

Greater expectations

Provision for learners
with disabilities



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

This publication can be supplied on request in alternative formats to meet individual needs.

Photography by:

Alamy/Image Source

Corbis/Zefa

Giles @ GMN Creative

Images of Disability

Stephen Wood

Additional thanks are due to Cheadle Royal Industries and Foxes Academy who kindly permitted us to photograph their activities.

Published by the Adult Learning Inspectorate

© Adult Learning Inspectorate 2006

Adult Learning Inspectorate

Spring Place

Coventry Business Park

Herald Avenue

Coventry CV5 6UB

This publication may be copied in its entirety, without charge. Extracts may not be quoted without acknowledgement of the source. Material from this publication may not be sold or used by way of trade without the express permission of the copyright holder.

Adult Learning Inspectorate publications are produced using materials from sustainable sources.

Greater expectations

Provision for learners
with disabilities



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Contents

	page
Foreword	1
Introduction	2
PRINCIPAL FINDINGS	4
Capacity and capability	4
Equality of opportunity	4
Teaching, training and learning	5
The national skills agenda	6
A learner's journey	6
Headline messages	7
WHAT COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?	9
Greater expectations	9
Structural changes	9
A change of emphasis	9
Custodial establishments	10
Adult and community learning	14
Workstep	17
Further education colleges and independent specialist colleges	20
Work-based learning	25
APPENDICES	
Background statistics	27
The legislative and policy framework	28

Foreword

Two powerful trends run through our society today in relation to people with learning difficulties or disabilities. The first is greater compassion and understanding. The second is a greater reluctance to accept that disabilities of any kind necessarily preclude a full and satisfying life and career.

This second trend is particularly strong among people with disabilities or learning difficulties themselves. It is supported by a general acceptance that they are the best judges of their own determination and capability; and by observation that spectacular advances in technology extend the capacity of every human being more and more with every year that passes. Nobody, today, can reasonably set an arbitrary limit on what another person might achieve.

This report makes difficult reading. It does so because it shows that, too often, compassion is seen as not only sufficient, but as a justification for restricting ambition and growth. Nobody doubts the devoted care received by many people with learning difficulties and disabilities, particularly by those who face the most severe challenges. But the report argues strongly that this is not enough. What is missing in many organisations that the ALI inspects are the skills and knowledge to help disabled people fully to realise their potential.

This country has an ageing population and a falling population of working age. We have too few economically active people to sustain our position as the fourth most prosperous country on earth. In part we will rely on immigration by skilled people in the years to come. In part we will rely on encouraging even more women to work. In part we will rely on raising the retirement age, so that those with wisdom and experience continue to create wealth.

People with learning difficulties and disabilities are also needed, as vitally important contributors to the world of work and the fulfilment of the national skills strategy: for their own benefit and that of our nation. That is the central message of this report. It criticises nobody for the sake of being critical. It blames nobody at all. But it does say that there is a wealth of energy and talent which is still denied its fulfilment, for reasons which in many cases are no longer relevant.



David Sherlock CBE

Chief Inspector of Adult Learning for England

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO
THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR
OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Introduction

The learning provision inspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) caters for the full range of learners who may require support or assistance to participate in learning, employment or community activity.

The support needed can arise from a range of impairments. These include:

- mental ill-health
- sensory impairment
- physical difficulties
- learning difficulties
- specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia
- medical conditions such as epilepsy
- communication disorders, including those that fall in the spectrum of autism
- profound and multiple learning difficulties
- emotional and behavioural difficulties

A team of seven ALI inspectors surveyed the current learning provision for adult learners with disabilities between July and September 2005. Each of them took responsibility for specific aspects of the ALI's work and each is a specialist in their area of responsibility. The investigation was mainly desk-based, looking at trends over time in inspection reports and evidence. Key national policy documents and reports were used as background information and their objectives were interpreted in the light of inspection findings. Examples of good practice identified through inspection were followed up by telephone and email.

For the purposes of the survey, it was useful to consider learners as falling into three separate groups, based on the level of support required and the level of programme at which they are likely to be studying. The groupings are broad-brush and indicative, as no learners fit neatly into definitions, but they proved helpful when considering the effectiveness of learning and training programmes.

The first group takes in learners with identified disabilities who, with adequate assistance, can

participate fully with their peers in mainstream education, training and employment, at a level that matches their abilities. For them, one of the outcomes of their learning or training could be sustained employment. These learners may be found in any of the types of learning provision that the ALI inspects. They are likely to be on programmes of learning at level 2 or above.

The second group comprises learners who are likely to have learning difficulties and or /other disabilities. Decisions about their learning pathway may be the result of multi-agency discussions. They may require assistance to develop employability, community and independence skills. Within this cohort are those who, in time and with appropriate assistance, could find employment – whether that be full-time, part-time or supported employment. They will be on learning programmes between entry level 3 and level 2. It is likely that a significant number of learners in this grouping will have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, which may have had an adverse effect on their educational attainment. The majority of these learners are found in further education colleges, independent specialist colleges, adult and community learning provision and Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes.

In the third group are learners who are likely always to require significant and sometimes continuous assistance and for whom independent living and open employment are not anticipated. Positive outcomes are likely to range from greater levels of community engagement and supported employment, to improvements in early stages of communication. These learners are likely to be on discrete programmes of learning, described as pre-entry level in further education colleges, independent specialist colleges, adult and community learning provision or in factories or businesses.

Principal findings

The current provision for adult learners with disabilities is costly and does not provide value for money. A lack of coherence between education and training funding streams; confusion about responsibility for social care and health funding; a scarcity of specialist training for trainers and teachers; the concentration on a predominantly behaviourist approach to discrete provision; and inattention to meeting the requirements of the 'national skills agenda' – all these factors contribute to provision which is not generally meeting the needs of learners. The expertise that exists is not sufficiently shared, meaning that a relatively small number of learners benefit from it. Inequalities are stark.

Capacity and capability

Expertise in assessing and working with people with disabilities is patchy, and the scarcity of such expertise features as a key weakness in much of the education and training provided for learners with disabilities. Even in further education colleges, which have taken significant strides in providing additional support, specialist support may not be available for all learners. Knowledge related to a specific type of disability, learning difficulty or health need is often found in voluntary organisations or government agencies such as the health service, which operate outside mainstream education and training provision. Technological aids and other equipment that could enable a learner to follow a learning programme or find employment are not universally available – and are not always up to date where they exist.

These failures are most evident in provision for those learners who are unlikely ever to be able to live independently. The difference between the best providers and those who are unsatisfactory is quite marked. Regionally and locally, some providers are beginning to develop networks to share specialist practice, but the extent of this work depends on which agencies happen to be based in the locality and the extent

to which they are able to work with other agencies or providers. Examples of strong inter-agency co-operation are still very much the exception.

There is no agreed basic training for Jobcentre Plus's disability employment advisers. The 'access to work' fund is designed to support people with disabilities in employment, but some Workstep providers report long delays in their requests being met – responsiveness varies significantly between regions.

Specialist training for teachers and trainers is similarly uneven and it is hard to find appropriate local training. Teacher training courses below level 4 do not focus sufficiently on important aspects of learning such as cognition, or on curriculum design and methodology. Generally, teachers and trainers are not well prepared for working with learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities. Providers in work-based learning provision have, additionally, faced structural barriers when attempting to enrol for level 1-3 teacher training courses. The only area in which training has been more widely available is in working with people with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Although the availability of such training has increased significantly over the past few years, small providers often find the cost of it daunting. The training available to support the literacy and numeracy curricula is not always helpful, particularly when the recommendations are for group work in the classroom, when many learners have failed previously to learn in this way.

