

INSPECTION REPORT

North West Community Services (Training) Ltd

05 June 2001



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based 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 *learnirect* 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.

Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

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

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

North West Community Services (Training) Ltd is a private training organisation based in Liverpool. It provides training for young people and adults in Life Skills, information technology, care and childcare.

Overall judgement

The quality of work-based training is unsatisfactory. The leadership and management of North West Community Services (Training) Ltd, are unsatisfactory. The overall quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of learners.

Work-based learning for young people

North West Community Services (Training) Ltd provides training in care for 14 advanced modern apprentices and 32 work-based learners, and Life Skills training for nine young people. Most care learners are employed or on work placements in childcare nurseries or residential care homes for elderly people. Achievement rates on Life Skills training programmes are good and 73 per cent of the learners achieved all the objectives in their training plans in 1999-2000. The proportion of apprentices who complete their modern apprenticeship in care is unsatisfactory. Only 6 per cent of the foundation level apprentices, and 7 per cent of the advanced modern apprentices, achieved all the objectives in their training plans in 1999-2000. The proportion of apprentices who achieve a national vocational qualification (NVQ) is low. The proportion of apprentices who achieve an NVQ at level 2 rose slightly from 25 per cent in 1998-99, to 29 per cent in 1999-2000. The proportion of learners on other work-based training programmes who obtained an NVQ at level 2, fell from 32 per cent in 1998-99, to 24 per cent in 1999-2000. Many learners in care leave during their first few weeks of training. Retention and achievement rates on Life Skills training programmes are good. In 1999-2000, 73 per cent of Life Skills learners carried out their training plans in full. Resources for Life Skills training programmes are poor. Theory training in childcare is planned well. Childcare learners have good training materials. Work placements are carefully chosen. On care training programmes, there is a disproportionate amount of assessment of written work. Key skills training and assessment are unsatisfactory.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of North West Community Services (Training) Ltd are unsatisfactory. The organisation maintains good communications with staff and with external organisations. Strategic planning however, is inadequate. Management information on learners' progress and performance is not used to plan

improvements to training. Staff promote equal opportunities effectively but there has been insufficient specific action to recruit learners from under-represented groups on training programmes. Quality assurance is poor.

GRADES

Health, care & public service	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Foundation for work	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- good understanding of equal opportunities among learners
- good internal and external communications
- good retention and achievement rates on Life Skills programmes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- inadequate key skills training and assessment
- poor assessment practices
- poor quality assurance system
- insufficient target-setting for staff
- inadequate strategic planning
- poor achievement rate on care courses

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more information for employers about off-the-job training
- more detailed operational procedures
- better use of management information in planning

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. North West Community Services (Training) Ltd (NWCS) was established in 1996. The company provides training in care, childcare and Life Skills throughout the Liverpool area. The company employs eight full-time and four part-time staff. There are 55 learners and two New Deal clients. Of the learners, 14 are modern apprentices, 32 are learners on other work-based training programmes and nine are receiving training in Life Skills. The New Deal clients were not present at the time of the inspection and their training was not inspected. Most learners are employed by private care and childcare providers within Liverpool. NWCS also provides training in information technology for a small number of apprentices.

2. Modern apprenticeship and other work-based training is funded through a contract with the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in Liverpool is 3.8 per cent compared with 6.2 per cent in the country as a whole. In January 2001, the unemployment rate in Liverpool was 7.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.5 per cent. In September 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Liverpool achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 35.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. Sixty-three per cent of school leavers in Liverpool stay on in full-time education, or enter training, compared with 69 per cent nationally.

