths

- good retention rates
- good attainment and progression into further learning
- good teaching and learning
- successful initiatives to attract new learners from the local community
- good support for learners

#### Weaknesses

- inappropriate accommodation in some centres

### Achievement and standards

57. Retention rates on floristry and flower arranging courses are good. In 2002-03, retention rates on accredited and non-accredited courses were 80 and 85 per cent, respectively. Although retention rates have declined slightly over the past three years, enrolments have increased considerably. More than 80 per cent of learners are from the four deprived wards in the north of the borough.

58. Learners develop good skills in using plant material, which reinforces their previous learning. They are able to combine these skills with their creative abilities to produce good-quality flower arrangements and designs. In one lesson, learners were being taught how to plait a leaf. After a short demonstration by the tutor, the learners quickly mastered this difficult skill. Learners' portfolio work and the practical arrangements they produce in the classroom are of a very good standard. They improve their ability to articulate their analytical skills through assessing each other's work.

59. Progression rates to higher-level courses are good. Flower arranging and floristry courses are available at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. In 2002-03, over 65 per cent of learners progressed to a higher-level course. Many of them use the courses as a first step back into learning, and then progress to courses in other subject areas. In one case, a learner is studying three mornings a week, doing two flower arranging courses and one computer literacy course.

### **Quality of education and training**

60. The standard of teaching and learning is good on flower arranging and floristry courses. Tutors have very good demonstration skills and ensure that learners have a thorough understanding of what is required for a particular design, before allowing them to start work on their arrangements. Learners are well motivated and regularly question their tutors about possible alternative materials for a particular design. They are allowed to design arrangements which they can use outside the classroom, in some cases helping learners to come to terms with difficult personal circumstances.

61. The college has launched successful initiatives to attract new learners from the local community into flower arranging and floristry. Enrolments have increased over the past three years from just under 20 to almost 80. The college has a clear strategy for the future development of courses and successfully focuses the courses on those adults in most need, using venues such as local primary and secondary schools and other community establishments. The college adapts its learner recruitment policy to promote courses to different local communities and plans its local advertising well. A range of new programmes has broadened the scope of the provision, and includes courses for employees of a major car manufacturer and a national bank, as well as short summer and Christmas taster courses.

62. Learners are supported well. Many of them are returning to learning after a long period away from formal education, or are using the courses to help them overcome significant personal issues. Learners are knowledgeable about the wide range of support that is available to help them attend their courses. They are offered free childcare at all venues, which is particularly appreciated. Many learners are given financial support to enable them to purchase flowers and other materials. Learners with additional literacy needs are given appropriate assistance, particularly in compiling their portfolios of work. The college is starting a pilot programme to fully integrate literacy support into all courses. Tutors give good pastoral support to learners and take an active role in all aspects of their development.

63. The assessment of learners' progress on all courses is satisfactory. In most learning sessions, tutors plan and carry out regular and effective assessments that support learners' progress. At the end of each class, the learners assess their own work using a checklist which is then compared with the tutor's assessment of the flower arrangement. This ensures that learners are fully aware of the improvements they could make. Learners are also encouraged to informally assess each other's work and discuss ideas with other members of the class.

64. In some centres, the accommodation used is not suitable for flower arranging or floristry classes. Some teaching rooms are too small and have insufficient space to allow learners to spread out the large amount of materials they need for this type of work. Chairs and tables in some schools are not suitable for adults. Learners have to bend uncomfortably to produce their arrangements and the tables are at an unsuitable height to allow learners to see their designs from an appropriate angle.

## **Leadership and management**

65. Management of the flower arranging and floristry provision is effective. The subject co-ordinator manages a small team of staff and is fully involved in the planning and day-to-day management of the programme. Learners particularly appreciate the individual attention they receive from staff. Although there is a system for collecting learners' feedback through evaluation forms at the end of courses, these are not always completed. The college's self-assessment report for all its land-based provision accurately identifies most of the strengths in the provision, but is not clearly linked to the council's own self-assessment report.

**Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel****Grade 5**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	208	5

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

**Strengths**

- good initiatives to develop programmes for learners with particular needs

**Weaknesses**

- unsatisfactory teaching and learning in many classes
- inadequate arrangements to ensure learners' health and well-being
- poor resources
- ineffective monitoring and recording of learners' progress and achievement
- inadequate curriculum planning
- poor operational management
- weak quality assurance arrangements

**Achievement and standards**

66. Retention rates on sport and leisure courses are satisfactory, averaging 65 per cent over the past two years. Attendance on most courses is good and learners are punctual in arriving for classes. Most learners demonstrate appropriate practical skills and the use of technical knowledge. They appreciate the positive physical and psychological benefits achieved through classes such as yoga and tai chi. Older learners particularly value the social benefits and the friendships they develop through classes, and have increased self-confidence in applying their own learning to everyday physical activities.

**Quality of education and training**

67. Initiatives to develop programmes for learners with particular needs are good. An imaginative range of courses is available, including keep fit for everyday living, indoor bowls, and dancing. Programmes are well designed to meet the very wide range of learners' abilities. Enrolments so far in 2003-04 have increased by more than 25 per cent, compared with 2002-03. The provision is enhanced through good partnership working with a number of organisations such as social services, care homes and day centres, and through contacts with community nurses. Links between the college's co-ordinators for sport and leisure and for adults with particular needs are effective, and the courses are managed well.

68. Pastoral support for learners is satisfactory. Learners appreciate the benefits of participating in activities led by supportive and friendly tutors. However, levels of

support vary considerably across the provision. Individual learning plans are used effectively to support learners with particular needs and additional literacy and numeracy support is well integrated with some courses. For example, in a routes and rambles class, the learners concentrate on improving their numeracy skills through interpreting maps and planning routes. They carry out a series of exercises, which culminate in walks that incorporate clear learning outcomes in numeracy.

69. Teaching and learning standards in sport and leisure are unsatisfactory. Teaching was unsatisfactory, or worse, in over 30 per cent of the lessons observed by inspectors. Lessons are poorly planned. Tutors use inappropriate language in some lessons and frequently participate in activities instead of supervising the class. Learners often wear inappropriate clothing for the class, and tutors do not give enough attention to learners' individual abilities.

70. Arrangements to ensure the health and well-being of learners are inadequate. Inspectors observed a number of dangerous practices in some classes. Tutors frequently do not correct poor exercise practices and sometimes demonstrate the wrong techniques for a particular exercise. Some staff do not possess an appropriate first aid qualification. The initial assessment of learners' fitness levels and their reasons for joining sport and leisure classes is poor. Tutors have only recently started to carry out health checks and, in some cases, they do not identify learners who record medical problems on their health check form. Tutors are unsure about what to do with this information and who is responsible for any action required.

71. Resources for many courses are poor. Learners in some classes are required to bring their own equipment, such as exercise mats and racquets, and tutors frequently provide their own equipment for classes. The use of non-licensed music in some sessions is not in accordance with the legislation for its use in public performances. Some classes are held in unsuitable accommodation which is badly maintained, poorly lit and too cold for the activities taking place. Some tutors do not have appropriate expertise and qualifications in their subject area.

72. The monitoring and recording of learners' progress and achievements are ineffective. Progress sheets designed by the college to give learners feedback about their progress or to identify their achievements, are not used sufficiently by tutors. In the weaker lessons, the performance of individual learners is not adequately monitored and tutors do not provide learners with sufficiently detailed feedback that they can use to improve their skills and knowledge.

### **Leadership and management**

73. Curriculum planning in sport and leisure is inadequate. Provision during the day is not sufficient and does not meet the needs of the increasing number of elderly people, or the significant numbers of unemployed adults in the north of the borough. Access to suitable accommodation for sport and leisure courses is restricted during the day. The range of courses is narrow, and many popular subjects, such as pilates and martial arts, are not offered. Current courses do not offer enough progression routes into more

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advanced courses.

74. The day-to-day operational management of the sport and leisure curriculum is poor. Few processes exist to ensure good communication between managers and the part-time tutors who make up most of the teaching staff. Many tutors are unaware of the existence of a key co-ordinator for sport and leisure and the college has not appointed a subject co-ordinator for this area of learning. Staff meetings are poorly attended and good practice is not shared enough to bring about continuous improvements in the curriculum area. Staff are not clear about their roles and responsibilities and insufficient staff development is planned specifically for sport and leisure tutors.