Equality of opportunity

Despite the requirements of the ²Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), people with disabilities continue to face barriers to learning that are both structural and attitudinal. Equality of opportunity is promoted ineffectively in most prisons, where disability and its impact on learning is given scant attention. It is not

uncommon to find adult and community learning providers that do not promote their services for people with disabilities adequately – their promotional materials may not indicate whether reserved parking is available or detail the type of support they can give, for example.

The language used by many providers – and by society in general – assumes that people with disabilities are recipients of services rather than people who can make decisions about the services they need. The term ‘support worker’ is commonly used for all forms of assistance, and is resented by some learners.

Very few providers gather data that can give them an insight into the effectiveness of their provision. The failure of education and training services to offer defined pathways for learners, leading to meaningful outcomes, has been masked because data on learners’ destinations has not been adequate. Only a few – the very best – providers prepare learners adequately for transition. This failure is particularly unacceptable where learners are moving to mainstream learning and may need greater understanding about the ways in which their disability may be perceived. The widespread

failure to make adjustments to age limits and time span on programmes such as E2E and apprenticeships is contestable in terms of equality of opportunity, since it is well established that learners with disabilities may take longer to achieve than their peers.

Teaching, learning and training

A key difficulty for many learners at the foundation stage is the poverty of the discrete curriculum. Although there are a few examples of outstanding practice, expectations of learners generally are too low. Despite much rhetoric in the sector about inclusiveness and matching the needs of the learner, it is common practice to assess learners against the requirements of some form of accreditation, or in relation to the programme that is being offered, not in relation to their individual needs. Rarely are strengths identified and built upon in a programme of learning. The assessment process too often results in establishing only a baseline of deficits and the learning plans that result from the process are based on remedying these deficits. Negative targets are mercifully becoming less common, but sadly, many learners’ perceived

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

deficits have an uncomfortable class bias, with too much attention paid to domestic activity such as tidying or cleaning. The activities that learners have to take part in as a result of this behaviourist approach are often unsuitable, particularly when unskilled teachers try to integrate literacy and numeracy work with them without sufficient understanding about how to do this well. Too often, the teacher has to devise specific activities so that an assessment grid can be ticked off, rather than operating in a learning context that is meaningful for the learner, with appropriate levels of challenge.

The national skills agenda

One of the main barriers to learners with disabilities making a contribution to the skills agenda is the nature of the curriculum they are offered. The thrust of inspection evidence for many years has been that young people and adults who are studying at below level 2 are likely to learn best, and make the most progress, in practical, realistic contexts. The majority of learners on provision between entry level 3 and below level 2 could, with appropriate accommodation and adjustments, find employment in the open or intermediate labour markets. Too many learners on discrete programmes are, however, studying a curriculum based on independent living skills and skills for life that does not have a meaningful context, and does not prepare them adequately for the possibility of engaging in the open or intermediate labour market. The emphasis on a behaviourist rather than a developmental approach to the curriculum may not be helpful for all learners. The curriculum offer nationally at foundation level is too narrow. Vocational activity is too often based on snacking on 'tasters' rather than getting to grips with real work. Changes in the expectations for E2E, and the brevity of the programme, mean that it is unlikely adequately to prepare young people with learning difficulties for employment. Learners mature, and develop well, when they are encouraged to exercise appropriate levels of responsibility and can see the purpose of their activities. This is particularly evident where learners require behavioural interventions and strategies as part of their learning programme.

Programmes that offer this are still rare, and even where they exist, any follow-through to build on what has been learnt may not be available.

The current foundation level curriculum is not up to the task of preparing people for the requirements of the national skills agenda. Too little is available, and from a learner's perspective, it is too subject to local variations. An imaginative shift in the design of foundation programmes could provide opportunities for all young people and adults, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to pursue real work activities, matched to their abilities. In every locality genuine work-based training could be available, in which literacy and numeracy skills, and skills for independent living, could develop naturally as learners attended work. There would be no need for providers to develop contrived situations in order to meet external requirements. The use of classrooms would be minimal. One of the best working examples of this is Foxes Academy, a training hotel that is a commercially successful business. The learners run the hotel, supervised by tutors. They have to keep to changing shifts and rotas and learn how to work with others and meet members of the public. This type of realistic training could be mirrored in many occupational areas, building on learners' strengths and interests, and supplementing mainstream work placements. Examples that have been seen to be effective include restoring or refurbishing buildings, maintaining parks, looking after livestock, running catering outlets, making and selling crafts and bespoke items, furniture restoration and printing. Such an approach may well include the involvement or establishment of social firms to meet the needs of learners who may need more time to prepare for open employment.

A learner's journey

A defining characteristic of weak provision for learners with disabilities is a vagueness of purpose. Participation, and meeting immediate targets to gain funding, is often emphasised strongly, often at the expense of longer-term and more meaningful results. For those learners who attend mainstream provision with additional support or assistance at level 2 and above, the

learning journey may be as clear as it is for their peers without disabilities. But, for learners who require more time and support to enter the labour market, participation in learning is too often seen as the key indicator of success. The learners' overall journey, and the gains they make along the way, are too often seen as secondary. There is insufficient transition planning at all stages of learning, from leaving school to every stage of adulthood. Many adults with disabilities have an acquired disability or illness, but their choices for training and rehabilitation are seldom clear and vary from region to region. At all ages after 16, decisions about which provision, if any, learners attend are arbitrary and inequitable. A few learners attend fully-funded residential provision for three or more years, while others do not participate at all – learners from a black and minority ethnic heritage are particularly poorly represented in this provision. Current sources of advice and guidance, such as Connexions and disability employment advisers, tend to focus on finding a course or programme to meet immediate needs, rather than on longer-term planning to build on the education and training programmes.

A key difficulty for providers and learners is that provision rarely seems 'joined-up', particularly when it is funded by different agencies. The number of agencies involved in some cases, such as social services and health services, can compound the problem. The outcomes of the current system are clearly evident: Learners who have attended E2E or other programmes and could, with more support, sustain employment, rarely take advantage of Workstep provision, or are aware of social firms and enterprises locally. Offenders have little specialist support while in prison and little continuity of programme on release. Too many adults continue to go through a revolving door of courses, with no clear purpose other than continued participation. The current arrangements are costly and inequitable. There is currently no local, independent, specialist assessment, advice and guidance service that could be available to any learner with learning difficulties and /or disabilities at any stage of their lives.

¹ National Skills Strategy – Appendix 2

² Disability Discrimination Act 1995 - Appendix 2

Headline messages

- The 'additional support' mechanism is very effective in enabling learners to participate at all levels of provision in colleges
- Too little specialist assessment and guidance are available, across all types of provision
- Too little specialist teacher training is available
- Current teacher training programmes do not focus sufficiently on cognition and curriculum design and development
- Too little collaboration or sharing of specialist knowledge and good practice takes place across funding streams and between providers
- Scant attention is paid to meaningful progression to employment, and there is too little focus on the intermediate labour market
- The current curriculum offers little for many learners
- There is insufficient understanding about the appropriateness of 'skills for life' provision
- Regional planning lacks coherence
- There is insufficient emphasis on promoting equality of opportunity
- Significant numbers of offenders with disabilities are not receiving appropriate assistance in the current educational provision
- Learners with disabilities are poorly represented on apprenticeship programmes
- Current provision offers poor value for money overall
- Current funding for additional support is unequal.

