

North Lancs Training Group

Inspection report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. North Lancs Training Group (NLTG) is a group training association with its headquarters in Accrington in Lancashire. It is a private company limited by guarantee. It was established in 1969 as part of the Furniture and Timber Industry Training Board and became a limited company in 1986. It is owned by approximately 50 member companies predominantly located in the North West of England and Northern Ireland. All profits are reinvested in the company. A management board of nine directors, of which seven are selected from the 50 member companies, set and monitor the strategic direction of the company. The company is managed by the managing director and operations manager and employs six senior managers and 257 staff.

2. NLTG receives most of its funding from Lancashire and Cumbria Area Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency, Territory North, to provide work-based learning for young people and adults. Currently there are 3,592 learners with 721 in engineering, 1,243 in business administration and law and 727 in retail and commercial enterprise programme areas. It also has 79 learners on essential skills programmes and 567 on Foundation Learning programmes. In addition, NLTG has 159 learners in construction and 65 in information and communication technology but these areas were not inspected separately. In addition, as part of the single adult budget, NLTG delivers employability skills to approximately 256 Jobcentre Plus clients.

3. The following organisations provide training on behalf of NLTG:
 - Accrington and Rossendale College
 - Preston College
 - Stone Eden Training

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners:	
Foundation Learning	681 learners
Entry to Employment	5 learners
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	482 learners
Apprenticeships	2,296 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	Grade
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	2
Hospitality and catering	2
Preparation for work	1
Business administration and law	2

Overall effectiveness

- NLTG is a good provider. Learners' achievements are good and current learners are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications. Achievements of learners on foundation and workplace learning programmes are outstanding. Learners develop good skills and confidence and many progress to higher level learning. Learners enjoy their learning and take pride in their work and in the development of their skills. They confidently use safe working practices in their learning and at work. The Foundation Learners in particular and NLTG in general make an excellent contribution to the community through a wide range of volunteering and charitable work.
- Teaching and learning are good. The individually planned programmes, and highly flexible arrangements for training and assessment, meet the needs of learners and their employers extremely well. The range and quality of resources to support learning are good. Technology is used very well to support learning in Foundation Learning and engineering programmes but is less effective in

business administration and hospitality and catering. NLTG's excellent partnership working with employers strongly supports learners throughout their training. The positive relationship NLTG have with local councils is very effective in developing innovative projects to benefit young people, particularly through sport. Very effective partnerships with local schools and community groups successfully promote the availability of training and employment opportunities. Support for learners is good and pastoral support is outstanding. Arrangements to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills are particularly good. The range of programmes is highly relevant to learners' employment and career goals.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall. Over four years, NLTG has demonstrated year-on-year improvements in success rates on apprenticeship programmes to around the national averages. Workplace learning success rates are outstanding. On Foundation Learning programmes, progression rates into further education, training and employment are very good.
- Apprentices make good progress on their training programmes and many progress onto higher level learning. The effective development of their literacy and numeracy skills significantly contributes to the attainment of their learning goals and qualifications. Learners develop good knowledge and skills and are able to apply them successfully at work and in the training centres.
- On Foundation Learning programmes, learners increase their employability skills significantly. They are more confident and self-assured at work and develop good social skills and literacy and numeracy skills through a variety of enjoyable and innovative enrichment and classroom-based activities. Learners feel safe at work and at the provider. They develop and display safe working practices at work and at the training centres.
- Teaching and learning are good. Courses are well planned. Trainers use their expertise to good effect to motivate learners with good application of theory to practical and to work roles. Resources are good but technology is not used effectively to enhance teaching and learning in all apprenticeship programmes. Assessment is timely, thorough and arranged flexibly to meet the needs of learners and employers.
- The provision is highly effective in meeting the needs and interests of learners and employers. Learners, employers and community groups are very positive about the flexible approach to training adopted by NLTG. Progression routes are good. Readiness for apprenticeship training is carefully assessed and those who are not yet ready receive good support to help them progress on to apprenticeships.
- Partnership work is outstanding. NLTG is an influential partner in developing a local improvement strategy. It is committed to providing opportunities for employers in specialist vocational areas and there is a very strong focus on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable people. Staff at all levels have

positive relationships with local partners that are of significant benefit to learners.