75. Quality assurance arrangements are weak. Staff are not sufficiently aware of the importance of quality assurance. Teaching observations of part-time staff are not routinely carried out. Some tutors have worked for the college for a considerable length of time but have never been observed. Learners' views are not systematically collected at the end of their courses and many have never been given a questionnaire to complete. The self-assessment process is inadequate and staff have insufficient recall of any involvement in the process or the outcomes. The council's self-assessment report makes no reference to specific strengths and weaknesses in the college's sport and leisure provision.

**Health, social care & public services****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	221	2

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

**Strengths**

- good achievement rates
- good retention rates
- good teaching and learning
- successful partnerships to meet the needs of the local community

**Weaknesses**

- inadequate resources in some centres
- insufficient initial advice and guidance for classroom and teaching assistant learners

**Achievement and standards**

76. Achievement rates are good for classroom and teaching assistant learners. In 2002-03, the programme's first year, 92 and 84 per cent, respectively, of classroom and teaching assistant learners who started the courses achieved their qualification. All learners completing complementary therapies courses receive a college certificate of attendance. Learners achieve the learning objectives set for them. The retention rate for learners on complementary therapies courses was almost 90 per cent in 2002-03.

**Quality of education and training**

77. Standards of teaching and learning are good on all courses. Teaching was good or better in almost 90 per cent of the classes observed by inspectors. Lessons are planned well to ensure that learners are constantly involved in a wide range of practical activities. They respond particularly well to verbal questioning. On classroom and teaching assistant courses, learners' portfolios demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of child development and relevant legislation. The well-qualified and experienced tutors are enthusiastic and very well motivated. They make sure that time is allowed in class for learners to work in small groups to develop very effective presentations. Learners on complementary health courses recognise the benefits that particular therapies can bring. They use the practical skills they gain outside the classroom, and share them with families and friends.

78. The needs and interests of learners from the local community are met through effective partnership working. Both the council and the subcontracted college have good links with a wide range of partners, to the benefit of the learners. Courses have

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developed as a result of local demand. The council recognises the importance of working with local primary and secondary schools and the early years partnership to meet local employers' needs. The college relies on partners to provide work placements for classroom and teaching assistant learners. Some learners have progressed to higher-level courses.

79. Arrangements for the assessment of learners' work are satisfactory. All learners receive an appropriate induction, and learners on the classroom and teaching assistant courses are assessed when they complete each unit of the qualification. The college has recently introduced an internal verification system for accredited courses, to meet the requirements of the external awarding body. Learners complete a progress review at the end of each class, in which they identify the benefits of that particular session.

80. Teaching and learning resources are inadequate in some centres. Shortages of textbooks and materials to support task-based learning and practical activities on classroom and teaching assistant courses mean that tutors frequently have to transport resources between venues. Heavy equipment used on complementary therapies courses, such as couches, has to be moved by staff without any assistance. Classrooms in some venues are cramped and the privacy arrangements for learners carrying out practical activities on a number of complementary therapies courses are inappropriate. Towels are frequently used as curtains to screen windows when privacy is required. Furniture used in some classrooms is not suitable for adult learners. All staff are appropriately qualified and experienced in their subjects.

81. Classroom and teaching assistant learners are not given enough initial advice and guidance before enrolling on courses. Interviews with potential learners are frequently carried out over the telephone and important details are not always formally recorded. Learners' job-related skills are not assessed sufficiently to decide their qualification level or to accredit existing knowledge and experience. Learners are not always given enough guidance regarding the appropriateness of the courses, or what outcomes and qualifications they can expect at the end of the programmes. Literacy and numeracy support is integrated with the classroom and teaching assistant courses, but an initial assessment of learners' additional support needs is not always carried out before they start the courses. The agreement of individual learning plans with learners is delayed.

### **Leadership and management**

82. The two key co-ordinators responsible for the college's health, social care and public services courses provide effective management. The classroom and teaching assistant courses have been rapidly developed over the past two years, to become an established and successful part of the adult and community learning programme. Regular staff meetings are held to discuss course developments, but good practice is not shared enough and tutors are not sufficiently aware of the availability of centrally held learning resources. The use of equipment, tools and materials is not properly monitored. No system exists for observing those tutors who teach for fewer than six hours a week. The council's self-assessment report does not identify any specific strengths or weaknesses for either classroom and teaching assistant, or complementary therapies courses.