What could make a difference?

Greater expectations

- The government and other policy makers should consider disability in all their mainstream policy documents. It should be assumed that most learners with disabilities are able to find some form of employment or make educational progress, with appropriate assistance, at different stages of their lives.
- The new public sector duty in disability should be expedited, so that more people with disabilities are engaged in decision-making bodies.
- Providers need to take the initiative by developing provision that is genuinely inclusive. The provision should focus on learners' abilities and potential, rather than on meeting the requirements of external accreditation and awards.
- Consideration should be given to changing some of the language used. The term 'support worker' could, for example, be changed to 'personal assistant', with a corresponding focus on encouraging learners to manage the support/assistance they need, rather than being seen as a passive recipient.
- Include meaningful data about people with disabilities in all reports.
- The marketing of apprenticeships should signal clearly that learners with disabilities are welcome. Costs for suitable adjustments need to be built in to allow for the fact that completion might take longer.
- Targets for funding need to be based on longer-term goals and reaching potential over time rather than on participation and short-term goals.

Structural changes

- A reshaping and revision of the overall curriculum at foundation level should be considered so that most of learners' time is spent in meaningful, and mainly work-related activity, not in the classroom. Funding should encourage social enterprises. Skills such as independent travel, and literacy and numeracy need to be rooted in relevant, meaningful and naturally occurring activities.
- The Workstep model must continue to develop, so that more participants with disabilities can progress from education and training to follow a supported route to employment.
- All relevant agencies should work co-operatively to ensure that learners with complex, profound and multiple needs are adequately and equitably funded to receive the most up-to-date technological support.

A change of emphasis

- Independent specialist assessment centres could be established in all regions. This would bring together all sources of specialist assessment and expertise in a region. These centres could assess and assist learners at all points of transition from age 14 onwards, acting as brokers to buy provision from preferred suppliers
- Greater clarity is needed about multi-agency arrangements, so that provision relating to housing, social care and health care are funded by the appropriate agencies, working with education and training providers.
- Vocational training needs to be given more emphasis in the learning and skills provision in prisons. The additional support model should be used to assist prisoners with disabilities. Prison development plans should include education and employment transition plans, with 'preferred regional providers' to plan training and employment strategies before release.
- The success of the additional support model in colleges should be built upon, so that learners in all learning contexts can benefit from individual support/assistance where required. Funding should be more equal across contexts, especially for people who, with support, could participate equally with their peers who may not have a disability.

Custodial establishments

Context and overview

In any one year, about 130,000 people are, or have been, in prison. A further 200,000 are supervised by the Probation Service in the community. Just over 6 per cent of the current prison population are women. The Disability Rights Commission in its 2005 memorandum to the Commons Select Committee on prison education states that three-quarters of men in prison are affected by two or more mental health problems, and between 20 and 50 per cent have a specific learning disability. People with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and behavioural difficulties are over-represented. Some 140 custodial establishments in England, Wales and Northern Ireland lie within the inspection remit of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, Ofsted and the ALI.

The main function of prisons is to keep offenders secure and the public safe. A major part of dealing with offending behaviour is sentence planning and structured programmes. Custodial establishments are required by the Prison Service to provide a core educational curriculum. The curriculum includes literacy, numeracy and language support, information technology, social and life skills (known as key work skills), and a limited variety of recreational activities (mainly art). Custodial establishments are not mandated to offer vocational training and arrangements for such training are seldom evident other than in training prisons. In some establishments, staff have developed short (10 hour) accredited learning programmes, mainly for more able offenders.

Until April 2005, The Offender Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) was responsible for allocating funding to custodial establishments with the exception of those managed by the Office of Contracted Prisons (OCP) under service level agreements. Funding for accredited education and training was ring fenced, and monitored against OLSU performance standards and targets. From April 2005 the Learning and Skills

Council (LSC) took responsibility for funding. A number of pilot regions are testing out funding methodologies.

Capacity to provide good-quality programmes

One characteristic of offender education is that provision is based on the requirements of the establishment, rather than individual offenders. It is not inclusive. Key performance targets may not be those that enable the staff to provide adequately for individual needs. It is not surprising therefore that offenders with disabilities, who require additional individual support, are unlikely to have those needs met.

The current arrangements for educational provision do not provide a context in which those with disabilities, including a range of learning difficulties, social and emotional disorders and mental health needs, can be adequately supported. The setting of key performance targets at qualification levels, rather than being directed specifically at the core curriculum, means that establishments focus on short-term, broad achievements, and qualifications such as those in food hygiene or manual handling, early in an offender's sentence. This makes it easier for establishments to achieve their targets, but does little to motivate offenders and does not provide the means for them to hone existing skills and develop new ones.

An additional requirement of the Prison Service is for establishments to supplement their overall annual budget by developing commercial contracts. This provides out-of-cell purposeful activities for offenders and a regular source of income for establishments. This area of work is often managed by prison staff and conflict can arise with the education and training staff as different departments vie for the same offenders. Working on these contracts often involves offenders carrying out menial and repetitive tasks, which give them little opportunity to

develop their skills or have skills recognised through accreditation. The pay structure for offenders often disadvantages those that choose education and training activities - more money can be made through doing menial work. Some establishments have recognised this anomaly and have introduced parity of pay for education, training and work activities.

The sentence planning system is inadequate. Offenders are given sentence plans only if their sentence is for a year or more. This plan will often identify education or training as targets but set no further objectives that would help to define the level of support needed. Those serving less than one year can apply for education, training or work activities but get no systematic custodial plan for progression or development. Training is rarely recorded on the green card designed for that purpose.

The process of initial assessment is fundamentally flawed. Initial assessment in custodial establishments is primarily a screening tool which identifies only general levels of need. Some offenders are given the assessment before they have had a full medical assessment. Some complete initial assessment in their cell, with other offenders present, and unsupervised. Offenders with poor language skills are often left to cope on their own or with help from other offenders. Offenders who are transferred at short notice or are first-time offenders are often too traumatised to understand the concept of educational assessment. Many are unable to read or write sufficiently well to participate in the initial assessment process. This is rarely followed up. Offenders may have to repeat the assessment in another establishment. Currently, information captured at assessment is seldom used to shape learning plans. It is rarely passed to those responsible for education and training programmes.

Despite recent research findings which highlight the high incidence of specific learning difficulties and disabilities in the offender population, those who carry out assessment are not trained to identify such problems. They are not able to suggest strategies that might help in work with learners who have behavioural difficulties or a specific learning difficulty, such

as dyslexia or dyspraxia - conditions that can have a significant impact on performance at all levels of learning. Although individual teachers may have experience of working with learners who have these difficulties, establishments as a whole do not take a planned approach to meeting specific needs. Most staff do not have the expertise to recognise the potential of relevant software to assist those with certain language-related difficulties. Software based on speech recognition technology, for example, is rarely used.

