INSPECTION REPORT

Joint Learning Partnership

02 March 2006
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 aged 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
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.
Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An outstanding provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A good provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A satisfactory provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- grade 1 - outstanding
- grade 2 - good
- grade 3 - satisfactory
- grade 4 - inadequate
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DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Joint Learning Partnership (JLP) is a privately owned training provider which was established in 1996. Two directors and a recently employed general manager make up the senior management team. There are four training managers and 14 trainers and assessors who manage the apprenticeship and national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes in administration, customer service, and distribution, business management and the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme. There are six independently employed trainers who manage and assess hospitality and catering, and some administration, customer service and retail NVQ programmes through a joint partnership arrangement.

2. There are 216 apprentices, 49 advanced apprentices, 56 NVQ learners and 17 E2E learners, who are funded by Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and a national contract for a large retail organisation. Merseyside and Greater Manchester Local Education Authority’s (LEA’s) fund six, year 10 and 11 school pupils through their ‘impact programme’ to provide an alternative vocational curriculum. Sixty per cent of JLP’s learners are employed in Merseyside and the surrounding area.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. JLP’s leadership and management and the arrangements for equality of opportunity are good, while the arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. Provision is good in retail and commercial enterprise, preparation for life and work and business administration and law. Provision is satisfactory in hospitality and catering.

4. The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process. The self-assessment process is partially inclusive. Operational managers and their staff write the report against the Common Inspection Framework. Grades are agreed as part of a validation meeting. However, employers’ and learners’ views are not included in the report. Few of the judgements in leadership and management match the strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspectors. Strengths and weaknesses in occupational areas are repetitive and many are no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified some of the same strengths as those in the self-assessment report, but few of the weaknesses identified by inspectors are included in the report. The development plan is sufficiently detailed and matches the judgements in the self-assessment report. The plan was updated just before inspection and many of the actions are complete.

5. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements. JLP has good strategies to promote continuous improvement. All staff and subcontractors have individual accountability targets that are evaluated regularly as part of an effective appraisal and review system. The operational management in all areas of learning is good and is supported by particularly effective employer involvement in teaching and learning. JLP is aware of the insufficiently thorough or standardised approach in monitoring quality policies and procedures, and is currently developing systems to support an organisational
JOINT LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

approach to quality improvement.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR JOINT LEARNING PARTNERSHIP:

- improve the retention and achievement reports available to operational managers
- improve the promotion of equality of opportunity in the workplace
- continue the development of a ‘skills for life’ strategy
- improve the learners’ review process
- maintain the strong employer involvement in training
- continue the standardisation of quality improvement monitoring

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Grades awarded at inspection

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership and management</th>
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<tr>
<td>Contributory grades:</td>
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<td>Quality improvement</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributory areas:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retailing, wholesaling, warehousing and distribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>NVQ training for young people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospitality and catering</td>
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<td>Contributory areas:</td>
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<td>Employability training</td>
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<td>Entry to Employment</td>
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### Business administration and law

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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Customer service</strong></td>
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<td>Apprenticeships for young people</td>
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<tr>
<td>NVQ training for adults</td>
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### ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. Provision in retail and commercial enterprise, business administration and law, and preparation for life and work was reported on and graded. JLP’s training programmes in information and communications technology were not reported on or graded. Evidence was collected from this area to support judgements in leadership and management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of inspectors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of inspection days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of learners interviewed</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of staff interviewed</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of employers interviewed</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of subcontractors interviewed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of partners/external agencies interviewed</td>
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### KEY FINDINGS

#### Achievements and standards

7. **Retention and achievements rates are particularly good on NVQs in customer service and warehousing and distribution.** Ninety per cent of learners on NVQs in customer service achieved their qualification during 2003-04, and in 2004-05, 93 per cent achieved the qualification and 3 per cent are still in learning. NVQ warehousing and distribution achievement rates in 2003-04 are 78 per cent, with 11 per cent still in learning.

8. **Learners on the e-NVQ programme in business administration are making very good progress.** The software has effective systems that the learners use to monitor progress, and plan learning and assessments. Learners on hospitality apprenticeship programmes are making good progress towards the full framework. Of the 29 apprentices who should complete the framework in July 2006, 17 are ahead of target and one learner has already completed it. Progression rates for hospitality and catering learners are good. Of the current 29 learners on the level 3 NVQ, 12 have progressed from the level 2 NVQ.
9. **Progression rates are good for E2E learners.** In 2005-06, 50 per cent of learners have gained a job or have started a further education programme, with 42 per cent still in learning. Achievement rates in key skills communication are good, but none of the learners have achieved the key skills in application of number.