THE INSPECTION

3. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 19 days at NWCS during June 2001. They interviewed 36 learners, conducted 17 interviews with NWCS staff, visited 18 employers and interviewed 18 workplace supervisors. Inspectors observed training, assessment and learners' progress reviews. They examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios of evidence, learners' records, the company's development plans, policies and procedures, promotional materials and awarding bodies' reports. Inspectors studied the company's self-assessment report, which had been updated in May 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Health, care & public service	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	4
Foundation for work	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	5

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Health, care & public service

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	46	4

4. At the time of the inspection, there were 14 advanced modern apprentices and 32 work-based trainees. Modern apprentices at NWCS normally take two years to complete the modern apprenticeship framework at advanced level. Work-based trainees take an average of nine months to complete their training programmes. NWCS provides work-based training in a variety of work placements including schools, nurseries, hospitals, nursing and residential care homes for elderly people, residential homes and training centres for adults with learning difficulties. Most childcare learners attend off-the-job training at the NWCS training centre for one day every fortnight. Individual trainees receive learning support. Care trainees working towards an NVQ at level 3 do not have a specific programme of off-the-job training at the training centre. They receive off-the-job training individually or in groups in the workplace or training centre, or are given training materials they can work through on their own. Staff who carry out training and assessment are occupationally qualified. Progress reviews are carried out on a monthly basis for the first three months and then every three months. Trainees who are identified as needing extra support receive progress reviews more frequently. At the time of inspection, some trainees were receiving progress reviews every week.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people								
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
	Number that started							9
Still in training							9	100
FMA framework completed							0	0
Left without completing the framework							0	0

Work-based learning for young people								
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)								
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Number that started			13		14		17	
Still in training			1	8	1	7	14	82
AMA framework completed			1	8	1	7	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			2	15	3	21	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed			4	31	5	36	1	6

NVQ Training								
NVQ Training								
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Number that started			113		110		84	
Still in training			0	0	12	11	32	38
Individual learning plan completed			37	33	17	15	5	6
Left without completing individual learning plan			62	55	62	56	42	50
NVQ level 2 completed			36	32	26	24	16	19
NVQ level 3 completed			18	16	3	3	0	0

STRENGTHS

- thorough recruitment and induction process
- well-planned off-the-job training in childcare
- good work placements
- effective support for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- poor assessment practices
- poor internal verification
- poor retention and achievement rates
- no recording of trainees' acquisition of skills in the workplace
- failure to make key skills training and assessment integral to programmes
- inappropriate advice for some trainees
- no monitoring and recording of trainees' progress in the workplace

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more information on off-the-job training for employers
- better recording of support for trainees

5. The recruitment and induction process is thorough. Potential trainees complete an application form. All applicants are interviewed and assessed by occupational experts. Once accepted, trainees carry out a trial period in their work placement to make sure that arrangements for work experience meet their needs and the needs of the employer. Induction is planned and well organised and helps trainees to understand all aspects of their training programme, the support services available to them and their rights and responsibilities.

6. Off-the-job training is well planned. Occupationally qualified trainers use a range of training activities to relate theory to current work practices. Trainees enjoy training sessions and say they help them to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. Trainees are given individual tutorials and they are encouraged to seek help when they need it. Sessions on child development and child observation are repeated every six weeks, to meet the needs of trainees starting their training programmes at various times throughout the year. Although employers value the occupational training provided by NWCS, they receive little information about it to help them provide effective support for trainees in the workplace. The company does not make use of expertise in the community to enhance training in first aid, food and hygiene and child protection.

7. Work placements are good. A range of work placements is available, the placements meet the trainees' interests and needs to be met. For example, one trainee is working in a small residential home. The trainee has learned a great deal about the demands of work in a setting similar to a family home. Another trainee was introduced to adults with learning difficulties during the induction period. She expressed her interest in working with this client group. NWCS arranged for the trainee to work two days each week helping an adult with learning difficulties. This trainee also spends two days a week in a residential home for adults with learning difficulties.

8. Trainees receive good support. Their progress is reviewed and recorded every three months. Each trainee is set clear, short-term targets. Trainees who have difficulty with their work receive progress reviews more frequently and receive good help and support. One trainee, who was making slow progress, achieved two NVQ units after receiving individual support, including weekly progress reviews. Support is offered to individuals and for groups in weekly half-day sessions. In these sessions, trainers give trainees help with written work. One trainer changed her day off to help a trainee at a particular time. Trainers do not keep clear records of the individual support sessions.