83. Tutors are made aware of staff training and development opportunities, but some staff do not take part in any of the training activities offered. Where staff make their own arrangements to update their professional expertise away from the college, the outcomes are not always fully monitored or recorded. Some staff involved in transporting heavy equipment between centres have not had any opportunity to attend training in the safe handling of equipment.

**Visual & performing arts & media****Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	650	3

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

**Strengths**

- good attainment
- good retention rates
- good standards of teaching and learning

**Weaknesses**

- poor accommodation and resources in some centres
- inadequate curriculum planning

**Achievement and standards**

84. Learners' work is good. They are working at an appropriate level and many make good use of introductory short courses before progressing to longer, 30-week programmes. A significant number of learners have been attending visual and performing arts courses for two years or more, gaining qualifications at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. The quality of learners' practical work is good in most classes, combining technical competence with creative flair. In a lace making class, learners produce work of an exceptionally good quality, exploring such styles as Torchon, Buckingham and Bruges lace. Good use is made of personal logs and sketchbooks, which include references to historical and contemporary sources. In most cases, learners make good progress towards achieving challenging targets and they gain independent learning skills. Many develop their work outside the class and use their craft skills in their local community, for example producing work to sell at craft fairs, schools and exhibitions.

85. Retention rates are good for visual and performing arts programmes, with 81 per cent of learners being retained in 2002-03. Many courses take place over a full academic year of three terms, but learners can pay their annual tuition fees in three instalments. Retention rates on most short five- and 10-week courses in 2002-03 were 100 per cent.

**Quality of education and training**

86. Standards of teaching and learning are good in visual and performing arts. Many of the tutors are freelance artists or specialists in their subject areas and have appropriate professional qualifications. One craft tutor is internationally recognised in her particular

area of expertise. Of the 18 teaching sessions observed, 16 were good or better and only two were unsatisfactory. Tutors use a wide range of teaching styles, appropriate to the level of learning. In a calligraphy class, Japanese learners have been successfully integrated with the group and make a valuable contribution. Lesson plans are thorough, with clear but flexible objectives set for each session. Well-organised teaching allows tutors to successfully integrate learners at all levels on accredited and non-accredited courses into the class. Tutors' confident and clear demonstrations motivate and inspire learners to extend their range of craft skills. In one soft furnishing class, the tutor showed learners how to make cushions to a professional standard in 10 minutes. They all succeeded in this technique, despite never having used a sewing machine before.

87. The assessment of learners' progress on most courses is satisfactory. Learners regularly receive constructive and challenging verbal feedback, enabling them to improve their work and achieve their learning goals. Tutors understand that having work assessed can cause anxiety for some adults who are new to learning, or returning to study after a long break, and they give appropriate and supportive feedback to these learners. The progress of learners on accredited courses is appropriately documented, using good systems, but the monitoring of learners on non-accredited courses is weak. Learners' own self-assessments of their progress focus on the activities they have completed and not enough on the learning that takes place.

88. Guidance and support for learners on visual and performing arts courses are satisfactory. Learners are supported well by tutors and centre managers who take care to ensure that learners attend classes. Tutors telephone learners to enquire about their welfare if they miss three consecutive classes without any explanation. A number of learners receive financial support for the materials they need to purchase. However, in some cases, information about courses is not sufficiently detailed for learners to be able to make an informed decision about their choice of programme.

89. Resources are inadequate at a number of venues. Some lessons take place in cramped classrooms where learners find it difficult to produce an adequate range of work. Some storage facilities are poor and learners carry work to and from sessions every week. In a sculpture class, learners have to parcel up wet clay work and take it home. Maintenance is poor in some centres. Learners work in classrooms without any heating and which are not always cleaned before the class starts. Some specialist equipment, such as sewing machines, is in short supply and tutors and learners often use their own equipment and materials.

### **Leadership and management**

90. Communications between staff are good. Tutors and centre managers hold regular meetings, and share good practice. However, not enough classroom observation of teaching and learning takes place and many staff have not been observed at all. Most tutors, although experienced and professionally qualified, do not have an annual appraisal. The council's most recent self-assessment report does not identify any specific strengths or weaknesses for this area of learning.