- Personal support is exceptional and staff go the extra mile to support learners, many of whom have significant and diverse needs. Impartial advice and guidance enables learners to make informed choices about their next steps. A high proportion of apprentices benefit from good additional support which effectively improves their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Senior managers at NLTG promote very high standards and a positive and supportive culture that encourages staff and learners to aspire to excellence. The board of directors provides very good direction and challenge. NLTG has significantly developed from their initial purpose of providing training for the furniture manufacturing industry to a multi-vocational training resource for a range of different industries.
- A particularly effective management information system provides managers with accurate and up-to-date information. Data are analysed well and accurately inform management decisions to improve performance across all programmes, although some improvement targets are not sufficiently challenging.
- The promotion and monitoring of equality and diversity are good. NLTG conducts appropriate risk assessments before working with employers and its approach to safeguarding and protecting learners is good. However, the ongoing promotion to test and further develop apprentices' understanding at work is insufficiently thorough.
- The self-assessment report is mostly accurate and action plans to further develop and improve the provision are effective. The process for assuring the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. However, the written records of session observations place insufficient focus on learning when making judgements on the quality of the session.
- NLTG uses its available resources particularly well to secure outstanding value for money. The company's legal constitution does not allow shareholder dividend payments apart from repaying an initial £1 investment should they leave the membership. All profits belong to the company and are reinvested to benefit learners and employers.

What does NLTG need to do to improve further?

- Provide more challenging improvement targets to further improve success rates.
- Further develop trainers' understanding of safeguarding and how it relates to apprentices in the workplace to enable them to develop apprentices' understanding and knowledge through good professional discussion techniques.
- Improve the rigour of the internal observation process and ensure a greater focus on what progress and learning has occurred in the session. Use the evidence from observations to ensure that all trainers have clear action points to improve and drive forward the quality and pace of learning and raise success rates.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the trainers' availability and approachability
- the good opportunities to develop a range of skills, including writing skills
- the use of voice records to record portfolio evidence as it saves time
- the support and help given which makes learners feel confident in their employment and helps them achieve their potential
- the enjoyable and interesting learning sessions
- the atmosphere at NLTG which provides a good environment in which to learn
- building up credits towards a place at university
- the excellent resources.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the number of trainer visits which are cancelled and rearranged
- the large amount of paperwork on apprenticeships by using technology more to record evidence
- the amount of resources and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) specialised units available to information and communication technology learners
- the amount of resources to help with answering questions from unit booklets
- the number of opportunities to meet other learners on the same apprenticeship programme.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the very good partnership working with NLTG
- the excellent service NLTG provides for employees and employers
- the excellent communication and flexible approach of NLTG staff to meet employers' and learners' needs
- the high standard of training NLTG provide
- the fantastic professional support that is given to learners by NLTG staff
- the effective support given by NLTG to employers, especially during business difficulties
- the positive benefits and improved employee skills as a direct result of training
- the training that broadens the outlook and raises the confidence of learners.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the supply of a replacement trainer when the usual trainer is absent from work
- the opportunity to attend a twice-yearly employers' forum
- the terminology and jargon used in questions for the NVQ.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

6. NLTG demonstrates good capacity to improve. The types of training programmes and numbers of learners have significantly increased since the last inspection in 2006. Since the previous inspection, success rates have shown a four-year improvement trend keeping in line with national rates. Management actions are further increasing success rates this year. Learners gain very good work skills and the majority of learners are making good progress. Improvement actions have consolidated strengths identified at the last inspection and improved weaknesses, some of which are now key strengths of the provision. Senior managers and the board of directors provide very effective leadership to bring about sustained company growth and improvements. Staff are highly effective and motivated. They work hard to develop learners' knowledge and skills that greatly enhance their future employment and promotion prospects. Quality improvement processes are mostly good and self-assessment is thorough and accurate. However, some improvement actions are not driving the pace of achievement for some apprentices.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

7. Outcomes for learners are good. Over four years, NLTG has demonstrated year-on-year improvement in success rates on apprenticeship programmes to around national rates. In 2011/12, management action to improve success rates has increased the pace of improvement. The majority of learners on apprenticeship programmes are making good progress towards achieving their qualification framework. In a number of sector subject areas, the current economic climate has had a detrimental impact on learner outcomes. Some of the employers have ceased to trade or have downsized their workforce and, as a consequence, learners have become unemployed and are not able to complete their qualification. The achievement rates of apprentices who complete their programme are good.
8. Overall success rates for intermediate apprentices are good and show a four-year improvement trend to just above national rates. Overall success rates for advanced apprentices show a three-year improvement trend, but in 2010/11 remained below national rates by four percentage points. Current in-year data, with the imminent end of the contract year a few days away, show a potential three percentage point improvement on intermediate apprenticeship success rates and between three and seven percentage points on advanced apprenticeship programmes.
9. Workplace learning success rates are outstanding having improved year-on-year over the past four years at a rate that has exceeded national rates.
10. On Foundation Learning programmes, outcomes for learners are outstanding. Progression rates are very good; most learners progress into education or

employment with a third of them going onto apprenticeship programmes. Learners are recruited from some of the most deprived areas and qualification success rate data shows that they perform significantly better than with similar providers.

