

INSPECTION REPORT

Lancaster Training Services Limited

18 February 2002



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 **learn**direct provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

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

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

Lancaster Training Services Limited is based in Lancaster. It provides a range of foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship training programmes for the local motor vehicle industry.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, work-based learning for young people at Lancaster Training Services Limited is good. The leadership and management of Lancaster Training Services Limited and its quality assurance systems are good. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

GRADES

Leadership and management	2
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	2

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- very effective employer links
- particularly effective management
- good quality assurance system
- thorough and effective progress monitoring system
- well-planned assessments
- effective internal verification system

KEY WEAKNESSES

- lack of target-setting for achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- poor retention rates in foundation modern apprenticeship programme
- insufficient planning of training in the workplace

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more assessors in the workplace
- wider range of equal opportunities activities during induction

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days with Lancaster Training Services Limited (LTS) during February 2002. One area of learning, engineering, was inspected. Inspectors interviewed 22 learners, conducted 12 interviews with staff and visited the college which is subcontracted to provide off-the-job training for motor vehicle body repair learners. The inspectors observed learners' progress review meetings. They examined a range of documents, including learners' portfolios of evidence, learners' records, the company's plans, policies and procedures, minutes of meetings and the reports of awarding bodies. The inspectors also studied LTS's self-assessment report, which was written in August 2001. Six learning sessions were observed and graded.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	6
Total	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	6

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. LTS was founded in Lancaster in December 1968 by a consortium of 10 haulage contractors, in conjunction with the Road Transport Industry Training Board. It operates from one site in Lancaster and employs nine full-time and two part-time staff, of whom five full-time staff work in the training section. LTS provides training for 48 advanced modern apprentices and 36 foundation modern apprentices who are employed by a range of employers throughout Lancashire and Cumbria. LTS provides off-the-job training for motor vehicle mechanics at its training centre and subcontracts motor vehicle body repair training to Blackpool and the Fylde College. LTS's modern apprenticeship programmes are funded through contracts with both the Lancashire and Cumbria Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). LTS also provides a range of commercial driver training courses and a consultancy service for local companies. These privately funded programmes are not within the current inspection remit.

3. Lancaster is the most northern of the districts of Lancashire in the Northwest. The economy of the district is dominated by the service sector, which accounts for 78.6 per cent of all employment. In September 2001, the rate of unemployment in Lancaster was 4.1 per cent, compared with 2.9 per cent nationally. Lancaster's minority ethnic community represents 1.3 per cent of the population, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. In September 2001, the proportion of school-leavers in Lancaster who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 54 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

4. The achievement rate of modern apprenticeship frameworks is good. Retention rates are poor on foundation training programmes and satisfactory on advanced training programmes. There is good achievement of key skills qualifications which form an integral part of the learners' programme of study.

5. The quality of off-the-job training is good and learners receive effective support from LTS. Assessments are well planned and LTS has a thorough and effective system to monitor learners' progress. Learners receive an initial assessment and continuous assessment throughout their programmes to identify additional learning support needs. LTS has effective links with employers. There is insufficient planning of training in the workplace.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

6. LTS has a training manager who is responsible for the private training provision and an assistant training manager who is responsible for the government-funded training. Each manager leads on the recruitment and training of their own staff and learners. A management committee of 15 employers meets bi-annually, and the training manager and the assistant training manager attend these meetings. The assistant training manager carries out all of the internal verification. There are four trainer/assessors one of whom is a qualified internal verifier and another is working towards his verifier qualification. There are no work-based assessors. The company has a business plan and a range of policies and procedures which include equality of opportunity and quality assurance. LTS holds the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. The self-assessment report was originally produced in September 2000 and updated in August 2001.

