

INSPECTION REPORT

North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade & Industry

26 November 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 **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

The North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry is a limited company and is owned by its members. Its headquarters are in Durham. The North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry is a training provider to five regional Learning and Skills Councils, which include Teeside, North Yorkshire, Durham, Tyne and Wear, and Northumberland. The North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry operates from nine training centres throughout the Northeast region, located in the main cities and towns. It currently trains 595 advanced modern apprentices and 623 foundation modern apprentices. Training takes place throughout the Northeast region. Training is provided in the areas of learning of land-based provision, construction, engineering, business administration, information and communication technology, retailing and customer services, hospitality, hairdressing, health, and foundation training. At the time of inspection, the company had nine New Deal clients on options.

Overall judgement

The overall quality of the provision is inadequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The quality of work-based learning is inadequate. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

Construction	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Business administration, management & professional	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Information & communications technology	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Retailing, customer service & transportation	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	5
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	5

Health, social care & public services	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- good work placements and links with employers
- good learner support

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement
- lack of improvement targets relating to retention and achievement of learners
- inadequate management information system
- poor development of key skills
- ineffective self-assessment process

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- learners' awareness of their individual learning plans
- better sharing of good practice

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of 13 inspectors spent a total of 65 days with the North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry (NECC) in late November and early December 2001. They visited learners and their employers in the northeast region. They interviewed 268 learners, 58 of NECC's staff and supervisors, 58 line managers and training managers at 72 workplaces. Inspectors observed training, assessment and review sessions. They examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios of evidence, learners' records, NECC's plans, records, policies and procedures and awarding bodies' reports. Inspectors studied NECC's self-assessment report, which had been prepared in November 2000.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	4
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Business administration, management & professional	0	4	4	0	2	0	0	10
Information & communications technology	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	5
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	5
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	5
Health, social care & public services	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	4
Total	0	7	19	8	2	0	0	36

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. NECC is a limited company and is owned by its members. Its headquarters are in Durham, NECC receives funding from five regional Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), which include Teesside, North Yorkshire, Durham, Tyne and Wear and Northumberland. NECC operates from nine training centres throughout the Northeast region, which are located in the main cities and towns. One hundred and thirty members of staff manage and support the nine centres and the head office. NECC is one of the largest chambers of commerce in the country.

3. NECC provides training and assessment for modern apprenticeships, work-based learning for young people and adults, New Deal and commercial training for private companies. Some off-the-job training is subcontracted to local colleges of further education. There are currently 1,908 learners in eight areas of learning. Learners receiving land-based training, and commercially funded learners, were not included in the inspection.

4. The Northeast region, which NECC serves, covers over 8,600 square kilometres, stretching from the Scottish Borders to North Yorkshire and from the North Sea on the east to the boundary of Cumbria to the west. The region is diverse and contains both large conurbations and rural areas. The major centres of population are in the east of the region and include Newcastle, Sunderland, Middlesbrough and Darlington.

5. The Northeast is a rapidly changing region. Its traditional shipbuilding and coal mining industries have declined and the main employment sectors are now the automotive and electronic industries and telecommunication companies that include call centres. Local labour market surveys suggest a future demand for training in tourism and leisure, engineering trades, customer support services and healthcare. Unemployment in the region is high, at 5.2 per cent in September 2001, compared with the national average of 2.9 per cent. There are local pockets of exceptionally high unemployment, including 6.5 per cent in Middlesbrough and 9.5 per cent in South Tyneside, which consists mainly of male unemployment according to NECC. About 1.4 per cent of residents in the Northeast are from minority ethnic groups, which compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent is low, although Middlesbrough has a higher proportion at 4.4 per cent.

6. Most young people in the Northeast have low educational attainment, which is a major barrier to them gaining employment. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 41.5 per cent, well below the national average of 49.2 per cent. However, this proportion is much lower in some areas, at only 35 per cent in Newcastle and 34.6 per cent in Middlesbrough.

Work-based learning for young people

7. In most areas of learning, learners have access to a wide range of work placements that provide good training opportunities. Learners are carefully matched to an employer to ensure that they can receive the training required for their qualification. In engineering, for example, many learners develop good skills from their work placements and in information and communications technology (ICT), many learners gain valuable experience by working in different company departments.

8. There are poor retention and achievement rates in six of the seven areas of learning. Dental nursing has satisfactory retention and achievement rates. Retention on advanced modern apprenticeships and NVQ programmes was particularly poor in 1999-2000 and in 2000-01 in ICT and retailing and customer services. Achievement rates on advanced modern apprenticeships in 1999-2000 and 2000-01 in engineering, ICT, retail and customer services, and hospitality were very poor. The highest rate of achievement for this qualification was only 50 per cent and this includes just two learners, in hospitality. Achievement rates on foundation modern apprenticeships, between 1999 and 2001, were very poor in six of the seven areas of learning. In construction and hospitality, there were no achievements in either year. The collection and analysis of retention and achievement data are poor, although some training centres have recently introduced systems to improve retention.

9. There is weak teaching and assessment of key skills in ICT, construction, retailing and customer service and hospitality. Learners have poor understanding of the role of key skills and there is little evidence of key skills work in most learners' portfolios. In some cases, assessment of key skills is not an integral part of the training and is often introduced late in the training programme. In some cases, the learning materials used in training are not relevant to the area of learning and so discourage learners. Only in engineering and manufacturing do learners show a good understanding of key skills, training for which is clearly set out in their individual learning plans. NVQ portfolios in engineering and manufacturing show good evidence of key skills development.

10. Assessments vary in standard. The better ones, for example, in customer service, are well planned to fit in with learners' work tasks, and evidence is cross-referenced to several NVQ units. In dental nursing, assessment is used as a useful learning aid, where written theory work is carefully marked and extensive feedback is given to the learners so that they can assess their progress and correct their mistakes. Learners have good and well-structured NVQ portfolios in business administration. Where assessment is less effective, for example, in construction, there is too much reliance on witness testimony and work diaries, and visits by assessors are too infrequent. Individual learning plans remain in the learners' files and are not regularly seen by or discussed with learners. Some learners are unaware of the content of their individual learning plan and there is little action-planning.

