

INSPECTION REPORT

Tendring District Council

12 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

Tendring District Council, operating under the name of Career Track, provides work-based training for young people in land-based provision, construction, engineering, business administration and sport and recreation. Currently, it trains 31 modern apprentices, who are employed in the Tendring area. Most of the apprentices are following qualifications in business administration. There were too few apprentices in the other occupational areas to warrant inspection of these areas. Most apprentices receive off-the-job training from Career Track or at local further education colleges.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of the apprentices. More specifically, the quality of the work-based training in business administration is satisfactory, but the leadership and management of the organisation are unsatisfactory.

Work-based learning for young people

There are 19 modern apprentices in business administration. Four advanced modern apprentices have a special training contract and are employed by the council for the duration of their training. The other two are employed by private companies. All the foundation modern apprentices are in work placements with the council. The proportion of advanced modern apprentices achieving the apprenticeship framework has risen from 40 per cent in 1998-99 to 60 per cent in 2000-01. The achievement rate for foundation modern apprentices is satisfactory, with 67 per cent achieving the apprenticeship framework in 1998-99 and 1999-2000. Retention rates for both advanced and foundation modern apprentices are satisfactory. The resources and support available to apprentices in the workplace are good and they can undertake some useful additional training. There is poor use of individual training plans. Some apprentices do not fully understand the requirements of national vocational qualifications (NVQs). On- and off-the-job training is unstructured and poorly co-ordinated.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of Career Track are unsatisfactory. Although it has a clear development plan with carefully explained reasons for change, it underestimates the importance of recruiting new apprentices and has not developed a recruitment strategy. There was insufficient planning for some of the recent changes to training. Staff training is well planned and linked to Career Track's

development plan. Apprentices receive comprehensive training in equal opportunities. Quality assurance arrangements are inadequate, although there are some quality assurance procedures. There is insufficient monitoring of the subcontractors' activities. Although the self-assessment was sufficiently critical and identified most of the strengths and weaknesses, it did not recognise the effect which the weak quality assurance arrangements have on Career Track's activities.

GRADES

Business administration, management & professional	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 progress reviews
- effective selection procedures
- useful additional training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- no co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training
- insufficient understanding of NVQs by apprentices
- incomplete quality assurance system
- insufficient monitoring of subcontractors

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- written records to help apprentices to monitor progress
- more work-based assessment and observation
- better management information systems
- further monitoring of equal opportunities
- more involvement of subcontractors in self-assessment

TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. Tendring District Council established Career Track in 1983. It originally provided work experience in council departments for school leavers. It later extended its activities into various occupational areas. Career Track provides training in land-based areas, sport and recreation, construction, engineering and business administration. It is no longer recruiting apprentices in construction or engineering and intends to stop providing training in these areas. Three council staff work solely for Career Track, which currently trains 31 modern apprentices. Most apprentices are either employed by, or on work placements with, council departments.

2. Modern apprenticeships are funded through a contract with the Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The district has a mixed economy in which the most important industry is tourism, which provides high levels of summer employment. The council is one of the largest employers in the area. There are also many small to medium-sized, owner-managed businesses. Unemployment in May 2001 was 4.1 per cent in Tendring compared with 2.1 per cent in Essex as a whole and 3.1 per cent nationally. In September 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Tendring achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 39.3 per cent, lower than the national average of 49.2 per cent. Less than one per cent of the population of Tendring are from minority ethnic groups.

THE INSPECTION

3. Two inspectors spent a total of eight days at Career Track during June 2001. They interviewed 11 apprentices and visited seven work placements, where they interviewed eight workplace supervisors. They conducted seven interviews with staff from the council and two interviews with subcontractors' staff. They examined a range of documents including apprentices' portfolios of evidence, progress review files, policies and procedures, organisational reports, staff development and appraisal records, contracts and operational agreements, promotional literature and reports from the awarding body. Inspectors studied Career Track's self-assessment report, which it produced in December 2000, and its updated action plans.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	19	3

4. There are currently six advanced and 13 foundation modern apprentices in business administration. The advanced modern apprentices are employed and the foundation modern apprentices are in work placements. Prospective modern apprentices are given a training contract for the duration of their training period if the council has no permanent jobs available. Under this arrangement, the apprentices have all the rights of a council employee. Overall, 17 of the apprentices work for the council in a range of departments including council tax, technical services, and planning and building services. Apprentices receive an induction to their work, covering council policies and procedures on health and safety, equal opportunities and their rights and responsibilities. Three full-time staff are directly involved with Career Track's business administration apprentices. The programme manager, a recently appointed training and assessment officer and an administrative assistant all carry out progress reviews. Two personnel assistants currently work part-time for Career Track, undertaking reviews. Changes are currently being made to the way the business administration training is organised and the most recent recruits, and all future apprentices, will be trained in-house. Apprentices are recruited throughout the year and all attend off-the-job training for one day each week at a college subcontracted by Career Track. The contract with this college was due to end just after the inspection and is not being renewed. The college is responsible for training and assessment, internal verification and registering the apprentices with an awarding body. Apprentices all receive key skills training.