STRENGTHS

- very effective communications
- particularly effective management
- good staff development and appraisal
- good equal opportunities policies and procedures
- continuous development activities for equal opportunities
- good quality assurance system
- particularly good monitoring of subcontractor
- effective internal verification system
- effective collection and analysis of learners' feedback

WEAKNESSES

- no target-setting for achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- inadequate promotion of equal opportunities during progress reviews
- insufficient staff training on equal opportunities
- insufficiently thorough self-assessment process

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better distribution of the management committee meeting minutes to all members
- greater consistency of terminology in paperwork
- wider range of equal opportunities activities during induction
- more frequent feedback from employers

7. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that communication within LTS and with employers is very good. Regular team meetings are held from which very detailed minutes are produced. The team meetings include standing agenda items which thoroughly monitor health and safety, equal opportunities and the progress of individual learners. Recommendations are made in team meetings for additional learning support for those learners identified by their initial assessment and continuous monitoring. All proposed action is followed up in subsequent meetings. There are also regular informal daily meetings, for the training team and the training managers, which ensure that potential problems are dealt with quickly. The training co-ordinator visits employers monthly to assess learners in the workplace. Because of the demands on time in the motor vehicle maintenance industry, assessors telephone employers several times to confirm assessment visits.

8. The overall management of LTS is effective. The planning and audit schedule for the policies and procedures is thorough and there is good monitoring of the business plan. Some employers have contributed to the development of the recruitment plan. A range of LTS activity is monitored in the team meetings and problems are identified, resolved and minuted. The employers' manual is regularly updated and the notification of the changes is audited. The management committee authorises major planning and purchase decisions and also ensures that any proposed business development is in line with LTS's aims. Minutes of the management committee meetings are not circulated to the members who do not attend.

9. The self-assessment report did not identify the good staff development and appraisal systems. There is a thorough and effective staff induction plan complete with audit paperwork. Staff development needs are identified by the managers and individual staff. Targets are agreed and reviewed as part of the annual appraisal process and, where appropriate, written into new employees' terms and conditions of employment. An overall training and development plan is drawn up, which shows the training needed to achieve each of the business goals. It also shows how and where the training will be carried out, how much it will cost and the deadline for completion. The plan is monitored throughout the year. Recent staff training includes national vocational qualifications (NVQ) in training and development at level 3 and 4, training on the completion of LSC paperwork and an internal verifier qualification.

10. There is no target-setting at management or trainer/assessor level for the achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks. LTS still refers to successful outcomes in terms of the number of NVQs gained for every 100 leavers. There are no base-line retention rates or achievement data on which to judge the success of each group of learners, or to consider performance trends over time. The self-assessment report does not analyse learners' performance data and so did not pinpoint the poor retention rates on the foundation modern apprenticeship training programme.

11. The term used to describe the learner is not consistent in LTS's paperwork and most descriptions of learners' aims identify NVQs as the required achievement target, rather than the modern apprenticeship framework.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

12. The assistant training manager is responsible for equality of opportunity. The company has a good equal opportunities policy, which includes procedures that deal with grievance, bullying and appeals. The equal opportunities policy is emphasised during induction, using leaflets which explain actions to be taken when problems occur. All learners receive a copy of these documents though many learners could not remember them in detail. No formal grievance or complaint has been submitted to date. Staff respond quickly to problems with appropriate corrective actions. The monthly team meetings are used effectively to monitor any actions which arise from identified problems. The employers' manual also contains a copy of the policies. Supervisors are required to read this document and sign to confirm that they understand it. When policies are updated, the revised policies are brought to the attention of the employers by the same procedure.

13. LTS is committed to developing a good range of initiatives to recruit learners from under-represented groups. It is a member of an organisation which promotes gender equality, and regular updates are circulated to staff. LTS's staff promote the company at careers events in local schools and by giving year 11 students mock interviews. Promotional materials show positive images of female engineers and learners from minority ethnic groups, as well as displaying equal opportunity statements. LTS has recently put promotional materials in a local mosque and has enquired about advertising in a local newspaper for ethnic minorities. LTS sets clear targets for recruiting women and learners from minority ethnic groups, but at the time of the inspection there were no learners from these groups on its training programmes.

14. LTS has an open and supportive recruitment procedure. Applicants sit an assessment test and then have a short interview with LTS staff. The results of the test determine the applicants' ability level, but do not prevent entry onto the apprenticeship programmes. Equal opportunities activities during induction are narrow. The interview helps determine which type of work placement would be most suitable for each applicant. Additional learning support is available for those who either request or require it. Learners must take computer-based tests for the apprenticeship. LTS has bought an audio version of the programme for learners who find it difficult to read on screen.

