

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Hull Business Training Centre

25 September 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**

Hull Business Training Centre provides work-based learning for young people in business administration, management and professional, information and communications technology and customer service. It is a privately owned partnership and the premises are located in the northeast of the city. At the time of the inspection there were 80 learners. Fifty-six of the learners are following modern apprenticeship qualifications in business administration. This was the only occupational area inspected as there were too few learners in the other areas. In addition, there were five clients on the New Deal full-time education and training option. This provision was not inspected.

### **Overall judgement**

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The quality of the work-based learning in business administration is satisfactory, but the leadership and management of Hull Business Training Centre are unsatisfactory.

### **Work-based learning for young people**

Work-based learning for young people is satisfactory. There are 56 modern apprentices in the business administration, management and professional sector. Fifty-two learners are modern apprentices in administration, with four in accounting. Hull Business Training Centre provides its learners with good-quality work placements which lead to permanent employment for those learners who remain on the programme. Learners receive good-quality individual support from their tutors. There are effective systems for monitoring learners' progress. Retention rates are poor and learners are slow to achieve their qualifications. Of the 67 learners who started modern apprenticeships in 1999-2000, almost half left before completing the apprenticeship framework. There have, as yet, been no foundation modern apprenticeship framework completions among the 30 learners who started in 2000-01. For many learners, the work they complete in key skills does not form an integral part of the NVQ training programme.

### **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of Hull Business Training Centre are unsatisfactory. There is an open and consultative management style and constructive links are maintained with a number of other organisations, but the business plan lacks coherence. There is a positive approach to widening participation in the training programme, but the arrangements for ensuring equality of opportunity are unsatisfactory. The equal opportunities policy is inadequate and there is insufficient

monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace. Staff respond positively to learners' concerns, but the arrangements for quality assurance of training are incomplete. The self-assessment report did not give an accurate assessment of the training programme.

## GRADES

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>4</b>
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	4
Quality assurance	4

## KEY STRENGTHS

- good work placements leading to employment
- flexible, individual support for learners
- good systems to monitor learners' progress
- open and consultative management style
- constructive links with external organisations
- active approach to widening access to training

## KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- poor integration of key skills with the NVQ programme
- lack of coherence in business plan
- inadequate equal opportunities policy
- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace
- incomplete quality assurance system
- inaccurate self-assessment process

**OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- more involvement of workplace supervisors in assessment planning
- more staff training in equality of opportunity
- better recording of staff appraisal discussions

## THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. Hull Business Training Centre (HBTC) was established in 1994 as a partnership to provide training for individuals and companies. Since 1996, HBTC has provided government-funded training for young people and adults. It is located in a socially deprived area in the northeast of the city. A second site in the city centre is due to open shortly, to provide adult training. HBTC's two partners employ 11 staff, of whom eight are full-time and three are part-time. HBTC provides work-based learning for young people in business administration, management and professional, information and communications technology (ICT), and customer service. In September 2001, there were 80 modern apprentices. The Humberside Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds this training. A separate contract with the Employment Service covers adult training. HBTC also contracts with the Employment Service to provide the New Deal full-time education and training option. Currently, there are five New Deal clients. Most learners are employed and nearly all are in work placements found by HBTC. Learners usually attend HBTC's training centre for the equivalent of one half-day each week.

2. Situated on the north side of the Humber estuary and just to the east of the Humber Bridge, the city of Kingston-upon-Hull is an area of some social deprivation. The rate of unemployment is 7.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.0 per cent in June 2001. According to the index of local deprivation compiled by the former Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, Hull ranks as the thirteenth most deprived authority in a list of 355. Wages are relatively low and the proportion of jobs that are part-time is relatively high. There has been a long-term decline in the number of jobs in fishing, food processing and manufacturing. The majority of employed people work in service industries such as distribution, public administration and health services. Hull's population is over 250,000 people, of whom 1.4 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Achievement rates of the general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) are poor. In 2000, 24.4 per cent of pupils in local authority schools gained five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, less than half the national average of 49.2 per cent. HBTC is situated on the edge of one of the country's largest council housing estates in an area of high localised unemployment.

