

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
FEBRUARY/MARCH 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
APRIL/MAY 2001

Prospect Training Services



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Grading

In summarising their judgements about the quality of provision in curriculum or occupational areas and about the quality of leadership and management, including quality assurance and equality of opportunity, inspectors use a five-point scale. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

SUMMARY

The original inspection of Prospect Training Services was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in a less than satisfactory grade being awarded for quality assurance. This area has been reinspected against the requirements of the *Common Inspection Framework* by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. The section of the original report dealing with quality assurance has been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website (www.ali.gov.uk).

Prospect Training Services provides good training for young mothers and for adults who are ready for employment. The flexible training is designed to meet individual needs and achieves good employment results. Training is well planned and effective. Prospect Training Services ensures equality of opportunity for trainees and provides effective trainee support. Management of training is good and there is a comprehensive system for monitoring trainees' progress. At the time of the original inspection, the quality assurance systems related mainly to contract compliance. There were no effective measures to evaluate and improve the quality of the training provided by the organisation or its subcontractors. These weaknesses have been resolved. Prospect Training Services now has effective quality assurance procedures which are fully understood by all staff, but the procedures are not integrated within a cycle of quality assurance.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Foundation for work	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	2
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ work-focused, flexible training meets individual needs
- ◆ innovative programmes for young mothers
- ◆ good retention, achievement and progression to employment
- ◆ practical implementation of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ flexible and responsive trainee support

- ◆ good working relationships between all parties
- ◆ comprehensive system for tracking trainees' progress
- ◆ clear and effective lines of communication
- ◆ good quality assurance procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ few work-placement opportunities
- ◆ insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ poor use of management information in development planning
- ◆ no cohesive quality assurance cycle

INTRODUCTION

1. The proprietor established Prospect Training Services (Prospect) as a sole trader in 1997. Since the original inspection, Prospect has become a limited company. Prospect runs its training programme for adults and New Deal for 18-24 year olds with funding from the Employment Service. A sister company, called The Business Centre (Gloucester) Limited, gives work-based training for young people funded by Gloucestershire's Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). The organisation is now based on two sites in the southern part of the city of Gloucester. Initially, the organisation ran programmes for young mothers-to-be and single mothers known as New Prospects, funded through the European Social Fund (ESF). In 1998, the Link Group, formerly Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), invited Prospect to test a new way of providing work-based training for adults who require additional training to re-enter employment. Prospect now provides these programmes under three LLSC contracts. The training for young pregnant women focuses on preparing the young women to become mothers and reviewing the options available to them after the birth of their children. The New Prospects programme helps young mothers to gain qualifications to improve their employability and provides financial support for childcare where appropriate. All the accredited work-based training for adults is subcontracted by Prospect to one of its training providers. Prospect offers training across the county through 51 subcontractors. The training includes basic skills, information technology, fork-truck driving and light goods-vehicle driver training. There were 83 adults on the work-based training programme, eight on the programme for young pregnant women and nine on the New Prospects programmes at the time of the original inspection. By the time of the reinspection, Prospect had broadened its training base. There are 75 adults on the work-based training programme, seven on the subsidised employment option of New Deal from the Gloucestershire Unit of Delivery, 26 modern apprentices, 70 on the Life Skills programme of the Learning Gateway, eight on the young mothers-to-be programme and 13 on the New Prospects programme. The latter is still funded through money from the ESF. The proprietor manages the organisation and employs a team of 15 full-time and two part-time staff.

2. The unemployment rate shows significant variation across the county. For example, in January 2000, Tewkesbury's unemployment rate stood at 1.9 per cent, while the Forest of Dean's was substantially higher at 4.1 per cent. This was slightly higher than the national average of 3.8 per cent and well above the average for the county of 2.7 per cent. By January 2001, the county's unemployment rate had fallen slightly to 2.4 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.5 per cent. Two per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers in Gloucestershire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 56.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, this proportion had increased to 57 per cent in Gloucestershire, compared with the national