Very few offenders require wheelchairs to assist with mobility, but large numbers of the older population develop restricted movement during the latter years of their sentence. Their physical and learning needs are often inadequately assessed. Remedial gym work is provided as a requirement of the Prison Service. There are no assessment facilities to determine what range of training or work might be appropriate for offenders with restricted mobility. Healthcare centres can assess medical conditions, but suffer from a severe shortage of staff and facilities to assess and support offenders with psychiatric problems. A small number of establishments offer a secure environment for adult offenders with severe psychiatric problems and a few provide secure learning centres for juveniles. Other establishments provide discrete sex offender treatment programmes. In many of these specialist centres, general education and training are seen as of secondary importance and those with learning problems are given insufficient support.

Shortcomings in the current assessment systems have been widely recognised in the Prison Service. Revised arrangements for assessment form part of the new 'Offender's Learning Journey' requiring an early, intense focus on initial and diagnostic assessment of learning needs as well as good-quality information, advice and guidance and an induction programme. Assessments must identify potential indicators of dyslexia and other additional learning needs.

Many prisons are not adapted to meet the needs of people with sensory or physical impairments. Many of the custodial establishments are

Victorian buildings and would be costly to adapt. Workshops and education departments are sometimes situated on the first floors with no possibility of installing lifts. However, in the newer prisons, particularly those contracted through the OCP, lifts have been installed and cells adapted to provide wheelchair access.

A few establishments allow offenders to participate – voluntarily – in democratic therapeutic communities, which are often located in the grounds of main prisons. These have higher levels of funding. Here, the emphasis is on tackling behavioural and dependency problems. Offenders must have at least eighteen months to two years of a sentence to serve as they are required to commit to a period of at least eighteen months. Qualified staff carry out comprehensive assessments to determine the level of support that individuals need. Individual learning needs, however, take a back seat and work to resolve learning difficulties is often ‘bolted on’ after behavioural and dependency concerns are addressed.

It has become more common for education staff to work with offenders on residential wings. This is often well received, particularly by those offenders who are reluctant to attend formal classes. These arrangements, however, are rarely recorded on individual learning plans or monitored. Those providing support are not sufficiently well managed or qualified. In some cases, the work on the wings is used as an alternative to providing teaching staff in the classrooms and as a means of improving efficiency figures rather than as a positive way to deal with learning needs. Opportunities for distance learning are still few and far between, despite the advantage this offers in terms of continuity if offenders are transferred between establishments.

In a few establishments excellent use is made of offenders as learning assistants and peer mentors to support those with learning difficulties, such as in the Toe-to-Toe literacy scheme run by Shannon Trust. This work is, however, largely unco-ordinated. The movement of offenders between establishments is frequent and often unplanned. The result is that some offenders leave while in the process of learning

themselves, or supporting other learners. In the better establishments the prison is allowed to place a hold on movement, if for example, an offender is close to sitting examinations. This is extremely motivating for learners - it raises their self-esteem and reinforces a more positive image of the learning process.

Insufficient attention is paid to the continuation of training or employment preparation on release. This is particularly important for those with disabilities, who are already facing additional barriers to finding employment. In some areas partnerships are developing to aid this transition.

Custodial establishments in the north-east of England are working with Finchale Residential Training College, which provides residential work-based learning for adults with disabilities, the University of York and the Dyslexia Institute. Focusing on dyslexia assessment, the collaborative project involves identifying offenders’ needs and providing support for those who want to pursue vocational training on release. Attending residential provision eases transition to the community for many offenders. Disability Employment Advisers from Jobcentre Plus are fully involved at an early stage.

The teaching of literacy, language and numeracy in prisons, a key part of the programme for learners with learning difficulties, continues to have too much that is unsatisfactory. Where it is satisfactory, it is often the result of individual endeavour rather than planning, particularly where it is managed by the prison service, and where the staff who work with learners have relevant qualifications and experience. It is less good when managed through the OCP, where staff are often less well qualified and experienced. Provision on the wings is also less effective as staff are rarely suitably qualified. Language support is poor in many immigration and removal centres. In some, initial assessment is only available in English. Staff are not sufficiently well qualified in working with learners who have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia that are likely to affect their performance in literacy and/or numeracy.

Leadership and management of the education and training provision in custodial establishments have improved since the introduction of the posts of Heads of Learning and Skills. The quality of educational provision for offenders with learning difficulties and/or disabilities still largely depends, however, on individuals within institutions and has no structural framework. Support needs are not adequately identified and planning is not based on individual need. The Education and Skills select committee report on prison education recognises that the curriculum is too narrow and that the focus on literacy, language and numeracy may not be sufficient or appropriate for many offenders, particularly those who have failed previously with a classroom approach. The context for learning for those at or below level 1 is not sufficiently rooted in practical work. The achievement of national tests may help to meet national targets but, particularly in literacy, is no guarantee of improved literacy, since the tests do not cover composition or speaking skills. Although improving offenders' comprehension skills is helpful, this is only one of a range of skills that aid employability. A more structured approach to preparation for employment is needed to meet the needs of the large numbers of prisoners who are affected by mental ill-health or behavioural difficulties, or who have been identified as having a specific disability.

Adult and community learning

Context and overview

Provision for adult and community learning has undergone significant changes since 2001, when the LSC assumed responsibility for its funding. The pattern of provision is very diverse – providers range from local community-based organisations to large local education authorities – and includes residential provision. Some organisations had previously been inspected by the Further Education Funding Council, but the great majority had been subject to local authority arrangements.

Funding arrangements and assumptions on which funding was based before 2001 were as diverse as the sector itself. Since then, the LSC has been working towards convergence and a common formula for funding. The arrangements for additional support are different from those in colleges. Providers are given an allocation for support and they themselves determine how to distribute it across their provision. Many of those who participate in personal learning or development programmes, and who declare a disability, do not require additional learning support. Those who have restricted mobility, however, benefit from adjustments made to the accessibility of buildings and designated parking spaces.

The participation rate in adult and community learning for adults with disabilities was 7 per cent in 2003-04, which is about the national level of disability for all LSC-funded provision. Adult with disabilities participate at every level of the curriculum, and most do not require support. Discrete provision for learners at level 1 or below is common, and these learners are also to be found in the discrete literacy and numeracy classes.

Capacity to provide good-quality programmes

Many providers focus on integrating adults who have disabilities into their main programmes, rather than offering discrete provision. This is a

positive response to inclusion and helpful in enabling those learners to study alongside their peers. But other simple ways of promoting equality of opportunity are often missed. Publicity does not always feature the support that is available or indicate whether there is reserved parking. Surprisingly, few providers have text-phone facilities. Very basic adjustments, such as producing printed material in a larger font size, are rarely made. Despite the requirements of the DDA 1995, tutors do not always get adequate training in taking classes in which there are disabled learners – and providers have not always thought sufficiently about the specialist guidance needed for tutors, many of whom work part time, sometimes for as little as two hours a week. Few providers are yet at the stage where they are able to analyse how effective their support is.

Discrete programmes for adults with disabilities are usually targeted at people who are studying below level 2. Much of the provision is attended by adults who live in some form of supported accommodation. The purpose of such provision is not always clear, and the assumption that adults who happen to reside in care homes want no more than a leisure programme is not necessarily challenged. Adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities may attend the same class for many years or simply be part of a 'revolving door' pattern of attendance. It is rare to find instances where the provider of learning has been involved in a person-centred planning process for each learner, an expectation under the ³'Valuing People' strategy.