## THE INSPECTION

3. Three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at HBTC during September 2001. They interviewed 20 learners and visited 15 work placements, where they interviewed 14 workplace supervisors. They conducted 14 interviews with staff from HBTC. Inspectors observed and graded four learning sessions, two at grade 3 and two at grade 4. They examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios of evidence, progress review files, policies and procedures, contracts, staff records, promotional literature and reports from the awarding bodies. Inspectors studied HBTC's self-assessment report which was produced in April 2001.



## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	56	3

4. There are currently 56 learners. Most are working towards administration qualifications. Of the four learners in accounting, three are foundation modern apprentices and there is one advanced modern apprentice. In administration, there are 37 foundation modern apprentices, 13 advanced modern apprentices and two learners taking NVQs. Learners are recruited mainly through the local careers service, although some apply directly to HBTC. Selection is based on an initial interview. This includes a discussion of previous achievements and the learner's interest in the occupational areas available. All learners take literacy and numeracy tests to establish any additional learning needs. Initial assessment is completed during the two-week induction period. If applicants require training below level 2, they are referred to other training providers. When additional learners needs are identified, HBTC provides satisfactory support. The induction also involves interview training designed to prepare learners for work-placement interviews. Guest speakers are invited to talk about family planning and drug awareness. Learners are placed in a variety of small and medium-sized companies, including computer hardware and software businesses, forge works, caravan firms, solicitors and welding suppliers. All companies are checked for health and safety measures and many have an established relationship with HBTC. Learners usually attend off-the-job training for half a day each week at HBTC's training centre. If learners have long distances to travel to the training centre they may opt to attend for a full day every two weeks. Some employed learners attend in the daytime, but the training centre also provides evening training, which some employers prefer. Learners are able to meet their assessors every week at the training centre and they also have access to information technology (IT) and the Internet. In addition to taught sessions, assessment action plans are checked and revised based on the progress made by learners in producing evidence for their portfolios. Tutors also visit learners in the workplace and review progress every month.

HULL BUSINESS TRAINING CENTRE

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		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started					33		30		20
Still in training					9	27	15	50	16	80
FMA framework completed					12	36	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					24	73	3	10	0	0
Left without completing the framework					12	36	15	50	6	30

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started			50		34		6		6
Still in training			1	2	5	15	4	67	4	67
AMA framework completed			23	46	8	24	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			6	12	7	21	1	17	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed			15	30	4	12	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework			26	52	21	62	2	33	2	33

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started			41		15		1		0
Still in training			1	2	0	0	1	100	0	0
Individual learning plan completed			22	54	9	60	0	0	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan			17	41	6	40	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 1 completed			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			20	49	9	60	1	100	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed			3	7	3	20	0	0	0	0

## STRENGTHS

- good work placements leading to employment
- flexible, individual support for learners
- good systems to monitor learners' progress

## WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- poor integration of key skills with the rest of the planned training

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- greater involvement of workplace supervisors in assessment planning

5. Following their recruitment, learners are quickly found good placements. Only five learners are still in training without a work placement and they have all been with the training provider for less than one month. This was not identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. A work-placement officer considers the interests and aims of the learner and matches them to work-placement providers' requirements. From the first contact, employers understand that HBTC's aim is for learners to gain employment as a consequence of taking up the work placement. This is an effective strategy as most learners are employed within three to four months. The only learners who are not employed are nine people who have joined the programme within the past two months. Training allowances and employee salaries are reviewed to encourage learners to make progress in their places of employment. Within only a few days of starting at the training centre, learners begin attending work-placement interviews. Learners can attend more than one interview and selection is a two-way process with plenty of choice for both parties. Some companies give practical exercises to check, for example, keyboard skills, but most are satisfied with HBTC's pre-selection methods. Once learners start a work placement, their workplace supervisors are actively involved in their development. Most participate in progress reviews with the learner and the assessor, and regularly check and sign for work-based NVQ evidence. Supervisors are involved in the short-term planning of work activities that contribute to the accumulation of evidence for NVQs. They are rarely involved in the initial planning for the achievement of the NVQ.