11. Learners benefit from good resources in most of the job training. In dental nursing, classrooms are well equipped and there are numerous learning materials, useful professional journals and good multimedia facilities for learners to use. In construction,

NORTH EAST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, TRADE & INDUSTRY

learners have access to modern information technology (IT) facilities. Useful learning materials relate clearly to training criteria for learners in ICT. Most teaching and learning sessions observed by inspectors were of a high standard.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

12. NECC has five directors and a chief executive. One of the directors has responsibility for training. There are two operations managers, one for the north and the other for the south of the area covered by NECC. Seven centre managers report to the operations manager responsible for their area. Centre managers are responsible for all aspects of the training based at their centre. Each NECC centre has its own administrative staff whose responsibilities include securing work placements for learners. There is an equal opportunities policy and a statement that sets out the responsibilities of managers, employees and learners. NECC has a quality assurance manual, which covers the full range of NECC's services. It is based mainly on the requirements of ISO 9001, an international quality assurance standard, but it also incorporates other quality assurance methods. NECC has produced three self-assessment reports since 1998. The report available for inspectors had been completed a year before the inspection.

STRENGTHS

- good internal communications
- effective monitoring of subcontractors
- effective arrangements for staff appraisals and development
- good support for learners with additional needs
- good use of learners' feedback

WEAKNESSES

- lack of improvement targets for retention and achievement of learners
- inadequate management information
- inadequate key skills training and assessment
- poor staff understanding of quality assurance system
- ineffective self-assessment process
- inadequate sharing of good practice between sites

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better learners' understanding of individual learning plans
- avoidance of gender stereotyping in promotional materials
- more checking that all work placements have an equal opportunities policy

13. NECC's internal communications are good. Good use is made of electronic and paper-based media to enable staff to communicate. Use of e-mail is extensive and the intranet has been developed to ensure that staff can easily be informed of news, policies and procedural changes. Newsletters and other written media are also effectively used.

There is an established structure of regular, useful meetings of teams, NECC's centre heads and managers. These meetings are minuted with action points included. The management structure was reorganised in April 2001. Two operations managers, one for the north of the area and the other for the south, have been appointed to implement the strategic plan, thus enabling centre managers to concentrate on operations management within their immediate locality.

14. The quality of the work of subcontractors is monitored effectively. In addition to contracts and service level agreements, NECC conducts a formal annual audit of the subcontractors' provision. NECC centre managers are trained to carry these out, including, where appropriate, observing training sessions. Consequently, subcontractors have dealt successfully with many of the concerns expressed by learners.

15. There are effective and well-established arrangements for the appraisal and development of NECC's staff. Each member of staff is appraised annually. This involves updating the individual's job description, a review of performance in relation to the previous year's objectives, the setting of new goals and the identification training needs. Progress is reviewed informally throughout the year. Opportunities for staff training are good. In addition to training courses organised by NECC, there is a scheme which enables staff to receive a 50 per cent subsidy towards the fees of approved external courses. NECC reimburses the other half of the fee on successful completion of the training.

16. There is a lack of improvement targets relating to the rates of retention and achievement of learners. Although NECC carefully monitors the number of learners starting and completing training, this is done principally to check compliance with LSC contracts. NECC does not set targets for the performance of groups of learners in particular areas of learning on various levels of qualifications. Most staff are unaware of how well a particular group of learners is performing in terms of retention or achievement in any given period, making it difficult for them to set realistic targets for improvement. There is inadequate management information about learners' performance. The database which is used to record learner information, provides reliable data on the number of learners who enter and remain in training. The inaccurate recording of information about successful completion of training made it difficult, in some areas, for inspectors to find reliable data.

17. Key skills training is inadequate. In some areas of learning, there has been no training and assessment of key skills. Learners do not always recognise the need to complete their key skills qualifications. Many have a poor appreciation of the relevance of key skills or the fact that they have developed such skills. In some areas of learning, NECC has introduced key skills training late in the training programme and has not linked the key skills training to everyday evidence which learners can collect in the workplace. This has delayed learners' completion of their training. NECC has trained staff in the teaching of key skills but some lack the confidence to put their training to good use. NECC is aware of this problem and a group of staff is trying to solve it.

18. NECC keeps individual learning plans in the learners' files. These are not regularly seen by or discussed with learners. NECC regards the individual learning plans as documents it should draw up and keep to meet the requirements of the LSC rather than an important guide for learners. Some learners are unaware of the content of their plan.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

19. Equality of opportunity arrangements are satisfactory. NECC has clearly written policies. There is an equal opportunities working party. NECC offers training to staff, especially when new legislation is introduced. Staff and learners are aware of harassment and grievance procedures, and complaints are dealt with thoroughly and properly.

20. NECC staff work hard to ensure access to learning for all learners. For example, travel allowances are clearly explained to learners from the outset. NECC allows learners who are no longer eligible for funding to remain in training to complete their qualifications. Tutors stay after work to help learners who cannot come to the daytime training sessions and visit learners who cannot come to the training centre at home. Forging links with special needs schools has widened participation and NECC gives learners from these schools good support. Learners with writing difficulties have been given Dictaphones, extra computer tuition and extra time to complete their training.

21. NECC collects data on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability in initial interviews and checks this at induction. Staff at all NECC centres have access to this information. NECC is aware that some groups are under-represented in its training, for example, the Chinese community in Newcastle, but its recruitment policies have not so far been successful in bringing under-represented groups into NECC. One NECC centre, however, has planned a series of open days about retailing, dental nursing and business administration training, in conjunction with the engineering section in the neighbouring building, in an attempt to challenge traditional gender roles. However, there is some gender stereotyping in some of NECC's promotional literature. Not all employers have equal opportunities policies and occasionally contravene NECC's own policies and have potentially discriminatory practices, for example, by asking for female learners only. Two of NECC's training centres are inaccessible to wheelchair users.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

22. NECC gathers and responds to learners' views. Learners complete a questionnaire at least three times a year. NECC analyses these in order to detect trends and learners' concerns. At each of NECC's centres, the centre manager reads each completed questionnaire and provides an immediate response to learners' concerns. For example, one manager was able to move the location of engineering training, having identified a problem by reading the questionnaires. Staff are encouraged to regard complaints by learners as an opportunity to improve the service provided. A good system for resolving complaints is overseen by the quality manager who monitors the progress of the response to each complaint. Each learner who leaves early is, if practicable, interviewed about the reasons for leaving. A useful feature of NECC's recently introduced training observation scheme is a questionnaire which all the learners who are present during the observed lesson complete. This is used to compare the learners' perceptions of the lesson with those of the observer.