average of 49.2 per cent. In 1999-2000, 66 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds remained in education and training compared with the national average of 63 per cent. Ninety per cent of businesses in the area are small or medium-sized enterprises and they account for 50 per cent of local employment. Most of the employment is in administration, mainly in insurance. Warehousing is the fastest growing sector, with an increased demand for trained personnel.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Prospect began its self-assessment process in September 1999. Staff attended training sessions run by the Link Group and a conference run by the Training Standards Council (TSC). The final report was produced in December 1999. Staff were consulted about the report and its contents. No quantitative data were used to help develop the report. The staff had difficulty in evaluating the training. Many of the identified strengths were no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with two of the grades given by Prospect, two were graded higher and one lower. An action plan, developed after the original inspection, was used to consolidate the strengths and deal with the weaknesses identified by self-assessment and inspection. A second self-assessment report was produced in April 2001, in preparation for reinspection. Staff were involved in the process of evaluating how the weaknesses identified in the original inspection report had been resolved. An additional summary report, prepared in February 2001 for the reinspection, outlined the remedial action which had been taken since the original inspection.

4. The original inspection was carried out by a team of four inspectors, who spent a total of 16 days at Prospect in February and March 2000. They interviewed 57 trainees and 14 of Prospect's staff. They visited two work-placement providers and interviewed relevant staff. Six subcontracted training providers were visited. A wide range of paperwork was examined and this included 36 trainees' files, eight trainees' database records, policies and procedures, contracts with the TEC and management files.

5. Reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors, who spent a total of eight days at Prospect during April and May 2001. They interviewed 11 trainees and 12 staff. They visited two employers and three subcontractors. One workplace supervisor and two trainees were interviewed by telephone. One induction, one training session and three progress reviews were observed. The training session was awarded a grade 1. Inspectors examined documents including portfolios, trainees' assessment records, trainees' files and quality assurance paperwork. The weakness relating to ineffective progress reviews, which was found in trainee support at the original inspection, has been resolved. This has been removed from the key weaknesses on the summary page, although it remains in the weaknesses and text for trainee support, which was not within the scope of the reinspection. Similarly, the key weakness relating to the lack of structure to key skills development in the occupational area has been rectified. It has been removed from the summary page but remains in the weaknesses and text for foundation for work as this was not within the scope of the reinspection.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Foundation for work		2	2			4
Total	0	2	2	0	0	4

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Foundation for work

Grade 2

6. There are 83 adult trainees on work-based training programmes organised through a brokerage across a range of occupational areas. Training lasts up to 14 weeks depending on different occupational requirements. Twelve trainees are training as fork-truck drivers and 54 are following basic- or higher-level computer literacy and information technology training. Trainees have the opportunity to gain a vocational qualification, develop confidence, and become ready for work through job-search support. Training is brokered through subcontractors across Gloucestershire according to each trainee's priorities for future employability and ease of travel to a training centre. The range of vocational qualifications has recently included light goods vehicle maintenance, public service vehicle maintenance, catering, first aid, and business start-up. Information technology training is run at open learning centres where trainees book sessions, during the day or evening, to suit their particular circumstances. In addition, trainees are encouraged to book into the training centre for group or one-to-one sessions on work-related topics such as producing a curriculum vitae or for assertiveness training. Three trainees are on work placement with an employer. Progress reviews are carried out at the subcontractors' premises by Prospect's trainers every four weeks and when trainees leave, with more frequent informal contact throughout the training.

7. Eight pregnant young women between the ages of 16-18 are on the young mothers-to-be programme at Prospect House. They attend three days each week for up to 12 weeks. The programme includes 12 learning modules relating to pregnancy, childbirth, parenting and future action planning. Key skills are developed and trainees gain a first aid certificate. Nine young mothers aged 16-24 are on the New Prospects programme which offers flexible hours of vocational training. Childcare costs are available during the training. Participants usually study up to 16 hours each week over a nine to 12 month period. Referral is through lone parent advisers, health visitors, the careers service and word of mouth.