9. Assessment practices are poor on the care and childcare training programmes. Trainees are making slow progress towards achieving their NVQs. Records of direct observations of trainees in the workplace have not been kept. Following the

recommendation of an external verifier, assessors maintain records that lack detail. Trainers require trainees to produce a disproportionate amount of written work. Trainees are expected to complete several NVQ units before they are assessed at work. Portfolios contain little evidence based on work the trainee has carried out in the workplace. Training materials for theory work consist of a set of questions. All trainees are expected to provide answers in writing or on tape to these. Trainees produce written evidence for the NVQ unit on the promotion and protection of clients' rights instead of being assessed at work. Little use is made of witness testimony of trainees' competence. There is no procedure for monitoring and recording the progress trainees make in developing skills in the workplace. The member of staff responsible for providing trainees with support is also the internal verifier for care awards. NWCS acknowledge that this member of staff has a conflicting role. Staff at all work placements currently used by NWCS have qualified, experienced work-based assessors. These assessors are now being encouraged to assess the trainees in the workplace.

10. Internal verification is poor. NWCS has a policy and procedures for internal verification. There is, however, no procedure whereby all trainees' portfolios are sampled at regular intervals throughout the training programme. In childcare, where internal verification has identified the need for some trainees to collect further evidence, there is no system for the resubmission of their portfolios.

11. The proportion of modern apprentices who carry out their training plans in full is low. In 1999-2000, 6 per cent of foundation level apprentices and seven per cent of advanced level apprentices carried out their individual training plans in full. The proportion of apprentices who achieve their NVQ is low but has improved from 15 per cent in 1998-99, to 29 per cent in 1999-2000. The proportion of trainees on other work-based training programmes who achieve their NVQ has declined from 32 per cent in 1998-99, to 24 per cent in 1999-2000. Many trainees leave their programme within the first few weeks. Most trainees who complete their programmes, achieve their NVQs. Key skills training and assessment are not an integral part of trainees' programmes but take place at the end of them. Few apprentices have completed key skills units. Two members of staff are qualified to assess key skills.

12. Some trainees are given inappropriate advice about their training. For example, some trainees said that at their initial interview, they were told, incorrectly, that they would have to pay the cost of training and certification in first aid. Childcare trainees are under some pressure to select options recommended by the company rather than choose them themselves. A care trainee who wants to work with adults who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities has started gathering evidence of her competencies gained through working with this client group. Optional units appropriate to her career choice have not yet been identified by NWCS.

Good Practice

A trainer helped a learner with dyslexia to become more confident in the skills of reading aloud. The learner selected a story and recorded the nursery manager reading the story to children. After taking the recording and the book home to practice, she read the story to the children. The assessor was present and gave the trainee constructive feedback on her work.

Foundation for work

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	9	3

13. Careers advisers refer learners to NWCS who need to further their personal development and require help with basic skills and want to work in care services. Applicants are given an informal interview. If they wish to take their application further, they complete an application form on which they identify their existing skills, and career aspirations. A start date is agreed within one week of the initial interview. On starting the training programme, learners receive an induction which covers health and safety and equal opportunities' and includes an initial assessment of basic skills. The Life Skills tutor, in conjunction with the learner, draws up an individual development plan for him or her. In drawing up this plan, the tutor draws on information given on the learner's application form and provided at interview, and takes into account the learner's results in initial assessment. Learners receive further progress reviews from the careers service personal adviser. At the time of the inspection, there were nine learners receiving training in Life Skills. Their training programme lasts for up to 13 weeks. It consists of activities to help learners improve their basic skills, build their self-esteem and confidence, and prepare for work. Learners are taught at the company individually or in small groups. Work placements in local companies are chosen to meet learners' career aims. Initially, placements are for one day a week but their duration is increased to three days a week later in the training programme. The aim of the Life Skills training programme is to help learners progress to further education or training, or employment.

Achievements of learners during the contract year 2000-01 are shown in the table below.