23. The staff's understanding of the quality assurance system is insufficient. A survey carried out earlier in 2001, showed that over 40 per cent of staff were unclear about the system. Since then, the quality assurance manager has conducted briefings and used the newsletter to publicise changes to the system although these measures have not yet been successful. All of the paperwork which forms part of the quality assurance system is available on the NECC intranet. The quality assurance system for training compares with the ISO 9001 requirements, an international quality assurance system. The emphasis is on ensuring that procedures are in place to ensure a consistent standard of service and that these are regularly improved and updated. However, NECC's system does not require training staff to conduct a review of how well learners on a particular programme are performing. There are very few action plans for improvement.

24. The self-assessment report available for inspectors was completed one year before the inspection and it is not based on the 'Common Inspection Framework'. It is the third to be produced by NECC. It is insufficiently self-critical. In many areas, there were no identified weaknesses. Some of the claimed strengths are in fact no more than normal practice. It makes very few references to learners' retention or achievement. The grades awarded by inspectors were lower than those in the self-assessment report. Most staff are involved in the production of the self-assessment report.

25. Inspectors found that there were variations in the quality of training available at NECC's different locations. NECC has identified this weakness and has established a group of staff to share best practice in each area. In addition, NECC has embarked on a longer-term scheme, aimed at standardising the teaching and learning materials in use for particular training programmes at each site. One of the groups meets quarterly to share good practice in relation to external and internal verification. Internal verifications systems and practices are adequate.

Good Practice

Staff are able to identify any new documents relating to training on the intranet. Each new or revised document carries a text flag for one month to draw attention to it.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	79	4

26. NECC provides foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships and NVQ training at three training centres. There are 20 foundation modern apprentices, 25 advance modern apprentices and 34 learners following other NVQ training programmes. Most learners following the other NVQ programmes are technicians, working towards other qualifications alongside NVQs at levels 2 or 3 in technical services. NECC recruits through schools, the careers service and direct advertising. Learners receive off-the-job training on a day-release basis. The NVQ technical services training programme is entirely work based. All off-the-job training is subcontracted to local colleges. Some learners also receive key skills training from subcontractors.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the 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					2		10		16	
Still in training					0	0	6	60	14	88
FMA framework completed					0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					0	0	0	0	2	12
Left without completing the framework					2	100	4	40	2	12

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					10		18		10	
Still in training					3	30	13	72	9	90
AMA framework completed					3	30	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					1	10	1	6	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed					0	0	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework					4	40	5	28	1	10

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					17		20		15	
Still in training					6	35	16	80	12	80
Individual learning plan completed					1	6	0	0	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan					10	59	4	20	3	20
NVQ level 1 completed					0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					0	0	0	0	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good support during selection, recruitment and induction
- productive links with employers
- good resources for off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- poor workplace assessment for modern apprentices
- insufficient key skills training
- poor retention and achievement

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of initial assessment results
- better briefing of workplace supervisors on training
- more use of individual learning plans

27. Learners receive good career guidance during recruitment. They have the opportunity to meet with current learners from the same occupational area. This contact supplements the impartial advice given through the careers service. Selection of learners is by interview and recently improved initial assessment tests in numeracy and communication. Results from the test help NECC to select suitable candidates for referral to employers. However, there is no prediction from the test results of learners' future performance or their additional learning needs. NECC does not assess and plan how to meet individual learners' needs. NECC's induction of learners is satisfactory. However, induction at some subcontractors is unmemorable for the learners. At their induction, learners take an assessed, in-house health and safety course. At their first

progress review, there is effective reinforcement of learning from the course. At one centre, the learners are required to complete a risk assessment of the workplace as their first learning target. Employers are satisfied that the learners NECC selects are appropriate for their company.

28. NECC makes good use of its links with employers to benefit learners. There is a good relationship between NECC and employers. Employers are well satisfied with the service provided and learners are pleased with their placements. NECC is quick to identify if a placement is causing difficulties and acts swiftly and successfully to resolve any problems. NECC uses its good links to make effective arrangements when learners transfer programmes. Some technician learners selected by NECC, are currently planning their progression to higher education with support from their employers.

29. Learners benefit from good resources for off-the-job training. Subcontractors have well equipped workshops, classrooms and learning resource centres. Learning materials are good. Computer facilities are up to date with a good range of specialist and office software. NECC has a new facility in Newcastle, with good training rooms, IT workshops and interview rooms. The quality of on- and off-the-job training is inconsistent. Some learners receive more support from workplace supervisors than others. Some supervisors have a good knowledge of the NVQ standards and match these to learners' work to ensure learners meet the requirements of their qualifications. However, learners cannot rely on this level of support from every supervisor. NECC does not give workplace supervisors systematic advice or training to help them understand the training process.

30. There is little pre-planning of learning to suit individual learner's needs. Most off-the-job training relies on traditional group teaching, often matched to the slower learners' abilities. Individual learning plans link to funding dates to suit the requirements of the local LSCs. NECC does not use the plans effectively to monitor and plan learners' progress. Progress reviews are ineffective and do not always take place when they should.

31. Workplace assessment for modern apprentices is poor. There is too much reliance on witness testimony and site diaries. Site visits by qualified assessors are infrequent, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. For example, an assessor has visited only three advanced modern apprentices on site. Some subcontractors are making suitable arrangements to resolve this weakness. There are, however, some good off-the-job assessment practices. One subcontractor, for example, uses group sessions in which learners co-operate to analyse past examination question papers. The group produces model answers to questions. Individual learners use the techniques developed in the sessions to complete their own assignments. Internal verification is effective. NECC's methods for checking a proportion of assessed work and learners' records are appropriate. Learners understand internal verification procedures and are aware of the appeals policy.

32. The key skills training currently taking place is insufficient to meet learners' needs.

NECC has no strategy to ensure that all learners receive the same quality of key skills training. Learners do not understand key skills or its importance in their training. One subcontractor is not providing key skills training and there are no arrangements for NECC to complete this aspect of learners' training. There are no opportunities to develop NVQ learners to achieve more qualifications by integrating key skills training with their training programmes.

33. Achievement of learners is poor. Since 1999, only three learners have completed the advanced modern apprenticeship. None has completed the foundation modern apprenticeship and only one NVQ learner has achieved all the aims on their individual learning plan. There are differences in achievement rates between NECC's centres. At one, every advanced modern apprentice achieved the framework. No learners did so at the other two centres. Numbers on all training programmes are small. The total intake of advanced modern apprentices across all centres in 1999-2000 was only 10. Only two foundation modern apprentices started that year. Retention of learners has been poor in the past, but has improved significantly on all training programmes, with current levels at 80 to 90 per cent.