15. Learners' progress reviews do not effectively gain feedback from learners on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The only monitoring and promotion of equal opportunities carried out is linked to the monitoring of learners' welfare. At the original inspection in 1998, some employers displayed potentially offensive pictures in work and rest areas. During this inspection, it was noted that similar pictures are still displayed.

16. Although staff are required to read equal opportunities circulars, there has not been any recent equal opportunities training for staff and none is planned for the near future. This was identified in the self-assessment report. Some areas of the training premises are not accessible to wheelchair users.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 2

17. LTS has a good quality assurance system which incorporates a wide range of policies and procedures. These cover business planning, communications, performance reviews, feedback from learners and subcontractors, a selection and recruitment system for learners, internal verification and assessment procedures and training. The monthly team meetings are used effectively to continuously monitor the quality assurance system and problems are dealt with promptly, recorded in the minutes and followed up in subsequent meetings. There is a schedule to update policies and procedures, many of which are up to date.

18. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the monitoring of the subcontractor is very good. The contract between LTS and the subcontractor is detailed and clearly identifies its responsibilities and those of the LTS staff. These include detailed monthly reviews by LTS which coincide with the subcontractor's staff/quality assurance meetings. They effectively identify any problems with learners and with the provision of training. Action to resolve problems is well documented and monitored. LTS also receives copies of the external verifier reports. LTS staff accompany college observers in their observations of college teaching staff to gain first-hand information on training standards.

19. There is an effective internal verification system which is detailed, thoroughly monitored and effective. Records show that assessment decisions are internally verified, all assessors are observed and that detailed feedback is given at each stage. Sampling plans are prepared in advance and records are kept up to date.

20. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the collection and analysis of learners' views is detailed, thoroughly analysed and effective. Learners complete evaluations after induction and during their programme of study. There is also an exit questionnaire for learners who leave early, which finds out their reasons for leaving, areas for improvement and how LTS can continue to help. LTS helps each learner to prepare a curriculum vitae and a job interview if necessary. All identified problems are documented and proposed actions are monitored to ensure continuous improvement. The return rate for employer questionnaires is satisfactory, but inspectors noted that many of the feedback questionnaires were not returned.

21. Inspectors established that although the quality assurance system is good and regular monitoring takes place in the monthly team meetings, the whole process is not supported by thorough self-assessment. The annual review is not part of LTS's process for continuous quality assurance improvement and the latest self-assessment report was no more than a brief update of the existing document. The process does not include an analysis of key performance indicators, such as retention rates, achievement rates and equal opportunities monitoring. Poor retention rates on the foundation modern apprentice programme were not recognised as an area for improvement. Many targets for improvement and measurements of success are vague.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	84	2

22. There are 84 engineering learners, 48 on advanced modern apprenticeships and 36 on foundation modern apprenticeships. There are 68 learners on the motor vehicle mechanics training programmes, 11 on motor vehicle body repair and five on the motor vehicle parts training programme. Learners are recruited through company advertisements, school careers events or are referred by employers. All learners have an initial assessment and a formal interview, at which point LTS staff identify learners' aptitude and additional support needs, as well as their suitability for specific work placements. All learners are in full-time employment at local garages for their on-the-job training. The work placements range in size from large franchises to small independent garages. Learners are given one day a week for off-the-job training. Motor vehicle body repair learners go to college and the rest of the learners study at the LTS training centre. The training centre has well-equipped workshops, an up-to-date computer suite and a team of staff who have a wide range of motor vehicle industry experience. LTS staff frequently visit learners in the workplace to review their progress and assess their competence against the requirements of NVQ levels 2 or 3. Four LTS staff are qualified assessors, two of whom are also qualified internal verifiers. Four of the staff have teaching or training qualifications. College staff are responsible for motor vehicle body NVQ assessments in the workplace. Key skills training is an integral part of on- and off-the-job training.