11. A wide range of data is collected on the performance of different groups. Significantly, the performance of learners who do not hold 5 GCSE grades A* to C on entry compared to those who do has improved year-on-year and the achievement gap has closed from six to two percentage points. In 2010/11, the success rate of those in receipt of additional learning support compared with those not receiving support shows an 8% difference. In 2011/12, management action to further reduce the achievement gap between different learners in this group has yet to have an impact.
12. The development of literacy and numeracy skills is good. All learners are supported to improve their level of attainment. Apprentices develop good knowledge and skills and apply them successfully at work. The progression rate from intermediate to advanced apprenticeships is good. The increased confidence and skills learners develop has contributed to some being promoted to roles of greater responsibility at work, particularly in business administration. On Foundation Learning programmes, learners demonstrate significantly improved employability skills such as self-confidence and team-working skills as well as developing good social skills and improved literacy and numeracy skills.
13. Learners feel safe at work and at the provider. They develop and demonstrate safe working practices. Foundation Learners receive excellent support to enable them to make informed choices about their health and well-being.
14. Foundation Learners in particular and NLTG in general make an excellent contribution to the community through a wide range of volunteering and charitable work. NLTG support a Young People's Service initiative that encourages local children to re-engage in training and education through snooker. World-class snooker players support the initiative which is very successful. Additional events held at NLTG premises and at a local school, entitled Functional Snooker, help develop young peoples' numeracy skills through sport. These events are also attended by a world-class snooker player who donates his time free of charge. Apprentices buddy school pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on an Outward Bound residential course.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

15. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Courses and individual learning sessions are well planned and link theory and practical work well. Trainers are well qualified and have good expertise in their field of work. They have a good understanding of the demands of the vocational qualifications and adapt the resources well to meet the needs of the employer and the specific job roles of the apprentice. The range and quality of resources to support learning are good. Whilst technology is used very well in Foundation

Learning and engineering programmes, it is less effective in business administration and hospitality and catering.

16. Assessment practices are timely and thorough. Verbal feedback on assessment is very good, but some written feedback does not always provide learners with sufficiently detailed information to help them improve the quality of their work. Learners' managers are generally involved in planning learning and monitoring learners' progress, but this is not yet consistently good across all programmes. Trainers respond very well to learners' needs and are very approachable and flexible. The timing of assessment visits is managed very carefully to minimise any disruption to business activities.
17. Trainers provide very effective individual coaching and learner support during their visits to employers' premises. Links between on- and off-the-job training are good and this motivates learners. On occasions, trainers too readily tell learners the answers to their questions and so do not provide sufficient opportunities to develop learners' autonomy or depth of theoretical knowledge, particularly at advanced level. Learners benefit from working alongside skilled craftsmen in the workplace.
18. Progress reviews are completed regularly and enable learners' progress to be monitored closely. Learners are set short-term targets, but these are not always sufficiently challenging. On some occasions, trainers are not sufficiently robust with learners when they have not completed the agreed actions on time. This inhibits the speed at which they complete their qualification.
19. Group sessions in Foundation Learning are planned very well and delivered at a good pace. An extensive range of highly relevant activities supports learning effectively. Learners are engaged and motivated to participate in practical tasks and discussions. Consequently, they make outstanding progress in developing a diverse range of social, academic and vocational skills that for many learners are life changing.
20. Initial assessments are used well to inform individual learning plans and prompt learning support is provided where need is identified. A high proportion of apprentices benefit from very good additional support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. This enables them to succeed both at work and in their qualifications. Trainers are skilled at contextualising learning materials to specific vocational areas and to reflect learners' interests and work roles. The symbiotic relationship with a local dyslexia charity is particularly beneficial to learners.
21. The provision very effectively meets the needs and interest of learners and employers through a wide range of training programmes. Employers, learners and community groups are very positive about the flexible approach adopted by NLTG to meet their needs. Links with employers are extensive and are continually extended. Optional units for NVQs are carefully selected to meet learners' and employers' needs. The workplaces of many apprentices are of a

high quality and work experience for Foundation Learners is good and makes a very valuable contribution to their development.