Poor Practice

One advanced modern apprentice has received no visits from assessors for three years. The learner was required to report to a subcontractor's premises to have his site diary checked.

Engineering, technology & manufacturing**Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	407	4

34. There are 407 learners on training programmes in engineering. Within the manufacturing area there are 37 learners in performing manufacturing operations. In addition, there are 45 laboratory technicians in training. NECC offers engineering and manufacturing training at four of its sites. The largest of these is in Teesside. Learners are both modern apprentices and NVQ learners. NECC recruits advanced and foundation modern apprentices. The latter have the option of converting to an advanced modern apprenticeship. In addition, it runs engineering NVQ training programmes up to level 3 and NVQs at level 4 in laboratory operations and engineering technical services. NECC has an annual recruitment programme, which includes visiting schools and careers events. All learners are employed. Applicants are tested and from the results, employers select individuals to employ as learners. Some learners attend college for one day a week throughout the four years of their training and study for craft certificates or national and higher national certificates. Others complete their training in their company. Key skills training takes place in NECC centres, employers' premises and colleges. Learners receive on-the-job training in a wide range of activities, including engineering production, installation and commissioning, engineering maintenance and technical services. All training programmes are employer-led, with most training taking place on the job. Most off-the-job training is subcontracted to local colleges of further education. Many of NECC's learners transfer to other training programmes, which the tables below do not fully reflect.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the 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					53		98		11	
Still in training					0	0	6	6	8	73
FMA framework completed					0	0	4	4	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					28	53	12	12	0	0
Left without completing the framework					53	100	88	90	3	27

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					88		130		50	
Still in training					36	41	95	73	41	82
AMA framework completed					0	0	4	3	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					9	10	2	2	1	2
NVQ level 3 completed					1	1	1	1	1	2
Left without completing the framework					52	59	31	24	9	18

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					71		186		156	
Still in training					4	6	93	50	131	84
Individual learning plan completed					9	13	16	9	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan					58	82	77	41	25	16
NVQ level 1 completed					0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					18	25	20	11	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed					2	3	14	8	0	0

STRENGTHS

- effective links with employers
- effective laboratory operations training and support
- good key skills training
- good general engineering skills levels

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- inadequate work-based assessment in motor vehicle programmes
- some inadequate progress reviews
- lack of planned training in smaller work-placement providers

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more up-to-date vehicles for learners to repair
- better guidance in careers and progression for manufacturing learners
- wider range of learning methods in theory sessions

35. NECC has a good range of work placements. Employers provide learners with a wide variety of good training opportunities and many learners achieve high skill levels as they progress to their advanced modern apprenticeships. Learners have plenty of opportunities to collect evidence towards their NVOs from their everyday work. In their work placements, learners carry out an extensive range of activities and make good progress in developing competence across the range of skills required by the NVO. Some learners also benefit from their employer's own training. In some companies, second-year learners can work with minimum supervision, which increases their confidence. There are many examples of good-quality work produced by learners. Employers receive full information about the key skills and theory training, which takes place off the job, and many plan workplace activities to complement the training at the training centre or college. Where the NVO requires tasks which learners do not normally carry out at work, employers often make special arrangements to provide the necessary experience. NECC has developed effective links with local employers. It works with reputable and well-established organisations, which have a strong commitment to training. There is regular checking of health and safety practices in work placements. There is careful matching of learners with employers, taking full account of learners' interests, abilities and career aims. Induction is comprehensive and learners have a clear understanding of their training programmes, rights and responsibilities. NECC's staff work closely with learners and their employers when preparing individual learning plans. However, trainers do not always use a wide enough range of teaching methods to maintain learners' interest in theory sessions.

36. The training and support for laboratory operations learners are very effective. In the past year, there have been problems in the college training, leading to complaints. An unsolved problem of college staff shortages was causing difficulties. Effective action by NECC helped to resolve the problem. NECC carries out additional monitoring of the training. During the staff shortages, the training adviser increased the frequency of visits to the learners to offer additional support. Supervisors in the workplace take part in the learners' progress reviews and add targets specific to the workplace. Learners also study for national certificates. After completing their level 3 NVQ, learners progress on to a level 4 NVQ. The learners show interest in their work and are confident about how well they are progressing.

37. Learners show a good understanding of key skills and appreciate that significant amounts of their NVQ portfolios can be cross-referenced to the key skills portfolio. Learners have an individual learning plan, clearly stating their intended goals and results, including their key skills qualifications. Learners receive initial assessment for both their level of key skills and occupational competence. As part of the learners' progress reviews, training advisers discuss key skills opportunities with learners. This helps learners to identify evidence for their key skills qualifications at work as well as in the off-the-job element of their training. There is extensive evidence of learners collecting such evidence, for example, by producing risk assessment in their own workshops, engineering drawings and materials lists for new workshop developments. Learners produce workshop assignments using computers and also use this as IT evidence for their key skills. Training advisers are very active in encouraging learners to ask their employers for additional experiences and learners are aware that collection of evidence from new work is useful for developing their key skills.

38. Retention and achievement rates are poor. Excluding learners who transferred to other training programmes, 38 per cent of advanced modern apprentices in 1999-2000, left without completing their frameworks. Most of those still in training have not achieved enough qualifications. Among foundation modern apprentices in the same year, again excluding those transferring to other training programmes, 64 per cent of learners left without completing their framework. Almost half of those who remained in training failed even to achieve a level 2 NVQ. In 2000-01, 52 per cent of foundation modern apprentices dropped out. In the present contract year, 27 per cent of foundation modern apprentices have left so far. Rates among NVQ learners who are not modern apprentices have also been poor since 1999.

39. Work-based assessment in motor vehicle is poor. There is little or no assessment in the workplace. There is too much reliance on the use of witness testimony to assess learners' work and there is inadequate recording of these testimonies. There is no approved list of witnesses who can assess learners' work.