8. Inspectors judged that foundation for work had been undervalued in the self-assessment report. Insufficient weighting had been placed on retention and achievement and on the work-related focus of the programmes. The self-assessment report correctly identified the well-established working relationships with training providers, good-quality training, the good overall resourcing of that

training and the flexibility of the short programmes. It recognised the unsatisfactory number of work placements but not the weakness in key skills development. The occupational area was not awarded a single grade in the report. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than the average of the grades indicated in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced training
- ◆ flexible training meets individual needs
- ◆ work-focused training
- ◆ innovative programmes for young mothers
- ◆ good retention, achievement and progression into employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ few opportunities for work placements
- ◆ no structured key skills development
- ◆ missed opportunities for matching employers' and trainees' needs

9. Subcontractors have been well chosen and Prospect's staff maintain regular contact. Training is well structured and effective in comfortable and welcoming environments suited to adults' needs. Information technology facilities are good, meet industry standards and offer e-mail and Internet access for job-search activities. Learning materials are generally clear and well presented, although some basic information technology training material was insufficiently broken down into small steps for trainees with low levels of literacy. Assessment is efficiently managed.

10. Trainees are involved in planning the training and assessment. Support from Prospect's staff ensures they have the necessary skills and self-confidence. Trainees welcome the flexibility of open learning which allows them to work at their preferred times and pace with effective support from tutors. In particular, adults with children can work when their children are at school, or by study in the evening. The information technology suite in Prospect House is good. Trainees use e-mail to find job details rapidly on the day of advertisement. Young mothers work through a careers software package and CD-ROMs are available to teach computer programming. One return-to-nursing trainee has gained sufficient information technology awareness to be able to update hospital patient records, and a trainee with severe hearing impairment is able to practise keyboard skills prior to a job interview. These facilities are available throughout the week. The company also creates opportunities to meet particular skill needs. A young single parent was given the first job she applied for and now works full time. The practise she had in receptionist and telephone skills in the training centre prior to interview were instrumental in giving her the confidence to apply for the job. Although key skills

are assessed at induction, there is little take-up of the training offered and there is no structured approach to the development of key skills for employment across all programmes.

11. Training is strongly focused on work and trainees have a good understanding of the steps they are taking to move into employment. Three young mothers are using the New Prospects opportunities to upgrade their skills and find better-paid employment that will allow them to afford childcare. There is a strong commitment to developing lifelong learning through building self-confidence and ensuring success while training. Prospect works with a very diverse client group but targets its programmes at those with the potential to gain work within a short period of re-training and confidence building. They have clear criteria for referral to other local training providers when long-term development is needed. They encourage trainees to link qualifications, such as fork truck driving with basic information technology, in order to meet current warehousing requirements. Some opportunities are missed, however, to develop information technology training which is specific to particular occupations or types of employer.

12. The short programmes, clear criteria for entry onto programmes, a customised response to training needs, and the good level of personal contact and support are key factors in achieving high levels of retention and achievement. In 1999-2000, 324 trainees have started and completed their programmes, with 90 per cent retention. Of those starting, 68.5 per cent have gained qualifications and 66 per cent have secured employment. Prospect has very nearly achieved this year's contract target for jobs: 170 out of 177. Although there are well-established links with employers and an understanding of local skill needs, there are few opportunities for work placements. The work placements visited offered a highly effective and structured opportunity to develop on-the-job skills.

13. Prospect has an holistic approach to the training needs of young single pregnant women and has developed programmes to meet their needs both before and after the birth. The programme for young mothers-to-be uses attractively presented learning modules, which integrate content and skills. Trainees produce a baby record book using information technology skills. Numeracy is integrated in the costing of a craft project or budgeting for healthy eating. The work that trainees complete is evaluated according to criteria related to each young woman's level of previous educational attainment. Young women with difficult home circumstances or little support benefit from working together on challenging tasks in a caring environment. The ESF has been used to provide a subsequent financial bridge for young parents who cannot immediately progress onto mainstream education or training because of their need for flexible hours of training and support to access childcare.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

14. Prospect attracts a broad cross-section of the local community and particularly those from groups which feel themselves to be socially excluded. At the time of inspection, 16 per cent of those starting on the programmes were lone parents, both men and women, 18 per cent were people with disabilities and about 20 per cent were over 50 years of age, most of whom have faced redundancy. Forty-one per cent of the trainees are women, many of whom are single parents seeking training to gain employment. Six per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic groups compared with 2 per cent in the population as a whole. The provider has an equal opportunities policy and procedures covering appropriate legislation, and these are updated annually. The proprietor and staff are strongly committed to upholding equal opportunities in a practical way. Information is collected at recruitment on the gender and ethnicity of applicants and whether they have a disability.