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)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					9		9		12	100
Still in training					0	0	0	0	10	83
FMA framework completed					6	67	6	67	0	0

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					5		8		5	100
Still in training					0	0	4	50	2	40
AMA framework completed					2	40	2	25	3	60
NVQ level 3 completed					1	20	2	25	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good pastoral and academic support in the workplace
- good progress reviews
- effective selection procedures
- useful additional training
- effective jobsearch programme

WEAKNESSES

- poor use of individual training plans
- poorly planned off-the-job training
- no co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training
- insufficient understanding of NVQs by apprentices

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- written records to enable apprentices to monitor progress
- more short-term target-setting for apprentices
- more work-based assessment and observation
- further use of witness testimony

5. There are good relationships between the workplace supervisors and Career Track's staff. They work together to advise and guide the apprentices through all stages of their training. Both pastoral support and help with theory work are available. Apprentices receive basic skills training if they need it. Career Track's staff are based in the council's headquarters and are always available to help the apprentices. Most apprentices are given a generous amount of time each week to gather evidence for their portfolios and complete work for their action plans. Career Track's staff keep accurate, up-to-date records and are very conscientious in dealing with apprentices who have been absent or who come to work late.

6. Prospective apprentices attend a half-day information session at Career Track. They are interviewed and complete a questionnaire about their personal work preferences, an initial basic skills assessment, a clerical test, a verbal reasoning test and a questionnaire to identify the best style of learning for each apprentice. Applicants are soon told whether they have been successful. The results of these tests are used effectively to draw up an individual training plan for successful applicants and to find them suitable work placements. Career Track keeps records of the number of applicants, those who attend the interviews and those rejected. The applicants who are rejected are given useful advice and referred back either to the careers office or to other organisations who can help them.

7. Apprentices' progress is reviewed every eight weeks. The review document is comprehensive and the process is conducted thoroughly. The document is divided into three parts. The first covers the apprentice's performance at work and personal qualities such as their ability to use initiative and build relationships. Line managers in the departments where apprentices are working encourage apprentices to complete the first part of the form as a self-assessment before discussion takes place. The emphasis in the rest of the document is on the apprentice's progression through their NVQ. Career Track's reviewers fill in this section with the apprentice. Copies of completed review documents are filed and a copy is given to the apprentice.

8. As the self-assessment report identifies, Career Track provides a useful range of additional training. Originally, these locally devised courses were planned to cover the time when the college was closed in the summer. The courses have now become an integral part of Career Track's training and cover areas such as time management, customer service and telephone techniques. In addition, some short computer courses offered to council employees are available to all apprentices employed by, or in a work placement with, the council.

9. There is a new jobsearch programme for apprentices coming to the end of their training. The programme takes place during the four weeks before apprentices are due to complete their training and leave. The activities offered include guidance on writing a curriculum vitae and application letters, interview techniques and discussion of the apprentices' personal qualities. Apprentices are also told about other agencies which could help them find work. Good records are kept of this training. The programme has been effective and the first three apprentices who completed the programme have successfully found work in the Tendring area, despite the high unemployment rate locally.

10. The individual training plans for apprentices are all very similar. All apprentices are given the same length of time to complete their training, but the plan is not updated if an apprentice makes faster progress. The key skills are listed on the individual training plan but there are no separate target dates for completion of each key skill. The plan does not show if an apprentice already possessed a particular key skill before starting training with Career Track. Career Track's staff have devised a new personal development and training plan recently for apprentices. The plan and documents are clearly laid out. Areas covered include apprentices' objectives, their prior learning, experience and

achievements as well as their training needs and support arrangements. However, the plan does not allow trainers or apprentices to make amendments to planned and actual achievement dates and keep an up-to-date record of apprentices' progress towards their qualification. Apprentices' progress is monitored throughout their training. Apprentices are told verbally how they are progressing but no written records are kept.