22. Good progression routes are available from Foundation Learning to advanced apprenticeships, with a number of learners progressing to professional and degree programmes after completing the advanced apprenticeship programme. Enrichment opportunities for Foundation Learners are excellent and make a significant contribution to their motivation, engagement, personal development and progression.
23. Partnership work is outstanding. Staff at all levels in the organisation engage with a broad range of partners that significantly benefit learners, their employers and the local communities in which they live and work. A wide range of employers, many who are prestigious organisations in their vocational area, work with NLTG. Employers provide good learning environments and most are involved in monitoring the progress of their employees. They value the training and the improvements this brings to the skills and efficiency of their employees and the positive impact this has on their business.
24. NLTG is a key partner in developing an improvement strategy to meet local needs. The positive relationship with local councils is very effective in developing innovative projects to benefit young people. Very effective partnerships with local schools and community groups successfully promote the availability of training and employment opportunities.
25. Support is good. Detailed and impartial advice and guidance enables learners to make informed choices about their next steps. NLTG is particularly good at engaging with the most vulnerable young people who have left school early or who are unemployed. Readiness for apprenticeship training is carefully assessed and where learners do not have the required pre-requisites, good support is provided to help ensure they are successful. Good support is provided to learners who speak English as additional language, working in the hospitality industry, food manufacture and textiles industries to improve their language skills before starting apprenticeship programmes.
26. Pastoral support for learners is exceptionally good. Many learners have an extensive range of academic and personal support needs. Trainers are very flexible in supporting learners. They are readily accessible between planned visits and go beyond their normal working hours if required. NLTG staff are very responsive to learners' requests and take prompt action in times of crisis, including providing financial support. Exceptionally good links with a wide range of organisations enable learners to access appropriate specialist support.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

27. Senior managers at NLTG promote very high standards and a positive and supportive culture that encourages staff and learners to aspire to excellence.

Staff feel highly valued and are very motivated. Staff turnover is low and staff absenteeism is very low.

28. Staff development is very good. An annual appraisal system effectively identifies training needs. The literacy and numeracy levels of training staff are assessed annually and if required trainers undergo training to ensure they have the skills to support learners effectively. Staff are well qualified and experienced. An experienced training officer provides good development and support for staff to enable them to provide consistent and high quality services for learners.
29. A particularly effective management information system provides managers with accurate and up-to-date information on performance. A variety of monthly generated management reports allows managers to review performance and inform improvement targets. However, some targets are not sufficiently challenging to drive improvement in success rates fast enough.
30. A very effective board of directors provides very good direction and challenge to guide the company and develop the business. Non-executive NLTG directors are recruited onto the board from member companies who own NLTG. They give their time and expertise to the company free of charge and inform and agree the business strategy. NLTG has significantly developed from their initial purpose of providing training for the furniture manufacturing industry to a multi-vocational training resource for a range of different industries. The board of directors instigated a joint funded Centre of Vocational Excellence for the furniture manufacturing industry at the Accrington site. This significant company investment provides an excellent facility and resource for learners and employers.
31. The provider's approach to safeguard and protect learners is good. The safety and well-being of learners is of high priority to staff. Appropriate Criminal Record Bureau checks are carried out on all staff and are appropriately recorded. Staff undergo annual training to update and refresh their knowledge. Safeguarding incidents are meticulously recorded and action taken is reviewed regularly. Links with external agencies are extensive and used particularly well to ensure learners are kept safe. The promotion of safeguarding and being safe to Foundation Learners is exemplary. A 24-hour helpline is publicised and used well by learners. Staff regularly respond to requests for help outside their normal working day. The welfare support learners receive mirrors the high quality safeguarding processes and actions. The high level of support and care very vulnerable learners receive helps a significant majority to stay on programme and progress to further learning. Safeguarding is promoted well to apprentices at induction. However, the promotion and testing by trainers to further develop apprentices' understanding at work is insufficiently thorough.
32. The promotion and monitoring of equality and diversity is good. NLTG has comprehensive policies to protect learners and staff from harassment, bullying and discrimination. An equality and diversity group meets every six weeks to analyse equality data, examine incidents and to discuss and implement

- improvements. NLTG conducts appropriate risk assessments before working with employers. It provides good support for employers who do not have relevant policies and provides help to develop them. Any harassment or discrimination is effectively tackled to ensure that learners are fairly treated and protected. Staff receive good equality and diversity training and they undertake refresher and knowledge enhancement training annually. Equality of opportunity and diversity are promoted and monitored appropriately at different stages of the apprenticeships to check and to develop learners' and employers' understanding and practice.
33. Learners' and employers' views are sought and analysed to help to improve the provision. NLTG is responsive and information about improvements is given to learners verbally and via the company magazine that is distributed to employers and learners.
 34. The self-assessment process is good and includes the views of staff, learners and employers. Data are used well to support judgements. Grades awarded in the self-assessment report match those of the inspection, apart from Foundation Learning which inspectors awarded one grade higher than the provider. Improvement action plans are regularly reviewed to further develop and improve the provision.
 35. The process for assuring the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. NLTG observes all trainers each year. Observers have a detailed professional discussion with each trainer and clearly identify development points. However, the written records and joint observations completed during the inspection, confirm that insufficient focus is placed on learning when making judgements and awarding a grade. The observation outcomes are linked well to individual and group training needs which are comprehensive and are improving course delivery.
 36. NLTG uses its available resources to secure outstanding value for money. All company profits are reinvested in the business to benefit learners and employers. The company's legal constitution does not allow shareholder dividend payments apart from repaying an initial £1 investment should they leave the membership. All profits belong to the company and are reinvested to improve and grow the business to benefit learners and employers. NLTG has significantly developed from their initial purpose of providing training for the furniture manufacturing industry to a multi-vocational training resource for a range of different industries.