40. Some learners do not receive thorough progress reviews. Reviews for motor vehicle engineering learners take place in the subcontractor's premises during off-the-job training and workplace supervisors are not involved. However, NECC does tell

workplace supervisors about the content of the progress reviews. The review in the workplace for motor vehicle engineering learners, concentrates on pastoral matters and does not cover training except for discussing NVQ evidence collection dates. NECC does not update individual learning plans to take account of targets set at progress reviews. It fails to use the individual learning plan as the basis for planning and monitoring learners' progress. Some training advisers who conduct the reviews, are not occupationally competent but are supportive of the learners. Learners do not have easy access to their portfolios, which are important training documents, because these are kept in the training centre. The vehicles used in motor vehicle training are outdated and in some cases incomplete. Learners complained that they were not able to test the completed repair work because the training vehicles were not operational.

41. Small companies which employ learners, carry out very little planned training in the workplace. Most training for these learners consists of observing and working with a workplace supervisor or mentor. These learners are not given work assignments to increase their competence. NECC provides no guidance notes for workplace supervisors on methods of training and assessment in the workplace, although there is an employers' handout.

42. In most cases, employers have followed a different course of training to that prescribed in current NVQ procedures and are not aware of the various ways in which learners can collect evidence. NECC's information packs for employers do not describe in detail the employers' role in the training process. There is no career and progression guidance offered to learners in manufacturing.

Good Practice

When learners begin level 4 NVQs, NECC routinely checks their portfolios from earlier NVQs. NECC extracts any evidence of a high standard from the optional units of lower-level NVQs and transfers it into the level 4 portfolios, saving the duplication of work.

Learners give presentations about their jobs to other learners as part of their key skills development. This raises awareness of a learner's abilities in the workplace when senior managers attend the presentation.

Business administration, management & professional**Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	722	4

43. There are 241 advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in business administration and accounting. There are 367 foundation modern apprentices working towards level 2 NVQs in business administration and accounting. Modern apprentices work towards key skills qualifications at an appropriate level. There are another 114 learners working towards NVQs in business administration and accounting. Most learners are employed or on work placements. Most learners are recruited from July to September. Applicants often respond to advertisements in local newspapers and on local radio. Some hear about the scheme from friends who are learners themselves, and some are advised to apply by the careers service. Some applicants attend an information session held at their school. Some modern apprenticeship applicants are directed to apply to join the programme by their employers. Applicants attend for an interview and receive an initial assessment of their numeracy and communication skills. Applicants' previous qualifications, learning and experience are accredited. Many of NECC's learners transfer to other training programmes. The tables below do not fully reflect this. All learners and most NVQ learners attend off-the-job training at one of the eight NECC centres that offer this training. Thirty-three staff provide training in business administration and accounting. Twenty-seven are qualified assessors and 14 are qualified internal verifiers. NECC staff visit learners' workplaces to carry out progress reviews and assessments for business administration learners.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the 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					387		445		263	
Still in training					21	5	149	33	197	75
FMA framework completed					60	16	17	4	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					159	41	51	11	3	1
Left without completing the framework					306	79	279	63	65	25

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					192		222		81	
Still in training					49	26	124	56	68	84
AMA framework completed					36	19	10	5	1	1
NVQ level 2 completed					36	19	82	37	3	4
NVQ level 3 completed					14	7	26	12	7	9
Left without completing the framework					107	56	88	40	12	15

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					68		84		120	
Still in training					0	0	24	29	90	75
Individual learning plan completed					11	16	12	14	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan					57	84	48	57	30	25
NVQ level 1 completed					2	3	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					19	28	4	5	1	1
NVQ level 3 completed					4	6	13	15	1	1
NVQ level 4 completed					1	1	8	10	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good support for learners
- well-structured NVQ portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement of individual learning plans
- poor retention rates
- insufficient analysis of retention and achievement data
- inadequate communication with employers

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better sharing of good practice

44. There is good support for learners from tutors. NECC's staff are available even outside of office hours to support learners. NECC responds quickly to resolve reported problems. Pastoral support is good. Additional support and counselling are offered. NECC refers learners with disabilities to external specialists. Business administration learners can gain additional qualifications in IT which make them more employable. Most learners are either employed or are found work placements within three week of starting training. Workplace supervisors are involved in progress reviews though not all are sure of the processes involved. Some workplace supervisors enable learners to match their work tasks to the requirements of their qualification. Day-release sessions take place at appropriate intervals and are extended for learners requiring additional use of the facilities. Off-the-job training is well planned and structured, with effective learning taking place.

45. Learners' NVQ portfolios are well structured and indexed. The quality of the work in the portfolios is of a high standard and learners are proud of their work. This quality was reflected in external verifier reports and confirmed by inspectors. Internal verification is thorough and effective. Portfolios show a clear improvement in the standard of learners' work as their training progress. Work-based assessments are scheduled and agreed with the learner and the employer in advance. Business administration assessments take place in the workplace and make use of learners' everyday work tasks. NECC uses the full range of assessment methods. Assessors give feedback to learners at the end of each assessment. This feedback is recorded in detail. NECC uses this information as a basis for action-planning for each learner. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report.

46. Achievement of individual learning plans is poor and declining. Although some NVQs are achieved, very few learners complete their individual learning plan. Many do

not complete key skills. In 1999-2000, 192 learners began an advanced modern apprenticeship programme. Of these, only 19 per cent have completed the framework. In the same year, 387 learners began a foundation modern apprenticeship. Of these, only 16 per cent have completed the framework. In 1999-2000, 68 learners began NVQ training. Of these, only 16 per cent achieved the aims on their individual learning plans. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

47. Many learners leave their programme before it is completed. Since 1999, 1,095 learners have started foundation modern apprenticeships in this area of learning. Excluding those who have transferred to other training programmes, 42 per cent of learners have left without completing the modern apprenticeship framework. Of the 495 advanced modern apprentices who have started since 1999, 42 per cent have left early. The proportion of NVQ learners who have left early in the same period, is 32 per cent. Again, these rates exclude learners transferring to other training programmes. The collection and analysis of retention and achievement data are poor, though some of NECC's centres can monitor this and have introduced systems to improve retention. Records are kept showing the reasons why learners leave the programme before achieving the aims on their individual learning plan. There are inconsistencies in data analysis between different training centres and in most cases, analysis does not lead to effective action to improve retention and achievement rates. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Different NECC centres do not share some of the good practice found in initial assessment, induction and key skills delivery.

48. Learning is well planned and structured at some training centres. At others, there is no planned off-the-job training. In these cases, learners receive individual training sessions carried out by training advisers in the workplace. The quality of resources for learners differs from centre to centre but they are generally good. Training for the accounting technicians' professional qualifications is particularly good. NECC learners' results in the central assessments for these are well above the national average. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Since July 2001, improvements in the training and assessment for key skills have been implemented and initial assessment has also become more comprehensive. These improvements have not been consistent across all NECC's centres.