6. Learners and employers value the individual support provided by the staff. A genuine commitment to help learners to succeed is evident at all stages, including careful work-placement matching, regular visits and prompt responses to learners with problems. For example, an employer was concerned about a learner's telephone manner and a

## HULL BUSINESS TRAINING CENTRE

telephone techniques course was immediately offered by HBTC. Structured off-the-job training sessions, as well as individual training, are available on request. HBTC is in the process of deciding the best way to organise off-the-job training. Learners with problems are invited into the centre for closer tutor contact and support. For example a learner with family problems was taken out of her work placement and her tutors worked with local support agencies until she felt ready to return to the work placement.

7. Learners are very clear about the progress they are making towards achieving their qualifications. Several methods are used to give this information. There is a tabular record which the learners and their assessors tick off when units or elements have been achieved. There is also a progress chart of all learners, which is kept and updated in the training centre. Some learners prefer to use their progress review sheets. These list the elements of all the units of their qualifications and indicate which ones have been met. A chart in the front of the individual's portfolio, with completed units highlighted, helps other learners. Monitoring systems show how learners are building up evidence. These systems were not identified as strengths in the self-assessment report. Recent efforts have been made to improve assessment practices and there are early indications that learners are starting to meet target dates for achieving qualifications. There is some sound assessment practice.

8. Retention and achievement rates for learners are poor. Of the 67 learners who started modern apprenticeships in 1999-2000, 49 per cent left before completing the apprenticeship framework. Of the 26 learners who started in 2001-02, almost 33 per cent had left after six months. In a recent five-month period, eight of the 19 starters in administration programmes left within the same period. Of the 30 learners who started in 2000-01, not one has completed a foundation modern apprenticeship framework. Only 10 per cent of these learners have gained an NVQ at level 2. Of the 50 learners who started advanced modern apprenticeships in 1998-99, less than 50 per cent have completed the apprenticeship framework successfully and, of those who started in 1999-2000, only 25 per cent have completed the framework. HBTC's self-assessment report acknowledges that the rate of learners' achievements on accounting programmes has been unsatisfactory. It has now stopped NVQ training in accounting at levels 3 and 4. A member of staff has been appointed to assess learners at level 2. Learners who achieve the NVQ at level 2 are given guidance about suitable alternative training providers, so that they may progress towards the technician level elsewhere.

9. Key skills are only slowly becoming integrated with the learning programme. This was not recognised as a weakness by HBTC. There are some recent examples of learners' work being assessed for key skills using evidence from the NVQ or additional qualifications, but several current learners still have separate key skills evidence. In some cases, assessment observations have been pre-set and simply reproduced for several learners with the appropriate name added. These were in the classroom situation, not linked to everyday evidence arising in the workplace. Mock exams are now arranged to allow learners to practise and they receive feedback to make sure they can learn from any mistakes. Staff are working towards achieving their own key skills awards.

### Good Practice

*A learner had been swearing at his supervisor and the situation was brought to his tutor's attention. Joint discussions and explanations of acceptable behaviour led to the learner having a clearer understanding of the situation. His work-placement company has recently employed him in recognition of his progress.*

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

10. HBTC is a partnership which consists of a managing director, who takes responsibility for corporate issues, and a training director, who has oversight of training and assessment. The directors manage two training co-ordinators, one for the youth programme and the other for the adult programme, and five tutor/assessors, two of whom are employed part time. There are four administration employees, including a part-time administrator, a full-time clerical officer and two full-time office juniors. The organisation has an equal opportunities policy and complaints and appeals procedures. HBTC is subject to external audit by its local LSC and awarding bodies. There is no formal quality assurance policy. It was accredited as an Investor in People in 1999, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. The directors updated the third self-assessment report in April 2001 in preparation for inspection.