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

Work-based learning for young people														
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)														
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	28		35		26		30							
Retained	0		8		6		20	67						
Successfully completed	0		8		6		20	67						
Still in learning	24		16		8		0	0						

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	34		24		22		20									
Retained	0		0		12	55	13	65								
Successfully completed	0		0		9	41	13	65								
Still in learning	23		13		0	0	0	0								

STRENGTHS

- particularly effective employer links
- effective initial assessment
- good induction process
- thorough and effective monitoring systems
- well-planned assessments
- effective additional learning support

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient planning of training in the workplace
- insufficient NVQ knowledge by some employers
- poor retention rates in foundation modern apprenticeship programme

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more assessors in the workplace
- more employer involvement in target-setting for learners

23. LTS has very effective links with local employers, some of whom trained with LTS. LTS matches learners to appropriate employers carefully. Learners are given permanent contracts of employment in the first few weeks of their training programmes. They carry out an extensive range of activities in their work placements and make good progress in developing competences across the range of skills required by the apprenticeship frameworks. Employers are not sufficiently involved in target-setting for learners.

24. Initial assessment is effective. All learners are assessed for additional learning support needs. A basic skills test is used to identify learners' literacy and numeracy needs and an appropriate software package is used to assess their occupational interests, numeracy, abstract reasoning, mechanical reasoning and verbal skills. There is no practical skills test. After initial assessment, additional learning support is provided for learners where necessary. Learners also take a key skills self-assessment to help them understand their own learning needs.

25. A comprehensive three-day induction programme is given at the training centre. Induction has presentations from external speakers including advice on drugs awareness, and financial matters. Learners have a good recall of the content of the induction. For example, one learner spoke highly of the financial advice that was given by a representative from a local bank. Another recalled the information about LTS's anti-harassment and anti-bullying policies. Learners' knowledge of the different aspects of the induction programme is assessed. Learners have difficulty recalling the equal opportunities content of induction. Some of the larger employers also have their own induction programmes. Staff work closely with learners and their employers when preparing individual learning plans during the induction programme.

26. Learners' progress in achieving the modern apprenticeship frameworks is monitored effectively using LTS's paperwork and systems as well as those of the awarding body. Both systems are well linked, clear and informative. All learners have a record of the progress they make towards completing the modern apprenticeship framework and the outstanding evidence required for each element of their NVQ. This is updated regularly and is used as a basis for a monthly review. A summary of learners' progress is attached to their toolboxes. An expected percentage completion figure is calculated for each learner and used to identify slow progress. Learners find this helpful and trainers can see current achievement at a glance.

27. Learners and employers plan assessments and set target dates. LTS staff telephone the employer a week before each assessment is due, to check that the scheduled visit is still appropriate. Learners can request additional assessments by using the telephone assessment hotline which they find very useful. Workplace assessment is thorough. Comprehensive and effective paperwork records assessment decisions and gives feedback to learners. Progress reviews are carried out in the workplace every eight weeks.

28. Learners receive effective additional learning support, a strength identified by LTS in its self-assessment report. Staff have an excellent rapport with learners, with whom they are in frequent contact, both in the workplace and at the training centre. Staff respond quickly to requests for guidance. The results of initial interviews are recorded in the individual learning plans. Staff give some learners their mobile telephone numbers so that they can be contacted outside office hours.

29. There is insufficient formal, planned training in the workplace and a heavy reliance on watching and working with experienced staff. Most employers do not have a formal

training plan. There are no training assignments in the workplace to enable a planned incremental development of learners' competences. There are no written training guidance notes for training in the workplace and the only formal assessment of learners' strengths and weaknesses is by LTS staff. Employer information packs have been introduced, describing the employer's role in the training process, this is recognised in the self-assessment report. All assessments are carried out by LTS staff as there are no qualified work-based assessors.

30. Some employers' understanding of NVQs is poor and they cannot advise learners about evidence requirements. Learners do not receive enough assessment in the workplace, as workplace supervisors are not aware of the evidence required.

31. Retention rates on the foundation modern apprenticeship programme are poor. The retention rates were 65 per cent in 1998-99 and 55 per cent in the following year. Most learners who leave early do so in the first six months. Achievement rates for learners who remain on the training programme are good. Retention rates in the advanced modern apprentice programme are satisfactory for the industry as a whole and the trend is improving.

Good Practice

LTS provides a taxi service for the 30-mile journey from the training centre to a regional college for learners on the motor vehicle body repair and refinishing NVQ programme.