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91. The planning of the visual and performing arts curriculum is inadequate. The provision is restricted to a narrow range of traditional subjects such as drawing, painting, soft furnishing, and dressmaking. Few courses are available which incorporate new technologies, such as computer-aided design, photography or multimedia. The courses reflect the availability and expertise of established tutors, and individual heads of centres often decide on the choice of programmes without any overall co-ordination. Some groups of adults from local communities, including men, are poorly represented in learning.

**Family learning****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	375	2

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

**Strengths**

- very good achievements
- good teaching and learning on literacy courses
- particularly effective partnerships to identify and meet the needs of local communities
- good curriculum management and leadership

**Weaknesses**

- inappropriate accommodation for some learners
- insufficient initial assessment on some family learning courses

**Achievement and standards**

92. Achievement rates are very good throughout the full range of accredited and non-accredited family learning courses. In 2002-03, achievement rates were over 90 per cent for many accredited courses, and have shown continuous improvement over the past three years. For example, achievement rates for family literacy courses have risen from just over 40 per cent in 2000-01 to 85 per cent in 2002-03.

93. Learners make good progress towards their individual learning goals. They can explain the learning that takes place and how it influences their lives. Many learners report that they benefit from unexpected outcomes, such as improved self-confidence, an ability to manage their learning and better parenting skills. They are able to develop strategies for supporting their children's work at home.

**Quality of education and training**

94. Standards of teaching and learning are good on family literacy programmes. Teaching and learning were good, or better in 70 per cent of the classes observed by inspectors. Courses are planned well with clear aims and learning outcomes. Teaching strategies are adapted to suit the needs and characteristics of the groups. Learners are enthusiastic and well motivated. They enjoy their classes and many comment that they regard their course as good fun. Learners interact and support each other well. However, in some numeracy classes, involving complicated mathematical concepts, the pace of the lessons is too fast and insufficient checks are made to assess whether any learning is taking place.

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95. Family learning programme managers have developed productive links with a range of external organisations. All partners share a clear vision for the development of the provision throughout the borough and a wide range of courses is offered. College staff work hard to pilot imaginative new courses in partnership with the council and a variety of local and regional agencies involved in family learning. Many of the family learning programmes are deliberately located in schools and communities where literacy and numeracy targets are not being met, and where adults and children are not confident in their ability to learn effectively. In one primary school, children with behavioural difficulties meet weekly, with their families, to carry out exciting practical projects linked to work on the national curriculum.

96. Learners receive appropriate support with personal issues from tutors and these discussions are handled sensitively and in a suitable manner for adult learners. Staff are good at informally guiding learners in a positive way and learners are offered good guidance about the range of family learning courses available, and possible progression routes. Weekly drop-in sessions and workshops are an important part of the informal support given to learners.

97. Accommodation for family learning courses is inappropriate in some centres. Many of the courses take place in school premises. Sometimes not enough space is available and the classrooms allocated for family learning classes do not always meet learners' needs. Tutors have appropriate qualifications and experience. They use good-quality course materials, which contain clear language and graphics. Professional handouts and prompt cards are used in some practical activities to supplement verbal instructions.

98. Initial assessment practices are inadequate on some family learning courses. Learners' abilities are identified using a range of initial assessment procedures. However, on informal, more generalised family learning courses, learners are not assessed at the start of their programmes to identify any additional literacy or numeracy support needs. There are not enough strategies for informal assessment to suit the wider aims of the courses. Schemes of work and lesson plans do not make enough reference to meeting the needs of individuals and progress reports do not always comment on learners' progress in literacy and numeracy. Assessment and support arrangements are satisfactory on accredited courses. Adult learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs are assessed and the results are used to plan teaching and learning strategies, and measure progress. Support for additional needs is integrated with all accredited courses.

### **Leadership and management**

99. The family learning curriculum is managed well by the council and the college. The joint adult and community learning plan for 2003-04 provides a clear framework for a family learning strategy in Solihull and, in particular, areas in the north of the borough, parts of which have a greater proportion of people with literacy and numeracy needs than the national average. Clear targets are set for the development of the provision and staff have a good understanding of the key objectives for this area of work. Managers provide good support for staff and regular and productive team meetings are held. Examples of good practice are successfully shared between tutors through a family

learning newsletter. The culture is one of continuous improvement in this area of learning and staff frequently participate in training courses. Strategies to integrate additional literacy, numeracy and language support into the wide range of accredited and non-accredited courses are well developed.