### STRENGTHS

- open and consultative management style
- constructive links with external organisations
- active approach to widening access to training
- prompt and effective response to feedback

### WEAKNESSES

- lack of coherence in business plan
- inadequate equal opportunities policy
- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace
- incomplete quality assurance system
- unsystematic approach to evaluation
- inaccurate self-assessment

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more staff training in equality of opportunity
- better recording of staff appraisal discussions

11. HBTC's directors have an open management style. Managers and staff form a close-knit team and share a commitment to the partnership's core values and its mission statement. Employees are clear about their own roles within HBTC, and their lines of accountability. Suggested changes to working practices by staff are welcomed by managers. For example, a member of staff suggested ways in which her induction might be improved and these have now been put into effect. Since July 2001, staff meetings have been held once each week. The meetings are used to inform staff about the organisation's performance against its LSC contract and a range of other corporate

issues, including equal opportunities. They provide a forum for discussion during which staff freely air their views. The meetings are clearly minuted. The two directors and the co-ordinators of the youth and adult programmes attend regular management meetings.

12. New employees are given a satisfactory induction which covers a range of issues including health and safety, conditions of service and working practices. This enables them to settle effectively into their work roles. Employees are appraised once a year. Their performance is judged against the requirements of their job role, targets for improvement are set, and professional development needs are identified. Performance targets are clear and driven by HBTC's overall contractual targets. However, written appraisal records are very brief and do not fully reflect the discussions which have taken place. Staff attend a range of professional development courses connected with their work roles. They value the nature and extent of the in-service training available to them.

13. HBTC's communications with its local community are good. It has a number of useful links with other training providers and organisations. The managing director attended a year-long course on business management run by the local LSC, and has been a member of various groups which have met to discuss how different aspects of training, for example individual learning plans, might be improved. She is on the committee of the local Training Providers' Association, and attends national meetings on behalf of this group. HBTC has adopted good practice from other organisations, for example, the design of progress review forms, which have been incorporated into its own procedures.

14. HBTC has a business plan which is updated each year after consulting members of staff. The plan contains objectives, goals and targets, but it lacks clarity. The objectives cited are simply headings, for example, 'quality assurance' and 'accommodation', which give insufficient detail about what is to be achieved. The targets set do not relate clearly to the objectives. For example, the current business plan sets a target of improving retention rates by 10 per cent, but does not describe how or why this target has been selected. There is no clear link between the staff development plan and the business plan. Improvements to equal opportunities practice are targeted for August 2001, but staff training in this area was not planned to take place until September 2001. HBTC is quick to react to requests or suggestions from its LSC, and to introduce changes which staff consider will be of benefit to learners. For example, HBTC has leased premises in the city centre with the intention of improving learners' attendance at off-the-job training sessions. A decision has been made to take on learndirect training provision. However, these decisions are not clearly set in an overall strategic context and they are not well recorded. The minutes of the monthly management meetings focus on staffing and procedural issues rather than strategic matters. The management information system is adequate as a database of learners' details. It does not, however, provide sufficient data on overall performance to enable managers to evaluate the quality of training.

**Equality of opportunity****Contributory grade 4**

15. HBTC has an equal opportunities strategy which was written in July 2001. This lists HBTC's objectives for equal opportunities and the timescales for achievement. The strategy lacks coherence. The actions identified are not set within a clear overall framework. Few of the goals have been achieved within the timescale set. HBTC has an equal opportunities policy which is given to learners during their inductions, and to employers when a work placement is set up. The policy does not adequately describe HBTC's position on equality of opportunity. It is very brief, stating only that HBTC is working towards equality of opportunity and gives a list of the groups for whom equal opportunities must be a priority issue. The policy makes no mention of any legislation on equal opportunities and does not specify what the organisation means by discrimination, or what strategies it will use to overcome it.