Subject areas

Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies

Grade 2

Context

37. NLTG offers engineering work-based qualifications in food manufacture, industrial applications and furniture and glass. Of the 721 learners, 36% are aged 16 to 18, 38% are aged 19 to 24 and the remainder are aged over 24 years. Around 91% of learners are male and 5% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Seventy four percent of learners are on intermediate apprenticeship programmes. Eight percent have a disability and 40% require additional learning support. Forty three trainers and 35 internal verifiers provide assessment, verification and training.

Key findings

- Outcomes are good. The achievements of learners who complete their programme are good. Success rates for intermediate apprentices in the glass industry are good and have increased each year for three years. However, learners in the furniture industry and advanced apprentices in the glass industry are making slower progress. The high level of redundancies in the local area has had a significant detrimental impact on overall success rates.
- Engineering learners develop a wide range of high level skills. Learners in the furniture industry use their skills particularly effectively to design and manufacture high quality furniture products. Learners produce a high, and in some cases outstanding, standard of practical work. Learners gain in confidence, identifying issues and influencing changes in the manufacturing processes in the companies they work in.
- Current learners are making at least satisfactory and often good progress. Many progress to higher level programmes gaining enhanced skills that often lead to promotion within their companies. Learners feel safe, have a good understanding of how to stay safe and use safe working practices in the workplace and in NLTG's workshops. During progress reviews, NLTG effectively raises learners' awareness of, and monitors, safeguarding, health and safety and accident reporting.
- Teaching and learning are good. Training programmes are planned and managed effectively. Trainers use a particularly good range of learning activities and resources including good quality information learning technology equipment to develop learners' skills and understanding. Good links between theory and practice enhances learners' understanding. Practical training in the workplace is very good and learners work confidently alongside skilled craftsmen.
- Assessment is good. During progress reviews, learners receive clear and relevant advice on how they can improve their performance and develop their knowledge and understanding. Trainers provide good verbal feedback on the quality of the learners' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity,

safeguarding and health and safety. However, the recording of learners' replies is insufficiently detailed to demonstrate their levels of knowledge and understanding.

- The extensive use of voice recorders supports learners in making better progress, with less concentration in writing lengthy reports for the evidence requirements of their training programme. However, there is slow implementation by trainers of other available technology to aid learner progress and support learning.
- Employers are provided with thorough and detailed feedback and are fully aware of the progress their learners are making, show an interest in and fully understand the apprenticeship framework requirements. Employers provide a very high standard of support to their learners during training activities in the workplace.
- The provision very effectively meets the needs of learners and offers a wide range of training programmes to meet the requirements of employers. The well planned provision provides learners with coherent progression routes. The arrangements for training and assessment are flexible and take account of shift patterns. NLTG works closely with employers to ensure that training programmes are relevant to the learner's employment and promote training for their managers and staff.
- Partnership arrangements are outstanding. NLTG works particularly closely with employers and local organisations. NLTG, local employers and the Preston Guild Apprenticeship Scheme successfully promote apprenticeship schemes in the furniture industry through a range of local employers. Employers are fully involved in working with NLTG to establish training programmes that exactly match their requirements in improving the skills of their workforce.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Staff provide very effective advice and guidance to support learners in achieving their potential. A high proportion of engineering learners require additional learning support. In addition to their NVQ training, learners receive regular and effective visits from specialist Skills for Life tutors to help them improve their literacy and numeracy.
- Leadership and management are good. During 2008, learning outcomes were identified as a cause for concern. Good and effective action was taken to improve the management of the programmes including an improved monitoring system and concentrated actions to improve learners' progress.
- The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and sufficiently evaluative to identify and implement actions to improve the provision. A wide range of data are analysed well by managers to identify issues and plan improvements. Value for money is good. Learners starting their programme with low levels of literacy and numeracy develop a high standard of skills, knowledge and understanding of engineering. The quality and availability of resources are good and used well to promote learning.