Tutors are not well trained or supported in how to develop teaching and learning strategies that encourage meaningful learning – and providers do not always know where to find such training. The quality of teaching and learning is rarely better than satisfactory. It is not uncommon to find topics taken out of context and rendered meaningless. There is some confusion about the use of core literacy and numeracy curricula, and the relevance and appropriateness of whole-class teaching of grammar for adults who have not

learnt to read while at school. The quality of discrete provision often rests on the skills and knowledge of individuals – and varies enormously as a result. At its worst, discrete provision can see learners in classrooms grappling with worksheets they cannot read or taking part in aimless ‘singalongs’ in residential care homes. At its best it can involve learners in activities that have tangible and beneficial outcomes, whether that be organising and performing in community arts events, growing plants and vegetables or progressing to mainstream programmes.

³ Valuing People Strategy - Appendix 2

Partnerships of various kinds figure strongly in adult and community learning provision. The recent targeting of funding by LSC towards ‘first steps’ provision and disadvantaged groups has encouraged much closer working with community and specialist interest groups. Some organisations work only with ‘preferred providers’ based in neighbourhoods with large numbers of residents who are disadvantaged, and are very successful in using neighbourhood centres to attract learners who would otherwise not attend. Some work with charities or other organisations that specialise in disability or with groups of people with a specific interest in disability. Training for adults who work or live with disabled people is a positive outcome of such collaboration. For example, ‘Adult Education Service’ runs training in British Sign Language.

A partnership between the Adult College Lancaster, Beaumont College, Lancaster University and the local Disability Partnership involves training local employees in working with people with complex needs. Central to the training is the specialism that Beaumont College has developed in finding effective communication strategies for learners with no speech.

Despite the welcome emergence of partnership working, it is not clear how far progression routes are meaningfully considered for learners with disabilities. The revolving door continues and although providers keep data about rates of participation, little is known about destinations. The emphasis on ‘first steps’ provision and the need to record the follow through to the next stage may make a difference to this.

Workstep

Context and overview

Workstep, which is funded by Jobcentre Plus, is the only national government-funded programme that aims to support disabled people in work, and to encourage them to progress to open employment where possible. Some 23,000 adults currently participate in the programme, which provides a much-needed bridge between unemployment and work. Applicants are referred by Jobcentre Plus's disability employment advisers and most receive incapacity benefit. Disabled people who participate in the scheme are supported either in factories or while in employment. Those in factories may have been working there for many years, and many have complex needs. Those receiving support while working in mainstream employment tend to have less complex needs and increasingly have disabilities relating to mental ill-health and associated conditions such as misuse of drugs or alcohol. A feature of the programme in mainstream employment is its encouragement of job retention. Under this arrangement, people who have become unwell, with illnesses that affect their capacity to work full time, can be supported.

Workstep emerged in 2001 from the modernisation of existing 'supported placement schemes' or 'supported employment schemes'. The modernisation was radical, changing expectations about the outcomes of the programme and in particular the nature of the support provided. Before 2001, organisations that employed a disabled person on the scheme received a wage subsidy, based on a notional assessment of 'capacity' to carry out a job. The only measure of quality was physical participation: this quality measure became commonly known as the 'proof of life check', a grim reminder of the time when those who worked in factories did not have an official retirement age and could work until the end of their lives, and also indicative of expectations and attitudes in relation to people with disabilities.

From 2001, the support for new participants in the scheme has taken the form of funding for itemised support, such as adapted equipment or job coaching, rather than a wage subsidy. This is more in line with the way in which additional support is provided in general further education colleges. In addition to specifying support, the programme introduced targets related to progression to open employment for people with disabilities, whether in factory settings or in external employment. There is now an expectation that those who can progress to open employment will do so, releasing the place for another disabled person.

A significant feature of the new programme is the introduction of development plans for each individual, based on a person-centred approach, and in line with the 'Valuing People' principles. This means that every Workstep participant is expected to progress and develop skills, whatever their ability. Outcomes can be measured in terms of individual progress at work, whatever the setting. For those whose assistance needs are so high that they are unlikely to find open employment, the new expectation is that they will have a greater opportunity and involvement in deciding their job roles, and have their skills acknowledged and recognised. The scheme is not intended to force individuals into open employment if that is unreasonable, but there is an expectation that they will be supported to progress internally. For those who, in time and with adequate assistance, could progress to open employment, the expectation is that this will be encouraged. In some instances, individuals have progressed at work and gained promotion as a result of the support provided. The modernised scheme introduced the expectation that employment-focused training, including work on literacy, language or numeracy skills, would be an integral part of each person's development planning.

Capacity to provide good-quality programmes

Over the three years that the ALI has been inspecting Workstep, almost half the provision has been found inadequate. This reflects in large measure the radical modernisation of the programme and the hazy understanding of the extent of this change among providers. Staff involved in the programme require substantially more sophisticated skills than they did previously. Expertise in areas such as development planning, assessing vocational abilities and support requirements, providing training (including literacy, language and numeracy support) and reviewing progress is needed – and many providers simply do not have staff with such a range of skills. This is particularly a problem for very small providers, of which there are many. In addition, providers are expected to carry out effective strategic planning and management, have quality assurance systems that bring about improvement and be active in promoting equality.

Confusion about the nature of the modernised programme, and insufficient training for staff, has meant that participants' achievements are not recognised and are often poorly recorded. Some providers have not kept records of any formal training, or of achievements that can be factors in successful employment, such as the development of social skills. For some participants, it may be their poor social skills rather than job skills that need developing in order to sustain employment.

Rates of progression to open employment have been low, at under 10 per cent. There are, however, significant variations between providers. A third of providers did not move a single person into employment between 2001 and 2004. A core of participants from the former supported employment scheme are unlikely to secure open employment for a range of reasons. But some of those who are in supported placements are taking longer to progress to open employment that might be expected.

In factory settings, the quality of training is often poor. The shift to a culture of continuous improvement has been a challenge too far for

some providers. Too often, Workstep participants get insufficient – or no – training and may have remained in the same role for many years. Expectations of them are often low. Although instructors or supervisors may have had training in instructional techniques, the concept of a developmental approach to training is new and not always understood. It is not uncommon to find much time and energy spent creating ways around participants having to use basic numeracy skills, rather than teaching them the skills they need for their job. The best factories have high expectations of their participants and understand how important job-related skills of literacy and numeracy can be developed as part of everyday work. Factories, however, are finding it increasingly difficult to balance their budgets. There are substantial differences in rates of funding for learners in Remploy enterprises and those on the standard rates of Workstep funding. It is not clear where the supported employment factories and businesses sit in relation to the development of social firms and other intermediate labour market initiatives within a locality.

For participants who are in external employment, their employers' lack of understanding about development planning and the use of reviews to acknowledge and record skill development has meant that records are often very general in nature, referring mainly to aspects of welfare, as under the previous scheme. Inspectors, when talking to Workstep participants, often unearth a wealth of information that could be used as evidence of participants' development.

Despite the programme's aim to support disabled people in employment, a failure among employers fully to recognise the implications of disability is not uncommon. Most make adequate use of Jobcentre Plus's 'Access to work' scheme to get specialist equipment and adapted aids (although many report long delays in waiting for the equipment) but their awareness of other aspects of disability is often limited. It is not uncommon to find that employees who are moving to open employment have no transition plan. Many employers are themselves unclear about the implications of the DDA and consequently unable to provide guidance for

employees about their rights and responsibilities. The disability employment advisers do not have a common programme of training for their job and the training they receive is often patchy.