16. HBTC is keen to widen access to training, and has an open and non-discriminatory entry policy. The proportion of people in the locality from minority ethnic groups is 1.4 per cent. There are no learners from minority ethnic groups. HBTC has been involved in two projects designed to attract people from under-represented groups. One of these was specifically aimed at people over the age of 50, who attended an IT course at HBTC's training centre, which led to a foundation level qualification. The programme was designed to build participants' confidence as well as helping them to develop their IT skills. It had successful outcomes, with 77 per cent of starters gaining their qualification and 37 per cent gaining employment. The other project provided flexible training in business administration to meet the needs of single parents, with course hours designed to fit in with school starting and finishing times. Both schemes were highly valued by participants.

17. The monitoring and promotion of equality of opportunity in the workplace is inadequate. This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report. When setting up a work placement, tutors ask to see the company's equal opportunities policy, but they do not examine it against any specific criteria. If the company has no policy, HBTC offers its own policy as a model. Since HBTC's policy is inadequate this approach is unsatisfactory. Learners are given information about equal opportunities during induction, but their understanding is not subsequently checked or strengthened. There is little further discussion about equal opportunities with either learners or employers. Learners' understanding of equal opportunities is limited. The training director has attended two courses on equal opportunities and two other members of staff are scheduled to have similar training soon. Equal opportunities training for all staff would be helpful in developing awareness and generating ideas and discussion. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of HBTC's grievance and appeals procedures. When complaints are made to HBTC by learners, they are dealt with quickly and appropriately. Access to premises is good for those learners who have disabilities.



**Quality assurance****Contributory grade 4**

18. HBTC does not have an effective quality assurance system. Working procedures have been written for a few aspects of the organisation's activities, but these relate mainly to health and safety and to administrative duties. There are no written procedures for training or assessment. A quality assurance timetable has been produced which lists some of the organisation's activities, such as appraisal and business-planning. The timetable lacks detail, and is incomplete. There is no effective system for the quality assurance of work placements, but there is some observation of training and assessment and, when this is done, staff receive suitably detailed feedback. However, key aspects of the training process, such as carrying out progress reviews, are not observed. Training co-ordinators carry out regular, detailed audits of learners' files. This has resulted in some improvements in recording, but not enough to ensure consistency and good practice in the practical performance of tutor/assessors' duties. Assessors' meetings are held once each month for the discussion of internal and external verifiers' findings and for the sharing of good assessment practice.

19. HBTC does collect some feedback from learners. Staff and managers at HBTC respond quickly and positively to matters arising from it. For example, the content and timing of induction sessions have been changed in response to feedback from learners. An evaluation of the views of learners working towards accountancy qualifications has prompted managers to make major changes to the arrangements for accountancy training. The arrangements for gathering feedback are, however, haphazard. Anonymous feedback is invited through the use of a 'suggestions bucket' which is located in the reception area. All learners now complete a well-designed questionnaire about their induction. Some of them also complete questionnaires at different stages of their programmes. There is no pattern to the distribution of these later questionnaires and most of them are poorly designed. Although negative responses are followed up, there is insufficient overall analysis of the data collected. There is no consistent system for gathering the views of employers. They are asked their views on HBTC's training during progress reviews, but not all employers are able to participate in this.

20. Internal verification is satisfactory overall, although there is insufficient observation of assessors and sampling of work on a continuous basis. The internal verification process identified some poor practice and the company's managers have effectively remedied this.

21. HBTC's self-assessment report lacks critical evaluation. There is insufficient correlation between the grades given and the strengths and weaknesses claimed. For example, the section concerning quality assurance claims nine strengths and no weaknesses, and gives a grade indicating satisfactory performance. Many of the strengths claimed represent no more than compliance with contract. The report identifies only one of the weaknesses found by inspectors. Most of the grades given in the self-assessment report are too generous. The report includes a brief action plan. This does not cover all the strengths and weaknesses identified by self-assessment. The actions proposed lack detail, and some are insufficient to lead to improvement. Most of the target timescales set have been missed, but revised targets have not been given. Staff were consulted before

the self-assessment report was written, but learners and employers were not involved in the process.

**Poor Practice**

*When reviews of learners' progress are carried out, learners are asked if the company for which they are working has an equal opportunities policy, and if there have been any recent changes to it. This question is insufficient to ensure that learners are protected from discrimination in the workplace.*