11. Most apprentices receive off-the-job-training at a local further education college. The training is planned for the first 13 weeks but not thereafter. During this time, there is some teaching by college staff. In addition, apprentices are given a series of work booklets to complete which cover aspects of the business administration NVQ units. After the first term, there is no structured training for the apprentices at college. During their time at college, some apprentices work productively, for example by preparing for key skills assessments, but others do not. Apprentices have individual tutorials at college to look at what they have already learned and to plan further work. However, tutorials are not planned in advance and the apprentices are expected to arrange their own tutorials. Some apprentices wait several weeks between each tutorial and they lose interest. Following each tutorial an action plan is written to explain to the apprentice what evidence they need to gather. The amount of work listed on the action plan is often not enough to keep the apprentice occupied until the next tutorial. Other aspects of training do not use action plans and short-term targets at all.

12. The college carries out internal verification of assessments. Two internal verifiers employed by the college, meet weekly to check a proportion of the work that has been completed. The evidence to show that internal verification has taken place is kept in a central file at the college and there is no clear indication in the apprentices' portfolios that their work has been internally verified. Although internal verification is regular, it is not planned and details are not communicated to Career Track. Some work-based assessment and observation is carried out and some use is made of witness testimonies, but apprentices progress slowly through the NVQ.

13. Career Track recognised in its self-assessment report that there is no co-ordination between on- and off-the job training. Although there is a written plan for the first 13 weeks of off-the-job training, this has not been distributed to workplace supervisors who could use it to help apprentices to collect relevant evidence at work. Apprentices who start after the thirteenth week work individually and do not follow an overall plan. Although the structure of NVQs is explained during induction, it is not referred to in any detail subsequently. Some apprentices do not fully understand the NVQ requirements and are not confident enough to collect evidence of their competence from the workplace unless given specific instructions about what they can use. Some apprentices need a lot of assistance to be able to match their evidence to the performance criteria of their qualification.

Good Practice

Workplace supervisors identified that apprentices did not have enough supervisory experience to meet the requirements of the level 3 NVQ. They devised a system to help apprentices develop these skills. The Career Track apprentices in one office are grouped together as a separate team, with each apprentice leading the team for a month. The leader has to organise a work rota and supervise other apprentices. The role of group leader develops apprentices' leadership and management skills and gives them a new challenge.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

14. There are six members of staff involved in organising and managing Career Track. They are employed in the council's management services department. A training and development manager is responsible for Career Track's strategic planning. The day-to-day operations are dealt with by a programme manager. Other members of staff carry out monitoring and reviewing of apprentices and administrative work. Work-based assessment, including internal verification, is currently the responsibility of two local colleges subcontracted by Career Track. Changes to these arrangements were imminent at the time of the inspection. Career Track has an equal opportunities policy and a quality assurance strategy. Self-assessment began in 1998, since when four reports have been produced. The most recent one was produced in December 2000.

STRENGTHS

- clear performance targets linked to corporate objectives
- clear strategy for business development
- well-planned staff training
- comprehensive equal opportunities training for apprentices

WEAKNESSES

- no overall strategy for recruitment
- insufficient planning for change
- incomplete quality assurance system
- insufficient monitoring of internal verification
- insufficient monitoring of subcontractors

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better management information systems
- further monitoring of equal opportunities policies
- better planning and recording of meetings with subcontractors
- more involvement of subcontractors in self-assessment

15. Clear performance targets have been set by the council for all its services under a local government initiative. The council has corporate objectives for regeneration and in particular, for bringing young people into training and employment. Career Track has specific annual targets linked to these objectives with performance indicators which are monitored monthly. Reports have been produced for the last two months but statistics have not yet been included to show whether the targets are being met.

16. Career Track has produced a clear business development report and three-year financial plan, which was accepted by council members in November 2000. This

document outlines plans to reduce the occupational areas in which Career Track provides training. Plans to reduce the amount of off-the-job training and assessment and increase work-based assessment are also detailed. The report clearly explains the reasons for these changes but it underestimates the importance of maintaining and increasing the number of apprentices. Over the last three years, fewer apprentices have been recruited in most occupational areas. Career Track recruits apprentices by advertising in the local press. A training and assessment officer has recently been appointed and has begun to promote Career Track to new businesses. However, no recruitment strategy has been developed alongside the three-year financial plan. The report was produced without consultation with the subcontractors. As a result of unsuccessful negotiations about the reduction of off-the-job training, one of the local colleges has withdrawn from all off-the-job training for business administration apprentices. It will only be responsible for internal verification and registration of apprentices with the awarding body. These changes were insufficiently planned. There has been confusion about finding suitable training facilities for off-the-job training for business administration apprentices.