What does NLTG need to do to improve further?

- Identify the reasons for slow progress for different groups of learners and implement improvement actions to ensure all learners successfully complete their framework requirements by their planned end date.
- Extend the use of technology to support learning and increase the rate of progress learners make on their training programmes.

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 2

Context

38. Learners are employed in a wide range of hospitality and catering establishments in Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cumbria. Currently, there are 520 learners on programmes; 351 of these are intermediate apprentices, 164 are advanced apprentices and five are on NVQ only programmes. Most learners are aged between 19 and 24 years; 56% are female and one third of learners have identified additional learning support needs. Most learning and assessment takes place in the workplace, provided by 21 trainers and internal verifiers.

Key findings

- Current learners make good progress towards the achievement of their apprenticeship frameworks, with many learners achieving additional units and qualifications in food safety and health and safety, further increasing their employability skills. Success is celebrated well. Learners have achieved City and Guilds Medals of Excellence and reached national finals in apprenticeship awards.
- In 2010/11, overall success rates and the rate for completion with planned timescales for apprentices were low. A significant minority of learners left the programme early for reasons out of NLTG's control. Success rates for the small number of level 2 workplace learning learners in 2010/11 are outstanding and significantly above the national average.
- Learners develop good workplace and personal skills. Many learners are promoted while on programmes and are given increased responsibility at work, for example, in devising staff rotas and recipes and changing restaurant menus. Learners increase in confidence and develop good team-working skills. They enjoy their programmes and gaining qualifications while at work.
- Learners feel safe and have a good understanding of the safeguarding procedures to follow should they feel unsafe while on their apprenticeship. Learner safety and welfare are checked well at each trainer visit but discussions are insufficiently well recorded. Learners follow safe working practices while at work.
- Teaching and learning are good. Good use is made of discussions and oral questions to check learners' understanding and extend their learning. Learners are able to apply their learning to workplace situations well. At the Accrington site, good use is made of the excellent facilities including a well designed and well equipped kitchen, bar, restaurant and cellar area to enable learners to gain skills and knowledge and complete assessments.
- Resources are used well to promote learning. However, technology is used infrequently in individual coaching sessions to help learners demonstrate and record their skills and reduce the amount of written work required. Skills for Life tutors very effectively use contextualised examples, such as scaling up recipes,

to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills in ways that are meaningful to them.

- Assessment practice is good. Trainers respond well to the business needs of employers and are sensitive to ensure their visits do not impact on business activities. Assessment is planned well with learners' and employers' involvement. Recording of assessment is thorough and feedback to learners is constructive and helps them improve.
- Learners benefit from regular reviews of their progress. Trainers set appropriate short-term targets and actions that are reviewed at subsequent meetings. However, trainers do not set longer-term targets to ensure that learners understand what they need to achieve and by when, or to focus specifically on long-term career development.
- Programmes meet the needs of employers and learners well. Apprenticeship training is linked well to employer training schemes. Communication with employers is good. Employers are involved well when learners start their apprenticeship and help to select appropriate optional units relevant to their work. Employers value the impact of training programmes on increased motivation, improved customer service skills and reduced turnover of staff.
- Support for learners is good. Trainers make frequent visits to the workplace and communicate well with learners between visits. Good pastoral support effectively helps learners remain in work and learning. Learners are well supported by their employers who take an active interest in their learning.
- Leadership and management are good. Staff are supported well by managers. A wide range of management information reports are shared with, and used well by, staff to identify learners at risk of not completing their programmes. Good management action is improving success rates. New trainers are given reduced caseloads and are supported well to develop their assessment practice. Learners now receive faster feedback on the results of their technical certificates.
- Learners have a good understanding of health and safety, and equality and diversity. At the start of their programmes, learners receive detailed information covering all aspects of equality and diversity including current legislation. Equality and diversity and safeguarding are appropriately promoted at each assessor visit. However, the outcomes of discussions are not sufficiently well recorded.
- Staff contribute to the self-assessment report and help inform actions needed to improve provision. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate but judgements on success rates are overly optimistic. Improvement targets are mostly demanding but targets to improve the rate of progress learners make are insufficiently challenging. Improved internal verification procedures have increased the effectiveness of internal quality assurance.

What does NLTG need to do to improve further?

- Increase the range of learning resources available to learners and promote the use of technology in learning and assessment to speed up the pace of learning.

- Make more effective use of medium and long-term target setting to guide learners' progress to complete on time and to develop their long-term career aspirations.
- Provide better guidance for trainers to record meaningful information about discussions with learners about safeguarding, equality and diversity.