49. There is inadequate communication with employers. On-the-job training is discussed with NECC staff but NECC rarely gives details of off-the-job training to employers. Employers reported that they would like more information in order to link on- and off-the-job training. NECC does not always explain training programme details or how employers could better support their learners. This disadvantages the learner. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

Good Practice

One centre runs a 'twilight session' to enable learners who cannot attend off-the-job training during the day to work towards additional qualifications in word and text processing.

Poor Practice

In some NECC centres, staff talk to learners about NVQs and key skills without explaining sufficiently that these are only stepping stones to the completion of an individual learning plan. These learners are not aware that they are registered as advanced or foundation modern apprentices.

Information & communications technology**Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	93	4

50. There are currently 93 learners in information and communication technology (ICT). There are 65 foundation and 28 advanced modern apprentices. NECC recruits learners through schools, the careers service, personal contact and by advertising. All learners have an interview and an initial assessment as part of the selection process. Work-placement officers attempt to find each applicant a job or an appropriate work placement. Staff carry out all training and assessment at NECC centres and on the job. During off-the-job training, learners take a basic computer literacy qualification and other qualifications in IT. Assessors visit workplaces to conduct assessments and to review learners' progress. All staff involved in training hold appropriate qualifications in training and assessment. The self-assessment report provided a combined grade for the areas of business administration and IT.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the 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					61		80		52	
Still in training					2	3	30	38	33	63
FMA framework completed					4	7	3	4	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					14	23	7	9	0	0
Left without completing the framework					55	90	47	59	19	37

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					29		37		3	
Still in training					5	17	20	54	3	100
AMA framework completed					2	7	1	3	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					3	10	2	5	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed					1	3	2	5	0	0
Left without completing the framework					22	76	16	43	0	0

STRENGTHS

- well-planned off-the-job NVQ training
- wide range of good assessment evidence
- good work placements

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement rates
- poor retention rates
- weak teaching and assessment of key skills

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better attendance at off-the-job training
- clearer target-setting in progress reviews

51. Each NECC centre provides off-the-job-training workshops for learners' NVQ work. The workshops are well-planned and use a good range of learning activities. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Background knowledge training is effective, learners take a number of IT qualifications and also have regular tutorials to develop their knowledge further. Training materials are produced to a high standard. NECC gives learners without work placements a good range of work to develop their competence. At one NECC centre, learners are working with the dental nursing staff to revise and produce new training materials and workbooks. Work commitments prevent some learners from attending off-the-job training regularly.

52. NECC has made significant improvements to assessment processes following problems associated with a high turnover of assessors. Useful assessment evidence is drawn from a wide range of sources. NECC uses assessment effectively to give learners feedback on their progress and to set dates for the collection of evidence. Assessors make regular visits to learners' workplaces. Significant amounts of portfolio evidence are collected from carefully planned observations. Assessors give substantial and constructive feedback after each observation. There is good use of witness testimony. Portfolios of evidence are well structured with good systems for cross-referencing of evidence. However, the review process does not provide effective targets for the learners. Internal verification procedures are satisfactory and NECC is taking measures to ensure consistency between centres.

53. Learners benefit from very useful work placements. Each centre has a work-placement officer who carefully matches work placements to the requirements of each learner's qualification. Employers are supportive and have a clear understanding of the

learners' qualification requirements. Most employers allow learners work time to collect evidence and compile their portfolios. Many learners regularly work in different jobs with their employer to gain a good variety of work experiences. Some learners benefit from carrying out special projects. One foundation modern apprentice has designed several spreadsheets to improve her company's financial management.

54. There are poor retention rates. Between 1999 and March 2001, 72 per cent of foundation modern apprentices left their training early. Among advanced modern apprentices in the same period, 58 per cent left early. NECC collects early leaver information but does not analyse it for common trends. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

55. There is poor achievement on the modern apprenticeships. Among the foundation modern apprentices, starting between April 1999 and March 2001, excluding those still in training, only 6 per cent have completed their frameworks. The rate for advanced modern apprentices in the same period was 7 per cent. There is no systematic analysis of the reasons for poor achievement. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. NECC has revised its assessment practices recently. Learners are now making better progress towards their qualifications. This was recognised in the self-assessment report.

56. The teaching and assessment of key skills is weak and is also inconsistent between NECC centres. Some learners have poor understanding of the importance of key skills and many portfolios contain little key skills evidence. Some learners begin key skills training and assessment late. These learners' key skills training is not an integral part of their vocational training. Two training centres have introduced key skills workshops and learners are now producing evidence for their portfolios. Key skills workbooks and learning materials, however, are not occupationally specific and are not an integral part of the NVQ training. Initial assessment is weak and there is not enough support for learners with additional learning needs.

Good Practice

One learner working in a central stores supporting a number of companies, is contributing to the development of a 'virtual' stores system. The system will enable customers to look at descriptions and digital images of products held in the stores.

Poor Practice

Assessors did not identify a number of spelling errors in learners' written work for initial assessment.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	313	4

57. NECC has 313 learners on its retailing and customer service programmes over its centres. This includes 137 foundation modern apprentices, 84 advanced modern apprentices and 92 learners on work-based learning programmes for young people. Recruitment of learners is through the careers service, employers, by individual arrangement or recommendation. Potential learners attend an interview and initial assessment with NECC, either at work or NECC's premises. NECC finds work placements or employment for learners. Training advisers give training and assess learners' skills. NECC provides extra off-the-job training and helps with portfolio-building at its training centres. NECC's training advisers review learners' progress every eight to 13 weeks. Advanced modern apprentices are employed and working towards level 3 NVQs. There are 50 in customer service, 25 in retailing and two in distribution and warehousing. Four advanced modern apprentices are working towards customer service and six towards retailing NVQs at level 2. One foundation modern apprentice is working towards an NVQ in customer service and one in retailing at level 3. Fifty-one foundation modern apprentices are working towards customer service NVQs, 55 are doing retailing and 19 are doing distribution and warehousing NVQs at level 2. Seventy-one employed learners are following other work-based learning programmes for young people. Thirty are unemployed and attend work placements. Four of these learners are working towards distributive operations NVQs at level 1. Twenty-two learners are working towards NVQs in customer service, seven towards retail operations and 36 are doing distribution and warehousing NVQs, each at level 2. Seven learners are also progressing towards retailing operations and five towards customer services NVQs at level 3. Learners work in shops, offices and warehouses.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the 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					156		242		53	
Still in training					25	16	72	30	40	75
FMA framework completed					12	8	13	5	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					40	26	23	10	0	0
Left without completing the framework					119	76	157	65	13	25