Foundation Programmes								
Foundation Programmes	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
	Number that started							62
Still in training							2	3
Gained job with training/progressed to further training and/or planned learning completed							9	15
Left without either							15	24
Gained job with training							0	0
Progressed to further training							20	32
Planned learning completed							45	73

STRENGTHS

- good retention and achievement rates
- excellent personal tutoring for learners

WEAKNESSES

- poor planning and inadequate recording of training activities
- insufficient training resources for basic skills

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more use of external specialists
- wider range of training activities

14. Working relationships between the tutor and the learners are good. The Life Skills tutor has qualifications in counselling. The tutor interviews all learners initially and knows their needs well. Work placements are a valuable component of learners' programmes. For example, one learner spent one day a week on a care work placement. Having completed his training programme, this learner is continuing in the work placement to complete work for his NVQ. Learners progress in the training centre and on work placement is monitored and reviewed by the tutor effectively. Teachers set learners demanding but realistic goals in their individual training plans. The tutor is available to the learners to help them resolve any problems they may have, and help them identify ways of gathering evidence of their acquisition of competences.

15. Learners' retention rates are good. Most learners spend between 10 and 11 weeks on the 12-week training programme. Seventy-three per cent of learners carry out their individual development plan in full and many progress to further training, further education or employment.

16. Training activities are not planned or recorded in enough detail. Training activities are related to the jobs learners have to carry out in the workplace, but they are not planned or scheduled systematically. No record is kept of the training tasks carried out. The training tasks are not planned so that they become progressively more difficult. There are no systematic arrangements for ensuring a replacement tutor is available when the regular tutor is not available to provide the training.

17. As the company acknowledges in its self-assessment report, training resources are insufficient or poor. There are not enough resources for basic skills training. Photocopies of worksheets are poor. Some materials are out of date. Few relevant books are available to learners.

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18. Tutors in Life Skills do not have qualifications in the teaching of basic skills. The range of learning activities in basic skills is narrow. NWCS makes little use of specialists from external agencies to advise on appropriate training methods for specialist topics such as education about drugs.

Good Practice

A learner who had experience of caring for an elderly relative was found an appropriate placement in a care home. He has learnt much through this placement and will progress from training in life skills to the company's mainstream care training programme.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**Grade 4**

19. NWCS is a private training company based in Liverpool. The company's training manager leads a team of eight full-time and four part-time staff who carry out training and assessment in the training centre and in the workplace. There is a full-time administrative officer and a health and safety officer. The training manager reports to the company's board of directors. The company achieved Investor in People status in 1999. NWCS's policies and procedures were revised during the 12 months before inspection. They include policies on equal opportunities and quality assurance. The company produced its first self-assessment report in February 2001.

STRENGTHS

- good internal and external communication
- good understanding of equal opportunities among learners
- effective action on feedback from learners and employers

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate strategic planning
- few clear targets for staff to achieve
- inadequate implementation of policy to recruit trainees from under-represented groups
- poor quality assurance
- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities through promotional literature
- lapse of annual staff appraisal system

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more feedback from work-based learners
- better use of management information

20. Communication between staff and external organisations is good. Staff meet regularly at all levels to discuss operational issues. The training manager produces a monthly report for the board of directors on key training issues and on performance in meeting financial targets. Staff meet with the training manager on an individual basis each month to discuss issues and concerns. Memos and notice boards are used by staff as a further means of communication and for receiving information on developments within the company. NWCS has established excellent relationships with a range of external organisations. Employers are confident that they can contact NWCS should they have a problem and that it will be resolved promptly. NWCS staff work well with local careers service representatives. The company maintains good liaison with local high schools to promote work-based training and encourage participation in training by disadvantaged young people. NWCS staff are also involved in local partnerships and

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networking groups throughout Merseyside. They contribute to meetings on developments in occupational areas and training. In its self-assessment report, the company recognised that good internal communications represented a strength but did not acknowledge the benefits of its good external partnerships.

21. In its self-assessment report, the company failed to acknowledge that strategic planning does not fully cover training. It focuses on financial planning and the securing of government-funding training contracts. The training manager produces a development plan which outlines the key objectives for the year. Strategic and operational planning are not linked. Monitoring of the implementation of the operational plan is poor. There is no strategic overview to determine training priorities, such as the successful introduction of key skills training. There are no clear strategies for achieving financial targets or improving learners' retention and achievement rates. The company responds to specific issues as they arise, but does not anticipate these through good forward planning. Fifty per cent of new learners leave their training programme within a month of starting it, but the company has not identified any measures aimed at reducing this high drop-out rate.