15. Three of the strengths given in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice, with two of them relating to trainee support. Prospect identified the strong emphasis placed on individuals and their different needs as a strength. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ practical implementation of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ successful recruitment of disadvantaged groups
- ◆ high level of respect for individuals

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ some unrecorded equal opportunities procedures

16. Prospect sees equal opportunities as a core responsibility. One member of staff has overall responsibility but all staff play a positive role in ensuring equality of opportunity. Staff show respect for trainees from a wide range of backgrounds and personal difficulties and this respect influences those who come into contact with Prospect. The training centre affords a warm and welcoming environment to everyone. Staff demonstrate genuine concern for each trainee as an individual. Trainees work well together and offer encouragement and support to each other, irrespective of their varied backgrounds and the issues affecting them. Adult trainees are informed of the young mother's programmes at induction and a number have been involved in providing specific training sessions for the young

mothers. For example, one adult trainee gave a demonstration of glass engraving in a craft session. There are several examples of trainees being on programmes which counter traditional work-related stereotypes. For example, a woman has gained a class two licence to drive light goods vehicles with Prospects and is now undertaking the training for the class one licence.

17. The equal opportunities policy and procedures are detailed and included in the staff handbook. All staff are required to sign that they have read and understood them. A comprehensive list of equal opportunities terms and their definitions is included with the policy. It outlines relevant legislation, but the Disability Act, 1995 has been omitted. The equal opportunities advisor has a clearly defined role and responsibilities. These are recorded, but some procedures for equal opportunities are not. For example, the grievance procedure includes timescales for resolving and responding to issues but the guidelines for dealing with complaints does not. Prospect does not consistently monitor subcontractors' commitment to equal opportunities. Although the work-placement provider agreement includes a commitment to equality of opportunity, the training provider's agreement does not mention equal opportunities policy and procedures. Both the review documents and trainees' customer satisfaction questionnaires contain questions on equal opportunities. However these are not structured in a way to obtain useful data on the trainees' understanding or the subcontractors' implementation of equal opportunities.

18. A disciplinary and grievance procedure is given to trainees at induction and included on the induction checklist. Records of all complaints received are kept with the customer satisfaction forms and action is taken to resolve issues. Where appropriate, this information is used to change the practice of the organisation. A log of all complaints received is kept to highlight possible trends for specific subcontractors.

19. There is insufficient promotion of equal opportunities in the organisation. Equality of opportunity is not covered at induction in a structured way and is not supported by records or materials. Trainees' responsibilities are stated as part of the application form but little emphasis is placed on trainees' rights. No document is issued to trainees listing their rights at Prospect, at the subcontracted training provider or on work placements. Positive images and information about equal opportunities issues are not displayed around the premises. There is inconsistency among the trainees in their understanding of equal opportunities and the issues surrounding it. For example, some of the older trainees are particularly aware of ageism and how it affects them in securing a job. In contrast, a number of the younger trainees have little or no understanding of how equal opportunities issues affect them.

20. Data on gender, ethnicity and disability are collected at recruitment. These data are analysed by trainees' starting programmes, qualifications gained and by those securing work. Marketing and recruitment drives regularly include minority ethnic community groups and clubs. At the time of inspection, a recruitment and

marketing strategy for people from minority ethnic groups was underway to help address the unemployment rate of 20 per cent for these groups. All staff are allocated outreach work. There is an action plan that reflects the thinking and discussion that is driving this initiative.