Preparation for Work

Grade 1

Context

39. There are 567 learners enrolled on Foundation Learning programmes. All learners, except for three, are aged between 16 and 18. Provision is available at centres in Accrington, Preston, Oldham, Fleetwood and Blackpool. Males make up 57% of learners. Eleven percent of learners are from minority-ethnic groups and 23% have identified that they have a disability. Learners attend a variety of group training sessions, developing personal, social, vocational and functional skills. There are 34 trainers and 20 of these are also internal verifiers.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners on the foundation programme are outstanding. From a very low starting point, learners make exceptional progress. Attendance monitoring is thorough and attendance at group sessions is good. Functional skills and vocational qualification achievement is very good. Progression to further training or employment is very good. Around a third move into apprenticeships and 42% to further education or employment.
- Learners' work is of a good standard, and meets awarding body standards. Very good development of personal and social skills ensures that learners are confident, polite and self-aware. Learners clearly enjoy their learning, and make exceptional progress in all activities. They are particularly enthusiastic about enrichment activities in football, snooker and dance.
- The opportunities to undertake work experience and work placements are very good and all learners develop the knowledge and skills to improve significantly their economic and social well-being. Innovative initiatives, for example, the snooker-based 'Cue Club', encourage disadvantaged and disengaged learners to develop understanding of employment and training opportunities and many consequently progress onto the Foundation Learning programme.
- Learners say that they feel very safe. Learners have excellent support to help them make informed choices about their own health and well-being. All learners attend a first aid course, a drug awareness and a sexual health session during the induction period. Further support is provided through healthy eating and budgeting sessions. Learners make an outstanding contribution to their community, through a wide range of volunteering and charity work.
- Teaching, training and assessment are good. The best lessons use a variety of methods to develop understanding and challenge learners. The use of technology to enhance lessons is good. Assessment is good and verbal feedback to learners is supportive and builds confidence. However, written feedback, whilst supportive, does not identify sufficiently ways in which learners can improve. Progress reviews are very effective and involve the learner and employer, where appropriate.

- Arrangements for initial assessment are good. The assessment of literacy and numeracy takes place at the start of the programme and includes a consideration of preferred learning styles. Information from initial assessment is shared with learners and used effectively to inform individual learning plans. Staff have appropriate vocational skills and expertise and benefit from very good opportunities to enhance their professional qualifications.
- The Foundation Learning programme is outstanding in the way that it meets the needs and interests of learners. The very broad based curriculum, with a full range of options across eight subject areas, is both flexible and well coordinated. Employers' views are carefully considered and inform programme development. Enrichment opportunities are excellent.
- Partnership working is outstanding. Employers provide excellent support and opportunities for Foundation Learners. Well established working relationships with the Young People's Service ensure high levels of effective support. Relationships with local schools are excellent; learners attend local schools to advise pupils on the future opportunities available to them through apprenticeships and Foundation Learning.
- Information, advice and guidance are very good and enable learners to make informed choices about their next step in training, education and employment. Pastoral support for individual learners is outstanding. Learners receive excellent support, particularly at times of crisis. Contacts with other agencies are well developed and offer specialist support, for example, drug and alcohol support.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Managers have successfully achieved improvements through a positive and supportive culture. Staff are fully committed to the ethos of the company to raise expectation and promote ambition in learners. Communication across the five centres is very good. An increased focus on performance and improved awareness of management information ensures improved outcomes for learners.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding, with prompt action to ensure high levels of care. Promotion and management of equality and diversity is good, with no significant variations in achievement rates of different groups of learners. However, some staff lack confidence in discussing ethnicity topics with learners. Learner feedback is actively sought and responded to through individual and regular group meetings with learners.
- The self-assessment process is thorough and is broadly accurate. It makes good use of performance data to inform judgements. Value for money is outstanding. NLTG's investment into purpose-built Foundation Learning facilities in Accrington and renovated premises in Blackpool, Oldham and Preston has provided additional learning opportunities for those areas. Learners have very good opportunities to develop personal and social skills and to achieve a wide variety of vocational qualifications.

What does NLTG need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of assessor's written feedback to identify clearly ways in which learners can enhance their work.
- Share good practice in relation to understanding of ethnicity issues to improve awareness of staff and learners across all centres.