22. Over the past 12 months the company has developed its management-information systems effectively. There are now computerised systems to help managers to monitor learners' progress and ensure that key processes of learners' progress such as reviews take place at the appropriate time. Managers, however, do not make enough use of the information available to identify priorities and carry out forward planning.

23. Few clear, measurable targets are set for staff. The training team works towards objectives set in the development plan. The training manager is responsible for ensuring the objectives are met. Staff are not informed of the targets in the development plan. Staff are not set goals or targets relevant to their areas of responsibility. The annual staff-appraisal system has lapsed. No member of staff has been appraised for 14 months. The informal monthly discussions do not focus on professional development. Any recommendations for action are seldom followed through. There is no process for the systematic identification of the training needs of staff. The performance of the training manager is not formally monitored.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

24. Learners ensure that they promote equal opportunities effectively through their activities in the workplace. Learners' understand their rights and responsibilities. The company has a comprehensive range of policies covering equal opportunities, racial and sexual harassment, recruitment, physical intervention, maternity, grievance and bullying. The equal opportunities policy makes reference to recent legislation. A shortened version of this is given to all learners at induction. Before learners are sent to a work placement, the company checks that the employer concerned promotes equal opportunities in the workplace effectively. Equality of opportunity is raised as a routine item during learners' progress reviews and is on the agenda for staff meetings. There is a clear complaints procedure, which learners and staff understand.

25. There are no learners with disabilities or from minority ethnic groups on any of the training programmes. There are few male learners on care training programmes. It is the company's recruitment policy to promote training to groups under-represented on programmes. In practice, however, this policy has not been fully implemented. NWCS has agreed targets with the Greater Merseyside LSC to increase the recruitment of learners from under-represented groups on programmes. The company's promotional literature does not include any statement of the company's commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities or images to counter gender stereotyping.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

26. Quality assurance is poor. NWCS Training has a quality assurance policy and procedures which cover all aspects of the training programmes. In its self-assessment report, the company acknowledges that there are weaknesses in its quality assurance process. Although regular six-monthly quality assurance checks are made on all work placements, issues identified during these visits are not always followed through. For example, it was found that no risk assessments had been made in some work placements. The company, however, failed to check subsequently whether these assessments had been carried out and whether action planning relating to health and safety had been implemented. No observations of off-the-job training are carried out. Work-based assessors do not submit learners' portfolios of evidence for internal verification on a regular basis. Internal verifiers do not have a planned schedule for sampling assessments. They depend on the assessors to go into the workplace and bring portfolios back to them for internal verification. Some learners' portfolios are almost complete before any internal verification of assessment is carried out. Internal verifiers visit work placements to observe work-based assessors and to help those assessors experiencing difficulty with the assessment of specific units. The written procedures on internal verification are insufficiently detailed.

27. NWCS seek and use feedback from employers and learners to improve the quality of the learners' experiences. Learners are asked to respond to questionnaires every quarter. Their responses are analysed. Action is taken on issues the learners raise. For example, improvements have been made to induction programmes and induction materials. The sample of learners invited to complete questionnaires does not include enough of the work-based learners who do not attend the training centre for off-the-job training. Employers are asked to respond annually to a questionnaire. Improvements resulting from feedback from employers include changes to off-the-job training days and a revision of the information about NWCS given to employers.

28. All staff were involved in the self-assessment process. Inspectors mainly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some strengths were overstated and that significant weaknesses relating to learners' retention and achievement rates on care courses were understated.

Good Practice

One trainee adapted an activity so that young children who had problems of mobility could take part in it successfully. The trainee was able to explain clearly how she tried to promote equal opportunities through her work.

Poor Practice

A quality assurance check on a work placement revealed that risk assessment for health and safety had not been carried out. No action was agreed with the work placement provider whereby the risk assessment would be carried out within an agreed timescale.