17. Staff training is clearly linked to Career Track's development plans. Staff and their training managers identify training needs through a comprehensive staff appraisal system which clearly states business and corporate objectives. Members of staff have appropriate assessing and/or teaching qualifications. Some supervisors who work for the council are receiving assessment training so that more effective work-based assessment can take place. There has been little preparation or training for supervisors and employers in providing witness statements for apprentices' portfolios. The programme manager is in regular contact with the workplace supervisors and maintains good, informal working relationships with the work-based assessors and reviewers.

18. Management information is collected and recorded in a variety of ways using different computer databases. These are not linked to each other and it is difficult to gain an overview of all the aspects of training. Career Track's action plan identifies the need for a more effective system. Various data and management information about apprentices are presented and discussed at regular staff meetings.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

19. Career Track has comprehensive written policies on equal opportunities. Apprentices are given copies of these policies as part of an information handbook and the policies are explained during an extensive and well-planned training event soon after apprentices start. This event includes apprentices watching a video and taking part in a discussion. Apprentices are given useful documents about equal opportunities at this stage. Analysis of the questionnaires completed by apprentices after the event, shows high levels of satisfaction and a thorough understanding of the subject. Apprentices interviewed have a good awareness of equal opportunities and understand their rights and responsibilities. Monitoring of equal opportunities takes place during progress reviews, when employers' awareness is also checked. However, Career Track is not monitoring how all aspects of its policies are implemented. A recent report analysed the ethnicity and gender of people applying for training with Career Track, but the results have not been used to change current recruitment strategies.

20. The programme manager and two of the three staff who conduct apprentices' progress reviews have had good equal opportunities training. They conduct reviews every eight weeks, at which equal opportunities matters can be discussed. These are separate from the assessment visits. Apprentices value the way in which staff deal effectively with any problems. One apprentice raised a problem as a result of this monitoring which was dealt with quickly and followed up at the next review. Apprentices can use the welfare and counselling services that are available to council employees. There are procedures for dealing with grievances and complaints for both employees and apprentices. These have not been monitored until very recently and it is difficult to assess their effectiveness. A revised complaints and appeals procedure has been introduced and information about this has been given to apprentices in the first edition of a learners' newsletter. No complaints under the new procedure have yet been received.

21. Career Track's exhibition stands and promotional materials state its commitment to equal opportunities but do not contain positive statements encouraging applications from under-represented groups in training, such as people from minority ethnic groups or those with disabilities.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

22. Career Track has recently written a quality assurance strategy. The strategy clearly outlines its aims, who is responsible, and how the aims will be achieved. It does not include procedures for monitoring aspects of the quality assurance strategy. Apprentices and employers regularly complete feedback questionnaires. Feedback from the last two years was summarised in a report which Career Track used as a basis for deciding to make the changes outlined in the business development report. Work-based assessment, internal verification and off-the-job training are currently subcontracted to two local further education colleges. The programme manager has observed training sessions but there is no overall plan to monitor training or to use the results of observations to make improvements. Each college conducts work-based assessments differently and Career Track does not specify any minimum requirements or check sufficiently for consistency. Operating agreements have only recently been agreed and signed. These agreements do not clearly outline the requirements for internal verification. Career Track has only recently requested copies of the colleges' internal verification procedures and one college has not yet sent these.

23. The programme manager from Career Track visits colleges to meet apprentices, tutors and work-based assessors. There are no formal arrangements for recording these regular discussions. Career Track's contracts do not require meetings to be held regularly. However, some meetings have been held and, for each of those, minutes were taken and circulated.

24. Self-assessment takes place regularly and staff are consulted as part of the process. The views of the subcontractors are also taken into account but they were not asked to evaluate their services for the self-assessment report. Action-planning is conscientiously undertaken. It is a standard item on the agenda for monthly team meetings, which all Career Track staff attend. The management information system produces analyses of monthly figures on the recruitment, retention and achievement rates of apprentices. The self-assessment report compared targets and actual achievement over the previous two years but there was not enough analysis of other trends over time to explain some of the report's judgements.

Good Practice
<i>Trainees are able to use good, specialist welfare services. They have access to an occupational nurse, trained counsellors and trained harassment advisers in each of the council's departments. The harassment policy is clearly written and outlines informal and formal procedures to be followed.</i>