Business Administration and Law

Grade 2

Context

40. NLTG offers intermediate and advanced apprenticeships in administration, management and customer service. Currently, there are 607 administration, 408 customer service and 228 management intermediate and advanced apprentices. Of these 265 are aged between 16 and 18, 575 are aged between 19 and 24, and the remainder are over 25 years of age. Twenty eight percent are male, 7% are from minority ethnic groups and 8% have a declared disability. All apprentices are employed in a wide range of workplaces. On- and off-the-job training and assessment are conducted in the workplace.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall. In 2010/11, achievement rates were high. However, a considerable number of apprentices were made redundant and this had an adverse impact on success rates. Many learners progress from intermediate to advanced apprenticeships and then enrol on higher education and professional courses.
- In 2010/11, overall success rates in workplace learning provision were high. The number of learners who completed within the planned time was satisfactory. Success rates show an improving trend between 2007 and 2011.
- Learners enjoy their learning. Their self-confidence and self-esteem increase and they improve their promotion prospects. They develop a good range of work-related skills, through relevant and practical work-based tasks and projects, which make a significant contribution to personal effectiveness and business efficiency. Most learners produce work of a good standard. They say they feel very safe in their learning and working environments.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Individual coaching and tutoring are directly related to learners' identified learning needs. Off-the-job learning is carefully sequenced and skilfully managed to motivate learners and to help them to succeed. Good emphasis is placed on problem solving through learner-centred practical work. Learning is appropriately linked to learners' occupational specialism and business contexts. Most learners make good progress.
- Trainers have good administrative, managerial and customer service expertise which they use effectively to coach and support learners. Learners' literacy and numeracy development needs are satisfactorily identified through initial and diagnostic assessments which are completed early in the apprenticeship programme.
- Learning resources are satisfactory overall, although insufficient use is made of technology to support trainers' verbal explanations in individual training sessions and there is an over-reliance on handouts. Learners' technical and theoretical knowledge is too often not developed beyond the requirements of the NVQ. Too

few learners are using technology to streamline their evidence collection and to speed up the assessment process.

- Learners' progress is regularly reviewed. They receive comprehensive feedback on their progress. Target-setting is satisfactory although some short-term targets are insufficiently ambitious and do not promote independent learning. Learners' knowledge of equality and diversity and safeguarding is insufficiently extended during their progress reviews. Although comments from line managers are sought, rarely are managers present when learners' progress is reviewed.
- The provision successfully meets the needs and interests of learners. Optional units are carefully selected with full consideration given to learners' job roles and career aspirations. As learners' proficiency increases, many are given more complex tasks or they are promoted. One learner, for example, was promoted to salon manager as a result of her team-leading competencies and qualification.
- Good partnerships have been developed with a wide range of employers, including manufacturing organisations, local authorities, medical practices and those involved in the leisure industry. Most offer good working and learning environments and are committed to improving the skills of their workforce. Employers and learners value trainers' reliability and their readiness to change appointments to accommodate work routines and unexpected emergencies.
- Learners receive outstanding pastoral care, guidance and support from their trainers. Learning support is good. Trainers visit the workplaces regularly to coach and assess learners and to deal with any difficulties that may arise. Tutors are very accessible between workplace visits and learners are able to contact them by telephone and email. Good information and advice are provided to learners.
- Leadership and management are good. The curriculum area is skilfully led and managed by two team managers and two team leaders. Communication is particularly good and staff meet regularly at monthly staff and curriculum meetings. The opinions of staff are valued and contribute to improving provision. Trainers have very good opportunities to discuss personal and professional matters at individual monthly meetings with their team leaders.
- Staff development opportunities are particularly good and staff are kept up-to-date with recent developments and innovations. Trainers are appropriately qualified, with an increasing number holding, or working towards, a recognised teaching qualification.
- Staff have a good understanding of the company's lone working procedures. Staff also have a good awareness of safeguarding and equality and diversity but these aspects are not always satisfactorily promoted to learners and embedded in the curriculum. Strategies to improve the quality of the provision, including self-assessment, are good. Value for money is good.

What does NLTG need to do to improve further?

- Increase the variety of learning resources, including the use of technology, to extend learners' theoretical and technical knowledge and to develop their autonomy, and ensure that equality and diversity and safeguarding are consistently promoted so that learners' knowledge is continually enriched.
- Ensure all learners have more demanding targets to meet between trainers' visits so they successfully achieve their qualifications and within the planned time period.
- Strengthen employers' involvement in the review process so they are fully informed about learners' progress and their short- and long-term learning needs.

Information about the inspection

41. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's quality and safety manager as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality-monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
42. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider/college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

North Lancs Training Group

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners				
Full-time learners	3561	583	3	2975
Part-time learners				
Overall effectiveness	2	1	1	2
Capacity to improve	2			
Outcomes for learners	2	1	1	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2			
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2			
How well do learners progress?	2			
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2			
How safe do learners feel?	2			
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2			
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	1			
Quality of provision	2	1	1	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2			
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1			
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1			
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2			
Leadership and management	2	1	1	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2			
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2			
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2			
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2			
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2			
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2			
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1			

*where applicable to the type of provision

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