10. **Learners develop good skills in retailing and wholesaling and hospitality and catering.** These adequately meet employers’ requirements and learners’ needs in their existing employment. Learners work independently and effectively and some are promoted into more demanding job roles. On E2E programmes, learners develop good social and interpersonal skills.

11. Achievement rates for apprentices in business administration and customer service, retailing and wholesaling, warehousing and distribution and hospitality and catering programmes are satisfactory. Achievement rates for business administration are 45 per cent for 2003-04 with a further 3 per cent still in learning. Achievements rates in retailing and wholesaling are 43 per cent for 2003-04, and in hospitality they are 39 per cent, with a further 4 per cent still in learning.

12. The standard of learners’ work is satisfactory. Portfolios contain an appropriate range of evidence which shows that the learners are achieving a good level of competence. The NVQ portfolios in warehousing and distribution demonstrate an understanding of a good range of topics. Learners are motivated to complete good work.

13. **The framework completion rate is low but improving for advanced apprentices.** Between 2002 and 2004, 11 per cent of learners completed the framework and 37 per cent are still in learning.

### The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
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</table>

14. **Learners benefit from good training.** Schemes of work on the E2E programmes are detailed and identify a broad range of learning activities. Training delivered at employers’ premises for apprentices is effectively planned to complement the employers’ own training. Assessors use effective practical workplace examples to provide good support and guidance through the NVQ requirements. Employers and JLP’s staff work together to deliver some aspects of training.

15. **Assessors provide good coaching during their regular visits to learners.** All assessors on the business administration and customer service programmes have, or are working towards, a coaching module from a level 3 learning and development qualification.

16. **Most employers provide on-the-job training that is well planned.** Employers provide a good level of work experience including job rotation, to ensure that learners can meet all the requirements of the NVQ.
17. **Most of the employers offer very good support for learners and allow time in work for research, tutorials and portfolio work.** Most of the learners have access to some form of learning centre in the workplace for internet research and study. Some employers have a learnerdirect access point that can be used by the learners.

18. **Learners on all programmes receive particularly good support from the provider.** Staff respond promptly to learners’ needs relating to the curriculum as well as personal, social and development needs. Assessors provide particularly good and very flexible arrangements to support learning and assessment. Learners are able to contact assessors by mobile telephone or online. JLP has a good working relationship with employers and with Connexions and uses these to support learners.

19. **Initial assessment of learners’ literacy, numeracy and language needs on E2E programmes is particularly good.** Learners complete a variety of diagnostic assessments and are reassessed at key times throughout the programme to measure improvement. Adequate arrangements are in place for the initial assessment of learners’ literacy, numeracy and key skills on hospitality and catering, and business administration and customer service programmes. However, initial assessment and additional learning support for learners in retailing, wholesaling, warehousing and distribution is inadequate. Most of the learners have an initial assessment, with the exception of some NVQ learners. Learners who need additional support receive extra help from assessors. However, assessors are not trained to deliver training in literacy, numeracy and language and do not have access to specialist materials.

20. Assessors use a sufficient range of assessment methods for the NVQ. Assessment visits are carried out every two weeks and extra visits are offered if needed. Assessments are planned to meet the demands of the workplace and cause minimal disruptions. Assessment in hospitality and catering is planned at times that best suit the industry, many outside the working day.

21. Appropriate advice and guidance is given to learners to help them choose the appropriate level of programme. Induction to the business administration, retailing, warehousing and distribution programmes is adequate for most learners, but it is brief and some subjects are covered superficially. Learners find the amount of information difficult to absorb in such a short time.

22. **Review practices are weak in retailing, wholesaling, warehousing and distribution, business administration, and customer service.** There is insufficient clarity between assessment action-planning and the review process. Few employers are involved in the reviews and some have an insufficient understanding of the requirements of the review process.

**Leadership and management**

23. **JLP has particularly good collaborative partnerships that provide very effective short-term programmes for E2E learners.** In partnership with another local provider, JLP has been successful in gaining European Social Funding to support a ‘first steps to employment’ programme which is due to start in April 2006. JLP has a number of very effective partnerships with subcontractors to deliver the apprenticeship programmes.
24. **Very effective business planning sets clear and detailed business objectives.** Partnership agreements with subcontractors contain very specific achievement targets and expected quality improvement practices. Retention and achievement rates have improved in the past three years.

25. **Programme management is particularly effective in retailing, wholesaling, warehousing and distribution and hospitality and catering.** Staff are particularly enthusiastic and well motivated towards clearly defined aims. Assessors and subcontractors work as a team. Detailed service level agreements between JLP and joint partnership staff give clear guidance on areas of responsibility and performance targets. The co-ordination and management of E2E, business administration and customer service programmes is satisfactory.

26. **Senior managers have developed a very strong culture of shared responsibility and team support.** All aspects of business planning are shared with the operational management team. Staff who work for subcontractors are given the same opportunities for training and development as JLP’s staff. JLP has a well-considered work-life balance policy.