The very high rate of unsatisfactory grades for quality assurance in Workstep reflects the lack of experience that most managers have in developing and implementing schemes, and perhaps as significantly, an uncertainty about what constitutes good practice in the remodelled programme. Good managers recognise the advantages of the new programme and its potential to enable people with disabilities to progress appropriately.

Jobcentre Plus, the ALI and providers' representative associations have been united in their concern about Workstep's problems. Some excellent collaborative work has gone on to try to turn around this technically and socially complex programme. If the results of reinspections of Workstep provision are any indicator of success, then the signs are good. Between July 2004 and June 2005, 93 per cent of Workstep providers came through the 'pain barrier' of poor inspection grades to reach at least a satisfactory standard at reinspection.

Further education colleges and independent specialist colleges

Context and overview

Further education colleges have almost a decade of experience of working within a framework that is based on the principles of inclusiveness. Following the publication in 1996 of the report of the findings and recommendations of an FEFC committee, chaired by John Tomlinson, substantial funding has been available for colleges to implement the proposals. The key concept of the proposals, that provision and support should match the needs of individual learners, has resulted in significant improvement in the arrangements for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The arrangements have been particularly successful in enabling people with disabilities to participate in provision appropriate to their ability. Additional funding is available, in agreement with the learner, to provide support for a learner on a course at any level. This support may take the form of equipment, adaptations, communicators or allocated time for a member of staff to work with a learner in the classroom. Colleges have also been given access to money for adaptations in response to the requirements of the DDA. Most learners with disabilities in colleges are aged over 25, although those on discrete programmes are mainly under 25.

Independent specialist colleges were, until 2001, outside the main further education sector. Since then, they have been seen as part of the sector. Learners are funded individually, using a formula that arrives at a fee based on the type of disability they have and the level of support they need. The result of this calculation forms the basis of an individual contract with the LSC, known as the 'learner schedule'. Some 3,000 learners attend these colleges, usually for three years. Although the number of day places is increasing slightly, over 90 per cent of learners are in residence. Colleges vary widely in size; some have fewer than 10 LSC-funded learners and others over 200.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funds a residential work-based learning programme for approximately 1,200 adults in 12 colleges. The programme is managed from the Government Office of the North East by the residential training unit (RTU). Eight independent specialist colleges provide both for LSC-funded learners and RTU-funded learners. Four providers receive only RTU funding. All the learners take vocational qualifications, many at level 2 or 3, and are expected to find employment at the end of their training. Seven of these colleges are specialists in sensory impairments and five in physical disabilities, although increasingly, most of them are providing for adults with mental ill-health.

In further education colleges and independent specialist colleges the learners range from those who need high levels of personal support and care, usually working at pre-entry level, to those progressing to higher education or employment. More and more adults with mental ill-health are attending further education colleges on a part-time basis. Full-time discrete provision is often offered in colleges for those working below level 1, with possible progression to mainstream provision. Some independent specialist colleges provide support for learners to attend a mainstream college, often as full-time students.

Capacity to provide good-quality programmes

The system for additional support for learners with disabilities on mainstream courses in further education colleges has been very successful. Most colleges now identify and support learners, and keep records of their progress. Many are now in a position to be able to compare rates of progress annually. Learners have noticed improvements in their experience as a result of such measures, as recognised in a recent Learning and Skills Development Agency survey

of their views. The budget can be used flexibly, on mentors who give personal assistance, for example, or on specialist assessment and tuition for learners who have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Support for dyslexia has increased significantly over the years and is now an important element of support in many colleges.

Discrete provision in further education colleges has not improved significantly over the past four years. Although the amount of outstanding provision has increased slightly, much is still only satisfactory and a core of about 4 per cent remains unsatisfactory. It is coasting at best. In independent specialist colleges the range is similarly wide, with some outstanding and innovative provision but about 15 per cent that remains unsatisfactory. Independent specialist colleges that provide only day placements have offered particularly poor value for money in the sector. RTU provision is mainly good, with only one area of learning found unsatisfactory over the past four years.

Staff working on discrete programmes tend to have little expertise in working with learners with disabilities. Their expertise is often limited to giving support for dyslexia. Lack of input from specialists at the initial assessment stage, and as part of the programme, is a continuing weakness in further education colleges, and particularly in independent specialist colleges. There is often insufficient assessment, guidance and intervention by therapists and specialists such as clinical and behavioural psychologists, speech and language therapists or occupational therapists for learners with complex communication and other difficulties. Staff often struggle to support learners themselves, unaware of the difference such interventions could make.

The lack of expertise in teaching is demonstrated particularly in discrete provision at level 1 or below. Few providers have responded effectively to the very clear message that has been available for almost a decade – that people with cognitive impairments are likely to learn best in practical contexts. Too many lessons are paper-based. This is particularly the case where staff have attempted to map their provision to the requirements of external accreditation or to the literacy and numeracy core curricula, without

considering the context or the needs of the learners adequately. The belief that completing a worksheet means that a concept or skill has been learnt remains strong. Sadly, even when a practical activity is used it may not be appropriate. Bringing a bowl of water into the classroom and finding cups to wash up, so that the skill of washing up can be ticked off as achieved, demonstrates powerfully a lack of understanding of the use of a practical context. Similarly, role-playing shopping in the classroom, with items such as packets of cereal for 'sale' at only one or two pence each, because learners can only count up to five, is neither good numeracy training nor effective use of a practical activity.

The availability of specialist staff training in disability is patchy, and its quality is similarly variable. Many providers run day courses on specific topics to plug gaps, but often the training need cannot be met in such a superficial way. A particular difficulty facing staff in this area is that teacher training of adults below level 4 rarely provides the requisite training in understanding cognition. Similarly, it is rare to find sufficient attention paid to curriculum design. Few tutors are aware of any approaches to the curriculum beyond a competence-based approach. Often, a developmental approach would be more suitable, focusing as it does on developing understanding and motivation, both of which are pre-requisites for learning.

Progression from discrete provision is good in some colleges. Further education colleges provide a wealth of vocational learning opportunities, and in the best colleges, where NVQ provision at level 1 is available, these opportunities are used well as progression routes from discrete provision. Learners may attend tasters in preparation for study on vocational courses, often with continued support. In Lambeth College, vocational tutors are trained specifically to work with learners with disabilities. However, few colleges encourage this sufficiently, and not all have sufficient level 1 provision to allow for such progression.

The best independent specialist colleges use the residential nature of provision to good advantage. They encourage learners to become more independent, perhaps by moving into

independent flats. In a few colleges the accommodation is inadequate and poorly adapted for learners with complex needs. One significant problem for learners who have been away from home for several years is the loss of meaningful contact with support agencies and friends when they return to their home area. Sadly, it is not uncommon to find learners who have been in specialist colleges for three years returning to live in care homes, sometimes homes for elderly people, with no opportunity to continue their development of vocational skills. A few colleges are now taking a more active role in preparing learners for life after they leave college and are, for example, working closely with housing associations and disability charities in learners' home areas to assist in appropriate placements.

Most colleges provide good personal care for learners and a few provide exceptional specialist support. The independent specialist colleges include providers with significant specialisms in epilepsy, complex communication and social difficulties, behavioural difficulties and sensory impairments. The RTU funds learners in such highly specialist provision, where specialist support is usually a key feature. Some of the most successful provision in the sector is found where learners are studying at level 1 and above, and where the provider has developed very good specialist provision. Unfortunately, this is the exception rather than the rule and too many independent specialist colleges provide little or no specialist support. It is sometimes not clear why learners are there.