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					108		85		25	
Still in training					14	13	46	54	24	96
AMA framework completed					13	12	5	6	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					5	5	4	5	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed					14	13	6	7	0	0
Left without completing the framework					81	75	34	40	1	4

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					114		60		94	
Still in training					7	6	19	32	66	70
Individual learning plan completed					14	12	4	7	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan					93	82	37	62	28	30
NVQ level 1 completed					0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					28	25	1	2	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good on-the job training
- particularly effective training and development of NECC staff

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress
- poor target-setting
- poor key skills training
- poor retention rates
- low achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- wider sharing of good assessment and verification methods

58. Learners receive good training at work. Training advisers run informative training sessions for groups of learners, in adequate training rooms. NECC arranges suitable work placements for learners. Unemployed learners have a series of work placements to increase their employability. Some learners have mechanical handling or first aid training sponsored by their employer. Workplaces have good resources and learners carry out an extensive range of tasks to increase their skills. Employers arrange workplace training in agreement with NECC. Learners' contributions in the workplace are valued.

59. NECC's assessors continually improve their skills and qualifications. Staff who are allocated new roles are given a wide range of opportunities to attend training courses and work with more experienced colleagues. Many are working towards or have gained training or teaching qualifications. Training advisers update their occupational competence every three years. They have a good knowledge of current working procedures.

60. Learners do not receive enough visits from NECC's assessors. Learners work with a series of up to five assessors. Some of NECC's centres have a high turnover of assessors. NECC and learners sometimes lose portfolios. NECC has failed to keep duplicate assessment records until recently. Learners have had to repeat some work. There is monitoring of learners' progress but steady progression is not achieved. There is not enough accreditation of prior learning.

61. Targets for learners are often undemanding and unspecific. For example, a learner's target was to complete an NVQ and nothing more. Progress reviews are sometimes brief and often the learner's supervisor is not involved. NECC does not base individual

learning plans on learners' initial assessment results. One learner had eight GCSEs and two general certificates of education advanced level (A levels) at grade D including English literature. Her only target is a retailing NVQ at level 2. At progress reviews, learners do not have a current copy of their individual learning plan. Many learners are not familiar with their qualification goals. There is no updating of individual learning plans. Learners are encouraged to work at their own pace regardless of target timescales.

62. NECC does not assess learners' level of key skills when they begin training. Nor does it assess their key skills competences alongside their NVQ competences. NECC sent one learner's key skills portfolio for final internal verification but there was insufficient evidence and certification was refused. NECC mislaid the portfolio for several months, although it has now been found and the learner is making progress. The proportion of learners achieving their key skills qualifications is too low and is falling. In the last two contract years, the proportions were only 9 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively. Advanced modern apprentices rarely achieve their key skills units and the proportion achieving this has fallen from 8 to 6 per cent in the last two contract years. No key skills awards have been gained during the past eight months.

63. Most learners fail to complete their training programme. Overall, since 1999, 64 per cent of foundation modern apprentices, 53 per cent of advanced modern apprentices and 59 per cent of NVQ learners, have left without completing their framework or achieving the aims on their individual learning plan. However, the retention rate has improved markedly for all learners in the present contract year, especially among advanced modern apprentices. Despite the improvement, the proportion of NVQ learners leaving early is still unacceptably high.

64. Few learners achieve all their learning goals. Achievement of foundation modern apprenticeships has fallen by 37.5 per cent between 1999 and 2001. Achievement of the advanced modern apprenticeship framework has fallen by half in the same period. Individual learning plan achievement among NVQ learners has fallen by 42 per cent.

65. Customer service assessments are well planned using learners' normal work tasks. Evidence is cross-referenced to cover several units of the qualifications. Many retailing and distribution portfolios contain evidence from observation, questioning and candidate reports, which are often unauthenticated. There are few witness testimonies. Some employers do not contribute to the assessment process and there is not enough work-based assessment. Assessment and internal verification is thorough in some NECC centres. Assessors keep some learners' portfolios rather than letting learners take responsibility for them. Some learners contribute little to their portfolios.

Good Practice

One learner has gained two NVQs at level 2, qualifications in word processing at levels 1 to 3 and a basic computer literacy qualification. The learner is currently working on a customer service NVQ at level 3 and key skills units. The employer has proposed that the learner should receive in-house training in IT, accounting and marketing.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**Grade 5**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	22	5

66. Two NECC centres offer training for catering qualifications. One of the sites contracts out the training and assessment to a local school. There are 22 learners in total. Of these, three are advanced modern apprentices, 12 are foundation modern apprentices and seven are taking level 1 NVQs. All learners are employed and recruited through their employers. NECC has two assessors for this training. One is qualified to assess all catering qualifications and is also responsible for internal verification. The other is occupationally competent in bar service and is working towards assessor qualifications. An external specialist verifies learners' portfolios on an annual basis. All training and assessment takes place at work, with the exception of basic food hygiene, which is taught at the NECC centre.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the 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					19		29		7	
Still in training					0	0	6	21	6	86
FMA framework completed					0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					10	53	7	24	0	0
Left without completing the framework					9	47	16	55	1	14

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					7		4		3	
Still in training					0	0	0	0	3	100
AMA framework completed					0	0	2	50	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					1	14	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed					2	29	1	25	0	0
Left without completing the framework					4	57	1	25	0	0

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					2				10	
Still in training					0	0			7	70
Individual learning plan completed					0	0			0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan					1	50			3	30
NVQ level 1 completed					0	0			0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					1	50			0	0

STRENGTHS

- no significant strengths

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates on foundation modern apprenticeships
- no key skills training
- slow progress for many learners
- inadequate review process
- weak internal verification

67. Retention rates on foundation modern apprenticeships are poor and deteriorated by 17 per cent between 1999 and 2001. Overall, achievement is poor. Retention and achievement rates on advanced modern apprenticeships are satisfactory and improving.

68. There is no key skills training. Achievement of key skills qualifications is poor. Of the 33 foundation and advanced modern apprentices who started in 2000-01, only two achieved their key skills qualifications. Assessors lack knowledge and understanding of key skills. Learners have no knowledge of key skills and their only aim is to achieve their NVQ. Key skills qualifications should appear on the individual learning plans, but do not. In some cases, initial assessment has shown that learners may be exempt. Learners receive no accreditation of their prior learning.