27. **Communication between JLP and employers is particularly good.** Training and coaching plans complement the existing employer training in the workplace. Assessors spend time with employers during the frequent assessment visits. Staff are committed to the promotion of good working relationships with employers. Extra-curriculum activities such as ‘masterclasses’ at a local college, are open to employers.

28. **Staff development is good.** Individual staff training is identified through an annual appraisal system. New staff have a thorough induction to company policies and procedures. Training in health and safety, fire safety and equal opportunities is given in the first few weeks of employment.

29. **JLP’s new premises are well designed and resources and facilities are good.** Training rooms are well resourced and comfortable. Learners and staff are encouraged to be environmentally friendly through recycling paper and aluminium cans. Resources for apprenticeship programmes are satisfactory. Most of the learners in large organisations have access to some form of learning centre in the workplace for internet research and study.

30. The collection and use of feedback from learners and employers is satisfactory. After the first six weeks on a programme, the employer receives a courtesy call by the marketing team. The member of staff checks that they have had their first visit and have received all the appropriate paperwork. Questionnaires are sent to employers twice a year and learners complete questionnaires after six months and at the end of training. Responses to the questionnaires are good with 85 per cent of employers stating that the training is good.

31. **The collection of data on learners’ progress, retention and achievement is not used effectively to analyse progress towards framework completion.** Few reports are generated to help operational managers identify learners’ progress against targets. Managers develop reports independently of the system and at times have difficulty recognising and owning the management reports.

32. **The literacy and numeracy and language needs of apprentices and NVQ learners are**
not adequately supported. Apprentices who have good results with general certificates of secondary education (GCSE) are not always given literacy and numeracy assessments. Initial assessment of NVQ learners is inadequate, with many not having the opportunity of diagnostic assessment. Occupational specialists are not qualified to offer training in literacy and numeracy. Staff who deliver the E2E programmes are insufficiently qualified in literacy, numeracy and language skills. A planned organisational skills for life strategy will qualify all tutors supporting learners literacy and numeracy development to level 3 key skills.

33. Equality and diversity are very well promoted to learners who attend the training centre. However, the promotion of equal opportunities to learners in the workplace is insufficient. The review document does not encourage discussion and uses closed questions that do not extend learners’ understanding of applying equality and diversity to their work situation.

34. The monitoring of practices and procedures is not sufficiently managed, or thorough enough to support a standard approach across all areas of training. Some aspects of key weaknesses from the previous inspection have not sufficiently improved. JLP has recognised that its quality monitoring processes are insufficient and is developing new audit practices.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very effective involvement in collaborative partnerships and projects
- particularly good business planning
- particularly strong culture of shared responsibility and team support
- good training centre resources to promote equal opportunities
- good support to enable learners to succeed

Weaknesses

- poor use of data to monitor learners’ progress
- insufficient literacy and numeracy support for learners
- insufficient monitoring of quality procedures
- poor promotion of equality of opportunity in the workplace

Retail and commercial enterprise

Retailing, wholesaling, warehousing and distribution

Strengths

- good achievement rates on warehousing and distribution programmes
- good standard of training
- strong employer links
- particularly effective programme management
JOINT LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Weaknesses
- inadequate arrangements for additional learning support
- weak progress reviews

Hospitality and catering

Strengths
- good progress on apprenticeship programmes
- particularly good support for learners
- good programme management

Weaknesses
- low achievement rates for advanced apprentices
- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities during progress reviews

Preparation for life and work

Employability training

Strengths
- good progression rates
- particularly good teaching and learning
- good use of initial assessment results
- particularly effective support for learners

Weaknesses
- insufficiently qualified staff for teaching literacy and numeracy skills

Business administration and law

Strengths
- very good retention and achievement rates for customer service NVQ programmes
- very good progress by e-NVQ learners
- particularly flexible arrangements to support assessment and learning
- good communication with employers

Weaknesses
- weak review practices
- insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity in the workplace
WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT JOINT LEARNING PARTNERSHIP:

- assessors are good at explaining things and are very patient
- the friendly and approachable staff
- very knowledgeable assessors
- getting a qualification while working
- frequent contact by assessors, sometimes out of hours
- flexible approach by assessors - they are always happy to re-arrange visits to fit in with work pressures
- being treated as an individual
- ‘I have improved my confidence and communication skills’
- ‘doing an apprenticeship doesn’t just help at work, it helps me deal with real life situations’

WHAT LEARNERS THINK JOINT LEARNING PARTNERSHIP COULD IMPROVE:

- clearer explanation at the beginning of the programme
- ‘more information about what else JLP does and what is available to me’
- the website for the e-NVQ is very complicated and can be confusing
- more training in writing
- more group training sessions