Some of the key weaknesses that inspectors find in the quality of teaching and learning, both in further education colleges and independent specialist colleges, are linked to the nature of the provision. The best discrete provision for learners who, with support and given time, could contribute to their community and engage in some form of social, supported or open employment, is not to be found in classrooms. It is found in contexts that enable these learners to learn and mature through taking part in meaningful activity. Compare spending most of the day running a hotel, as at Foxes Academy or taking care of horses as at the Fortune Centre of Riding Therapy, with classroom-based learning, where activities are not part of a whole, but

atomised and contrived, and devised to meet the criteria set by an awarding body. Where learners are fully engaged in activities that are genuinely part of an enterprise, the skills of working in teams and such as at Truro College, where a community partnership sees learners working in a sandwich bar and on a recycling and renovation project, of turning up on time, as well as specific job skills, occur naturally. This makes it much easier to plan programmes, because the context is rich with opportunities for learning.

Imaginative use of the local environment, whether it is rural or urban, characterises much of the more effective provision for learners at level 1. The Ruskin Mill Educational Trust, for example, offers the chance to work on over 50 traditional craft activities, from glass blowing to bow making, as well as allowing learners to get involved in running a fish farm or growing and selling organic produce.

The current orthodoxies about what constitutes a curriculum at entry level and below are a major cause for concern. Too much effort is expended on activity that is of questionable value. Key weaknesses in target-setting and planning often arise because the context is artificial and contrived and the curriculum impoverished. The commonly used approach with disabled learners is to identify four or five generic targets related to topics such as appropriate behaviour, literacy and numeracy skills, independent living skills and perhaps vocational skills. Tutors then seek out activities where these can be assessed, often with a random number seen as success. This approach is usually meaningless. 'To divide 10 by 5 on 3 separate occasions' is not an appropriate way of determining whether that skill has been learnt. Lesson planning too often becomes an exercise in finding opportunities for assessment, rather than for developing skills. This behaviourist approach often reduces the content of lessons (and even worse, the learner), to a series of disparate, meaningless targets. This is not the most productive approach to learning and at its worst is patronising, particularly where the targets are based on perceived weaknesses as determined by staff. Teachers may spend hours on unproductive recording and setting of arbitrary and often pointless targets to satisfy external requirements. Where expectations are high, and learners are engaged in meaningful

activity, targets or goals can be met in a variety of ways as situations naturally occur. Activities that are motivating and meaningful for the learner are essential if progress is to be made. Targets are most effective when based on something the learner wants to achieve, and presented as individual challenges, rather than driven by teacher-led, externally set criteria. One learner with severe physical disabilities aspired to take his girlfriend out to dinner in a restaurant and pour her a glass of wine. Making this happen involved intensive work with physiotherapists and greater sophistication in his use of communication aids, the achievement of which also assisted him with other activities.

For students whose support needs are such that they are unlikely ever to be able to consider independent living, the curriculum is most effective where it recognises that communication is the core of learning. The skills for life pre-entry curriculum does not reflect a good understanding of how people learn best. Some providers find it unhelpful and not always respectful of people with disabilities. The best provision seen usually takes a sensory approach, to stimulate senses and encourage expression through a range of media. Communication may also be stimulated by a range of communication aids, including technological aids. In a one-hour class in a further education college, adult learners in the early stages of communication attended with staff from their care home. The multi-sensory techniques used to encourage communication and reduce anxiety were learnt by the care staff, who were able to replicate them in the care home. They reported significant improvement in the quality of life for these learners, such as reduced levels of anxiety and reductions in behaviours such as self-harm. In a specialist college for learners whose communication needs are intensified by physical disabilities, the development of an arts curriculum, combined with outstanding augmentative and alternative communication aids, has enabled many of those who previously struggled to make known their thoughts and feelings to communicate with their peers and to have their voices heard.

Questions need to be asked about the overall purpose of discrete provision at level 1 and entry level 3, in the light of the national skills agenda

and of the Valuing People principles that aim to reduce dependence and encourage participation in the community. Very few learners enter employment – whether that is open, supported or in social firms – when they leave colleges at entry level or level 1. Too few learners have work experience that leads to anything when they leave. Adults on discrete part-time courses in colleges are not always best served by an approach in which they repeat the learning of everyday living skills that they have possessed for many years. The sector is unclear about what constitutes a meaningful curriculum.

A replication of the school approach to a timetable, with a balance of topics, including independent living skills, literacy and numeracy and a series of vocational tasters, is a common model, but it does not necessarily prepare learners for possible employment-related options.

The deficiencies in the current arrangements are beginning to be recognised. In a few regions of the country, specialist providers are beginning to create local networks in which they can share expertise with other providers. Hertfordshire LSC is leading a project to determine how individual ‘packages’ can be developed for learners, by exploring all available options for multi-agency funding and types of provision. In Tynedale a ‘virtual’ specialist college is being planned to enable learners to travel to different venues for specific curriculum specialisms. More flexible approaches are being developed that build on recognised specialisms. The Royal National College for the Blind, for example, has developed a ‘tele-tutoring’ programme, funded by the RTU, which enables home-based students, who are blind or partially sighted, and in some cases also wheelchair users, to access training at home.

Work-based learning

Context and overview

Work-based learning programmes are central to the government's skills agenda. The number of learners with disabilities who follow apprenticeship programmes continues to be very low. The work-based programme which has the highest number of learners with declared disabilities or need for additional support is Entry to Employment (E2E), which has been available since August 2003 and is aimed at young people who are not yet ready or able to enter directly an apprenticeship programme, further education or employment. E2E replaced Life Skills, Preparatory Training and NVQ learning at level 1 (for those aged 16-18). E2E programmes are based on identifying individual learning needs, within a learning framework which develops vocational and employability skills, personal and social skills and literacy, numeracy and language skills. Over 30,000 learners are on E2E programmes at any one time. Many learners face significant personal, social and educational problems. In the first year of the programme about a third of learners declared a learning need, mostly related to dyslexia or social or emotional needs. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are integrated into the majority of E2E programmes.

Capacity to provide good-quality programmes

Of central importance to good provision in E2E, and particularly for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, are strong collaborative partnerships and well-established networks to share expertise and good practice and to pool resources. Such initiatives are not yet sufficiently widespread, but one good example is in Derbyshire, where Connexions Derbyshire Limited delivered E2E to over 400 learners through 20 subcontracted training providers. The different specialisms of these providers gave E2E learners more choice and E2E co-ordinators fostered good relationships and

communication between providers to ensure that learners' needs were met.

The best providers make available a wide range of opportunities for learners to develop good vocational skills, through real or simulated work environments, appropriate employment-related activities, work tasters and access to level 1 national vocational qualifications. Learners are able to acclimatise to the world of work and improve their interpersonal and social skills in placements with small or large employers. Some providers make particularly strenuous efforts to cement their links with employers and are able to set up work placements for young people who have been very hard to place. The best providers have good links into work-based learning programmes.

Too many learners on E2E programmes, however, including those with learning difficulties and /or disabilities, do not get enough work experience. Many providers place little importance on this aspect of the programme. Many providers do not accredit the vocational skills achieved by learners and there are scant opportunities for learners to achieve external qualifications at level 1. The work placement element can be poorly planned. In such cases, targets for learners are not set or monitored adequately. Some employers do not have a firm grasp of the aims of the E2E programme. They fail to make sufficiently strong links with other agencies that can offer support on assisted placements or in social firms.