Trainee support

Grade 2

21. Prospect supports trainees from diverse educational and social backgrounds, including those from groups traditionally under-represented in education and training. Prospect's staff interview all prospective adult trainees at local job centres to assess their suitability for training and to provide them with advice and guidance. Employment goals are matched to existing skills, training needs are agreed and the elements of a training programme are identified. The information collected at initial interview is used to prepare an individual training plan. Staff conduct a weekly one-day induction for adults. Trainees also receive induction from subcontracted training providers. Trainees following the young mothers-to-be course are assessed using the basic skills agency's assessment test for reading, writing and numeracy. Adult trainees are offered the option of undertaking a key skills assessment during the induction programme and are given individual feedback on their performance before the end of the day. Additional support needs are logged in individual training plans. New Prospects and young mothers-to-be trainees have access to support from external agencies and specialist staff. Staff visit trainees regularly, reviewing adult trainees' progress after four weeks, or more frequently if needed. In addition, training providers carry out their own reviews to monitor trainees' progress.

22. The self-assessment report describes the arrangements for trainee support but is insufficiently evaluative. The inspection team mainly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the company. The self-assessment process did not recognise the weaknesses in the induction process but identified weaknesses in the review process. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by Prospect in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexible and responsive trainee support
- ◆ extensive links with external support agencies
- ◆ specialist counselling service available
- ◆ continuing support beyond the training programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective reviews
- ◆ missed opportunities at induction

23. Prospect has effective arrangements for trainee support to meet the needs of individual trainees. Trainees are well aware of the arrangements for support and are able to access appropriate support promptly. They are given up-to-date information and advice on employment opportunities. There is good team working among staff. Staff, training providers and trainees are in regular contact by telephone. Trainees are encouraged to talk openly with staff about their progress and any issues which may be affecting their training. Staff and training providers are committed to finding flexible solutions to problems which present barriers to the achievement of a trainee's employment goals. Training arrangements, which take account of local transport and childcare responsibilities, enable trainees from remote rural areas, and lone parents, to access training. Staff have arranged for trainees with a variety of medical conditions and disabilities to work towards occupationally specific qualifications which they have achieved successfully.

24. Pastoral support is good and includes crisis intervention and long-term support to help trainees deal with serious personal and domestic issues. Staff and subcontractors willingly provide support services beyond their contractual responsibilities. One training provider collects trainees daily from an agreed collection point and transports them to the training centre to overcome problems with public transport. Staff provide additional one-to-one help for trainees with disabilities and arrange for specialist support. A trainee with a severe hearing impairment receives a range of support including the services of an interpreter, customised software and individual support in preparing for a job interview. Personal counselling services are available for young mothers attending the young mothers-to-be programme and New Prospects training. This support is also available for the adult trainees. A qualified professional counsellor provides regular weekly counselling sessions and additional sessions are arranged, if necessary, in response to trainees' needs.

25. Prospect has extensive links with external agencies offering advice and practical support. Staff work closely with local housing associations to support young mothers facing serious and immediate housing problems. A midwife provides advice regularly to the young mothers at the training centre to encourage attendance. Links with lone parent advisers have resulted in a sustained increase in the number of lone parents accessing training programmes. Staff also provide continuing support beyond the training programme. Arrangements are made to enable trainees who need additional time to complete a course or qualification. A fortnightly coffee morning is held at the training centre where young mothers who have completed their training come with their children to meet other course members, to discuss training needs and other problems informally and to support the current group of pregnant young women.

26. Initial assessment and interview arrangements are efficient, systematic, welcoming and informative. All adult trainees receive a day's induction to training following their initial interview. They are provided with information on programme content and the additional short courses available at the centre.

Procedures for placing trainees with training providers are well established and trainees are normally given final details of their training programme during induction. Trainees must absorb information in a very short amount of time and complete a number of documents. As a result, there are few planned opportunities to get to know other trainees, to build confidence and to check that the substantial amount of information given during the initial interview has been fully understood. Trainees receive written information which covers health and safety.

27. Reviews of trainees' progress are carried out regularly at the training providers' premises. The self-assessment report identifies a concern that reviews may not adequately address pastoral issues that can influence the effectiveness of training. This was not substantiated by observations of reviews made during the inspection. However, the review process does not provide a detailed report of trainees' progress and achievement, or action planning that includes realistic targets against which trainees' progress can be monitored. Training providers are not involved in the formal review process. This limits the effectiveness of reviews which are the main formal instrument staff use to monitor progress and the appropriateness of individual training plans.