69. Progress for 60 per cent of learners is very slow. Due to a long-term staff absence, these learners had no visits, reviews or assessments for at least five months. There was no action taken to rectify the problem sooner. Some portfolios remained with the

absent assessor, until a new assessor was recruited seven months later. The subcontractor cannot provide training throughout the year. The attendance of learners is poor.

70. Some learners have been inappropriately placed on foundation instead of advanced modern apprenticeships. Assessors do not understand modern apprenticeships adequately and there is poor use of initial assessment. Staff are currently working hard to accelerate the progress of these learners. They visit the learners weekly to plan and carry out assessments, including assessments late at night or in the early morning. There is a great deal of pastoral support to encourage learners to stay and complete their training.

71. Insufficient use is made of the learners' review process. The targets set for learners are vague and unchallenging. Not all action plans are completed and learners are not always aware of their targets. There is updating of individual learning plans at progress reviews but the learner is not aware of these changes. Employers are not sufficiently involved in the review process. All workplaces are satisfactory and appropriate to the learners' requirements.

72. Internal verification is weak. There are not enough staff to conduct internal verification successfully. The only qualified member of NECC's staff is countersigning unit records for the unqualified assessor. NECC has employed an external consultant to verify portfolios annually, which is insufficient. The internal verification process is not constant and causes delays to learners' progress. The self-assessment report wrongly found no significant weaknesses for this area of learning.

Good Practice

Learners have the opportunity to achieve additional qualifications in health and safety and first aid.

Poor Practice

A part-time assessor is unable to attend the weekly key skills briefing as it occurs on his day off. No alternative arrangement is considered.

Health, social care & public services**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	127	3

73. NECC has a well-established dental nursing training programme. There are 127 learners on the current programme. In 2000-01, NECC began offering the level 3 NVQ in oral health and dental nursing. Previously, learners had followed the syllabus for the relevant professional body's qualification. All the learners are working in dental practices. Sixty-five per cent are employed and the remainder are on work placements. Every learner attends NECC's off-the-job theory training at either day or evening sessions. All NECC centres have demonstration facilities consisting of a fully equipped dental surgery. All the tutors are well-qualified dental nurses. NECC has trained all six tutors as assessors and five as internal verifiers. Assessors visit surgeries to observe and assess learners as well as carrying out progress reviews.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started			33		28		69		22	
Still in training			17	52	25	89	69	100	16	73
Individual learning plan completed			16	48	3	11	0	0	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan			0	0	0	0	0	0	6	27
NVQ level 1 completed			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			16	48	3	11	0	0	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- effective assessment
- good support from tutors
- good training resources

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement within expected timescales

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better communication of learners' targets to workplace supervisors

74. There are good links between learners' on- and off-the-job training. Dentists are keen to put their dental nurses on to the training programme and are pleased to take learners from NECC. The newly introduced level 3 NVQ has meant closer involvement with assessors. All classrooms are equipped with well-fitted demonstration surgeries. Learners familiarise themselves with equipment and processes. Occasionally good simulations allow learners to gain evidence for an infrequently performed procedure. The tutors are well-qualified dental nurses, who return to dental practices to update their occupational experience. The assessors are extremely flexible in meeting the needs of the learners and visit learners at work to observe procedures as patients requiring particular treatment book appointments with dentists. Learners are aware of the times assessors are available and will attempt to make patient appointments to fit the times they know their assessor is available. Teaching sessions frequently refer to practical aspects of the job.

75. Learners' continuous assessment helps them with their learning. Learners complete written work for the theory part of their qualification. The written work is carefully marked and returned promptly with extensive comments, to allow the learner to assess their progress and correct their mistakes. Assessors' visits to learners are frequent and very constructive. If the assessor identifies any areas of weakness, the learner works on improving these next. Learners are able to see the progress they are making as monitoring charts are accurately and promptly completed. Some workplace supervisors are not informed of the targets set at learners' progress reviews.

76. Learners receive good support from their tutors. Tutors are prepared to visit learners at times which suit the learners, even outside their normal working hours. They also design their teaching sessions to fit in with learners' work by running sessions in the evening as well as in the daytime. Tutors support the learners well by spending extra time with any who are having problems. One learner experiencing difficulties with the written work was given a tape recorder, extra computer training and was reassured that she could take longer to complete her training if necessary.

77. Each centre has a large and effective teaching area. There are plenty of useful books, videos and posters for the learners to use. Informative professional publications are available. There are well-prepared handouts relating to every section of the course. Many of these have been produced by the tutors, including some material which has been researched from the Internet and transferred to laminated cards for learners to use

in surgeries. There are good facilities for storing portfolios and all learners are shown how to use, and have access to, up-to-date IT equipment to use for building their portfolios. Learners also gain valuable basic computer literacy and health and safety qualifications. Induction and initial assessment of learners are effective.

78. The expected length of stay on the training programme is two years but some learners have been on the programme for almost four years without achieving an award. Relatively few learners over the past four years have gained their professional qualification. Learners used to work towards a qualification gained solely by an examination overseen by the relevant professional body. The tutors welcomed the arrival of the level 3 NVQ in oral hygiene and dental care. However, its implementation was delayed nationally and there was a break when some learners' progress was delayed and others transferred to the customer service NVQ programme. The level 3 NVQ has only been available for 18 months and therefore there are no achievements to date. Learners still have to take the dental nursing examination to complete their NVQ but recently the examination was simplified. The first opportunity to take the new examination will be in May 2002. The proportion of learners successfully passing the professional examinations was satisfactory at 48 per cent in 1998-99. In 1999-2000, only 11 per cent were successful but many learners from then are still in training, partly because of the delays in introducing their NVQ. NECC has been unrealistic in the past in its expectation that learners who left school with few or no academic qualifications would be able to succeed in this demanding course.

Good Practice

Dental tutors are very responsive to the needs of the learners. When the opportunity arises for the learner to be assessed, tutors will attend the workplace almost on demand.

A whiteboard in the demonstration surgery shows examples of good and bad practice. The identified bad practice is anonymous, for example, 'Not changing gloves between patients' but it names the good practitioner, for example, 'Zoë gives patients who are nervous a stress ball to hold'.

Poor Practice

A whole group in a theory session waited for one latecomer to catch up.