Specific training for staff in working with learners with disabilities is rare, and there is little specialist expertise among providers.

Assessments of learners who have disabilities do not always identify adequately their strengths, so that learning can be planned in a positive way. Staff have insufficient expertise in preparing and adapting teaching strategies and learning materials. There is not enough use of technologies designed to facilitate learning and raise aspirations. Assessment and support for

learners with dyslexia and related learning difficulties are often weak: many providers do not check whether learners might have dyslexic difficulties and their assessments focus on performance in literacy and numeracy tests, rather than on the wider range of characteristics associated with dyslexia, such as difficulties with sequence, categorisation, planning and time management. Few providers use specialists to conduct detailed assessments of learners' difficulties and their support requirements. Most staff are not fully aware of how to build support for learners with dyslexia into their everyday teaching. A few providers offer coloured filters and tinted paper to assist with reading or scribes and readers for tests.

Flexible and highly effective personal support is a feature of the best E2E programmes. Learners with mental ill-health or personal problems such as homelessness benefit greatly from practical support from E2E staff – and from other professionals such as youth workers, counsellors, support workers or youth offending team workers. Many learners attribute some of their success to this support. They can describe how the support enables them to complete tasks and activities that they would not have done before. Those with additional needs have sometimes been given a few weeks longer to complete the programme.

The best providers promote equality of opportunity particularly well. One provider with nearly a thousand learners across the country, Education and Youth Services Ltd, produces a detailed equality and diversity report that shows clearly participation and achievement in relation to gender, minority ethnic groups and additional need. The report is used to develop action points to enable the company to set challenging targets for improvement. This provider is, however, an exception – few providers have such a clear picture of, for example, the retention, achievement and progression rates of learners with learning disabilities and/or difficulties. Few use data fully to identify areas in which they could improve their provision for different groups. Overall data from the LSC suggest that success rates for people with disabilities are only

slightly lower than for other learners. The changed expectations of E2E, however, with level 2 being the expected progression rather than level 1, means that the programme is no longer seen as appropriate for those learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities for whom level 2 might not be a realistic aim.

APPENDIX 1

Appendix

Background statistics

A cross-departmental government strategy report published in January 2005, *'Improving the life chances of disabled people'*, reported that some 11 million adults and 770,000 children are disabled. The majority of adults have what are described as 'low level impairments'. Only one in two of people of working age with a disability is in employment, compared with four out of five people without a disability.

In 2003-04, 579,000 learners with disabilities were funded by the LSC across the post-16 education and skills sector, at a cost of approximately approximately £1.3 billion. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, therefore, represent approximately 8 percent of the LSC-funded cohort in this period. This percentage is similar across all types of programmes funded.

Of the 579,000 learners funded by the LSC, 167,000 were aged 16-18, 75,000 were aged 19-24. The gender split is roughly equal. Of the 453,000 learners whose level of study is known, 258,000 were studying courses at level 1 or below, 117,000 at level 2 and 78,000 at levels 3 or 4.

The largest cohort is in general further education colleges, with 382,000 learners. Some 3,000 of the 579,000 LSC funded learners were at independent specialist colleges for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The budget for this provision was £126 million in 2003-04, rising to £140 million in 2004-05. In 2003-04, The Department for Work and Pensions funded 107,000 people on work-based learning and 23,000 on Workstep.

Inspection results for 2001-05 show that provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities produces some of the least satisfactory outcomes of all inspections.

The number of outstanding providers remains low, and too much is still unsatisfactory. The two areas that have the most unsatisfactory provision are Workstep and independent specialist colleges. 23,000 people participate on Workstep programmes at an average annual cost of £8,200 per person, and 3000 are in independent specialist colleges, where the costs are close to an average annual cost of £46,000 per person and predicted to rise significantly by LSC in its projections for 2008. The combination of poor quality and high expenditure of the provision is featured in two recent publications, *'Through Inclusion to Excellence'* (November 2005) by LSC and *'Gaining and Retaining a Job'* (October 2005) by DWP.

APPENDIX 2

Appendix

The legislative and policy framework

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)

The original act did not cover education, although work-based learning was covered under the Part 3 requirements for providers of goods, facilities and services. The act was substantially amended in 2001 to give new rights to disabled students and new responsibilities to education providers. Under Part 4 of the DDA, providers have to ensure that they do not treat disabled learners less favourably for a reason related to their disability, and that they provide reasonable adjustments for them.

Disability Discrimination Act 2005

Recent amendments to the act include a duty on public sector bodies to promote disability equality. This will involve significantly more sophisticated reporting on matters relating to people with disabilities, promotion of equality and also ensuring that people with disabilities are included in decision-making. This duty will come into force in December 2006.

Learning and Skills Act 2000

Under this legislation the LSC has a duty to have due regard to the needs of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, and also to promote equality of opportunity between disabled and non-disabled people.

The policy influences on providers come from two main sources:

- government initiatives from the DfES and other departments
- policy developments by funding agencies.

The National Skills Strategy 2003 and progress report 2005

The National Skills Strategy: '21st Century Skills' was launched in July 2003 in order to maximise the contribution of skills to raising productivity, economic competitiveness and sustainable employment in the UK. Little reference was made to disability. However, in the recent progress report, specific mention is made to people with disabilities.

14–19 Education and Skills White Paper (February 2005)

The paper writes of 'routes to success for all, engaging all young people,' but it makes clear that its use of such phrases in fact excludes those with learning difficulties, and no mention is made, within the report's main focus areas, of disability. It talks of those with learning difficulties as 'a very different group of young people'.

Valuing People: A new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century. Department of Health 2001

This national strategy for adults with learning disabilities has been developed particularly to improve the opportunities for adults, many of whom may be in care homes. The strategy has four key principles: rights, independence, choice and inclusion, which are largely accepted by the local Learning Disability Partnership Boards, who have the main responsibility for ensuring that people with learning disabilities 'lead full

and purposeful lives within their community'. In January 2005, the LSC endorsed the strategy, with a commitment to engage learners in education.

Mental Health and Social Exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004)

The report includes commitments from more than 20 government departments, agencies and other organisations to tackle issues of social exclusion for people with mental ill-health. This model of joint working is an essential feature of meeting the needs of many excluded groups. The unit finds that only 24 per cent of adults with long-term mental ill-health are in work, and more than 900,000 people claim incapacity benefit for mental health reasons. Many people do not have activities to fill their days, and many frequently spend their time alone. The report sets out a six- point action plan that recognises the need to give people a real chance of sustained paid work that reflects their skills and experience, and the need for more opportunities to access education.

Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People (Cabinet Office, 2005)

The report takes an holistic overview of people's lives, and finds that disabled people do not benefit as much as the general population from government-provided education and training provision. It recognises that too few people with disabilities are unemployed and that more needs to be done from an early stage to encourage greater participation. The report also wants changes made to the current situation, where adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities may attend the same class for many years or simply be part of the 'revolving door' pattern of attendance.



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate, Spring Place, Coventry Business Park, Herald Avenue, Coventry CV5 6UB
Tel: +44 (0) 24 7671 6600 Fax: +44 (0) 24 7671 7828 Website: www.ali.gov.uk