Management of training

Grade 2

28. Prospect has been operating as a training provider for three years. There are 51 subcontracted training providers on its database though only eight or nine are active at any given time. There is a simple management structure. This facilitates discussion and effective management with the proprietor fulfilling the role of facilitator at management meetings. Prospect employs 11 full-time staff, and two part-time staff. Among the staff, two are employed as trainers. The remainder are employed as contract managers, quality and health and safety co-ordinators and recruitment and employment managers. There are also a number of specialist support tutors who deliver training at Prospect's premises. These include counselling and midwifery specialists.

29. The self-assessment report was insufficient in detail and identified strengths that were considered no more than normal operating practice. The structure of the report did not match the framework in *Raising the Standard* and grading methods were inconsistent with the standard requirements.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ productive working relationships among all those involved in training
- ◆ staff development clearly linked to business plan
- ◆ comprehensive system for tracking trainees' progress
- ◆ clear and effective lines of communication

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ limited analysis of management information

30. Prospect's staff are thoroughly committed to the development of each trainee's potential and there are good working relationships between the staff and trainees. There are equally good working relationships between staff, subcontracted trainers and employers. The commitment among all groups is reflected in the high achievement rate over the past three years, at 52 per cent, for trainees gaining employment. The close links and effective communication lines that exist between Prospect and employers within the community enhance the matching of trainees to employment opportunities. However, some key skills requirements identified from employers' requirements are not included into the particular trainees' individual training plan. For example, large goods vehicle driver skills include the use of on-board computers. Trainees wishing to pursue this employment route may be identified as requiring some additional information technology development. This fundamental skill is not always a target on the individual training plan. Working relationships with subcontracted trainers are equally good. Formal contracts detail the trainer's responsibilities and reporting guidelines. Regular visits to training providers' premises by Prospect's staff help to ensure that compliance with contract requirements is monitored. Attendance, progress and trainees' problems are reported. The contract requires qualifications gained by trainees to be notified to Prospect's office. It also specifies access to subcontracted training providers' premises for an annual health and safety survey. However, monitoring of health and safety by Prospect's staff during weekly or monthly site visits is not recorded. Trainees' review forms record their perceptions of health and safety issues during the training period. There are no formal meetings between Prospect and its subcontractors. Communication is by direct telephone contact or visits by Prospect's staff.

31. Current staffing levels within the organisation are adequate. Prospect has recently recruited one trainer to fill a vacancy on the programme for young mothers. Specific key skills and responsibilities are defined in the job descriptions held by all employees. There are recorded procedures for recruitment and appraisal. All staff are each given a personal development folder. Within each folder are copies of relevant administrative procedures, job descriptions and personal training plans, and the organisation's policies on equal opportunities and health and safety. There is no reference to a quality assurance policy within the organisation. Staff training and development plans are based on issues raised during annual performance appraisals. The training plans directly relate to the organisation's business development plan. Specialist training, such as sign language, information technology and management skills, is agreed with staff to improve the preparation, delivery and management of training programmes, as well as for their own personal development. The appraisal system has recently undergone a major revision. More defined performance targets are set. The system is still relatively new and its effectiveness has yet to be determined. Staff meetings

are held weekly and open debate is encouraged.

32. Prospect has developed a customised data management system to track trainees' progress. The organisation employs a dedicated systems manager to oversee the development and control of this database. The system is networked throughout the organisation and is synchronised on a daily basis. This ensures that trainees' records are updated frequently onto the network server. The database provides up-to-date information on trainees' progress. Management controls for tracking progress against review targets are also available. Information is available on subcontracted trainers regarding contacts and health and safety surveys. Trainees' progress from induction to qualification is recorded. Further interrogation of the database offers comprehensive statistical data regarding trainees' achievement, retention and information about early leavers. This statistical information, however, is not fully analysed to identify trends. Opportunities for identifying action to drive improvement are therefore missed.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

33. Prospect's quality assurance strategy, procedures and processes meet the requirements of the LLSC and the awarding body. Responsibility for monitoring and evaluating quality assurance procedures and practices lies with the quality assurance manager and is overseen by the proprietor. The new internal verification procedures developed for the modern apprenticeship programmes meet the requirements of the awarding body. Feedback from trainees and employers is obtained at regular intervals by means of questionnaires and interviews. Results are analysed and discussed at regular staff meetings. Trainees' progress, achievement rates and destinations are monitored at frequent intervals. The company achieved the Investors in People Standard in December 2000.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ some gaps within quality assurance system
- ◆ poor understanding of quality assurance among staff
- ◆ continuous improvement process unsystematic
- ◆ little monitoring of subcontractors' training

34. Since the original inspection, Prospect has used action-planning and close monitoring of performance to assist in the development of new quality assurance procedures. The weaknesses identified at the original inspection have now been resolved. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report produced for reinspection, but considered the strength relating to liaison with subcontractors and observation of subcontractors' training to be overstated. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear understanding of quality assurance arrangements by staff
- ◆ good quality assurance procedures
- ◆ effective monitoring of quality assurance processes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient use of measurable performance targets
- ◆ no cohesive quality assurance cycle
- ◆ no evaluative judgements in self-assessment report

35. Prospect has developed a new quality assurance strategy. This is displayed in different locations around the training centre to reinforce the importance of providing a good-quality service. All staff understand the strategy and the procedures involved. Three staff training days, along with regular team and management meetings, have been successful in updating staff on quality assurance. The strategy clearly outlines the main policies and procedures designed to improve the quality of training and to ensure consistency across subcontractors and training programmes. Staff manuals have been updated to include the new policies and procedures. Procedures for recruitment, initial interviews, induction and progress reviews are produced in diagrammatic form to ensure consistency of use.

GOOD PRACTICE

Prospect is teaching key skills at the start of modern apprenticeships. This good practice extends to administration, management and customer service trainees. In one example, two trainees are devising an equal opportunities policy for their employers. The work they are doing, including research, organising meetings and formulating a policy, not only teaches them to apply key skills effectively but also raises their awareness of equal opportunities. The evidence from this task will be used towards key skills units and elements of the NVQ.

36. Quality assurance arrangements are good. They include monitoring the training being given to trainees on subcontractors' premises. This is still at an early stage, but reports have been produced on each subcontractor. Some of the reports on individual training sessions lack evaluative judgements. In most cases, actions identified are followed up on subsequent visits. There is effective monitoring of each trainee's progress. The progress review process is good and in most cases the employer is involved. Realistic targets are set for completion of activities and these are followed up at the next progress review. Trainees complete questionnaires after their initial interview and induction, which ask for their views on these processes. Further questionnaires are completed mid-programme and at the end of the training. Any issues raised by trainees are dealt with quickly and effectively.

37. The quality assurance manager monitors the quality assurance processes. Information from progress reviews and questionnaires is entered onto the management information database and trainees' actual progress is checked against their targets. This identifies when trainees need further support. The database is also used to ensure that progress reviews, and visits to subcontractors, are carried out at the correct time. There are thorough audit procedures to ensure compliance with LLSC and Employment Service contracts. Information from the database is used to carry out statistical analysis every three months. Data are produced in relation to ethnicity, gender and retention rates but they are not always used to

predict trends or make improvements.

GOOD PRACTICE

Prospect makes effective use of trainees' weekly timesheets. Trainees on the Life Skills programme complete their timesheets to show the range of training they have undertaken. Prospect monitors the trainees' comments to ensure that they are receiving a varied training programme and that the training is consistently good across seven subcontractors.

38. Prospect uses action-planning to make improvements to each training programme. Action plans are effectively used, well monitored and it is clear from them when actions have been completed. They are, however, sometimes drawn up to deal with issues which are not related to action points from team meetings or the self-assessment report. The action-planning and quality assurance processes do not always result in measurable targets for performance being set. For example, in-house targets for retention rates, achievement of qualifications and progression into employment are not set.

39. Prospect has introduced a range of quality assurance measures since the original inspection. However, the separate procedures are not linked to form a quality assurance cycle. There is no procedure covering the self-assessment process. Self-assessment is not sufficiently integrated with the quality assurance arrangements. It is regarded as an annual event, complementary to, but outside the quality assurance procedures. The company produced its second self-assessment report for reinspection. It is primarily descriptive and lacks quantifiable evidence and judgements.