

INSPECTION REPORT

North East Employment Training Agency Ltd

10 December 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 **learndirect** provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

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

Inadequate provision

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

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

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

SUMMARY

The provider

North East Employment Training Agency Ltd has its headquarters in Gateshead. It is a private training organisation which provides work-based learning in hairdressing, as well as Life Skills and basic employability training for young people and adults who are unemployed. There are currently 209 learners in training. One hundred and seven are young people on modern apprenticeship or national vocational qualification (NVQ) training programmes in hairdressing. Forty-two young people are training in Life Skills and 60 adults are training in basic employability.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the Life Skills programme is satisfactory, but work-based learning in hairdressing is unsatisfactory. The leadership and management of North East Employment Training Agency Ltd are also unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

Hairdressing & beauty therapy	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- good strategic development of premises to meet changing demands
- good internal communications
- strong emphasis on equal opportunities on Life Skills training programme
- good quality assurance procedures
- good quality hairdressing salons
- flexible training arrangements for hairdressing learners
- broad range of activities for Life Skills learners
- good personal development for many Life Skills learners

KEY WEAKNESSES

- no strategy to improve retention and achievement rates
- insufficient awareness of responsibilities on the part of employers
- ineffective promotion of equal opportunities
- ineffective monitoring of equal opportunities practice
- inadequate self-assessment process
- poor retention and achievement rates of modern apprentices
- inadequately planned training for hairdressing learners
- ineffective target-setting for hairdressing learners
- poor use of individual learning plans for Life Skills learners
- poor action-planning and target-setting for Life Skills learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better co-ordination of practical training and NVQ training
- better basic skills training for Life Skills tutors
- more appropriate reports to the board
- further quality assurance procedures to focus on the needs of learners

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 11.5 days at North East Employment Training Agency Ltd (NEETA) in December 2001. They observed or interviewed 40 learners, conducted 17 interviews with NEETA's staff, interviewed five employers, and visited seven work placements and three of NEETA's own sites. They also examined a range of documents, including learners' portfolios of evidence and individual learning plans, the company's business plan, policies and procedures, job descriptions, contracts with employers, promotional literature and reports from the awarding body. They also examined the company's self-assessment report, which was prepared in December 2000.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Hairdressing & beauty therapy	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Foundation programmes	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	4
Total	0	1	0	4	1	0	0	6

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. NEETA was established in 1988, and was contracted by the Employment Service to provide assessment and guidance services to unemployed adults in Gateshead and South Tyneside. In 1991, the company expanded and began vocational training in hairdressing as well as extending its provision for unemployed people. Since 1998-99, it has provided basic employability training for adults, and is Tyneside's largest provider of this training programme. Since 2000-01, it has provided a Life Skills programme for young people as part of the Learning Gateway. A programme in health care has been discontinued since the company was inspected by the Training Standards Council (TSC) in July 1998. The company has 25 staff. Its head office is in Gateshead, which also serves as a base for some of its training. It has other training centres in Newcastle upon Tyne, Washington, South Shields and Blyth. It currently provides training for 179 young people and adults. One hundred and seven are on modern apprenticeship or NVQ programmes in hairdressing. Seventy-two are young people or adults who are unemployed.

3. NEETA contracts with Tyne and Wear Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The unemployment rate for Tyne and Wear in September 2001 was 5.2 per cent. The rates for Gateshead, South Tyneside and Newcastle upon Tyne were, 3.7 per cent, 9.5 per cent and 4.0 per cent, respectively. The rate for England as a whole was 2.9 per cent. The service sector accounts for 74.4 per cent of jobs in the Northeast. In 2001, the proportion of young people leaving school with five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grades C or above was 49.3 per cent in Gateshead, 36.7 per cent in Newcastle upon Tyne, and 39.1 per cent in South Tyneside. The average for England as a whole was 50 per cent. The 1991 census shows that Gateshead, Newcastle and South Tyneside have minority ethnic populations of 0.8 per cent, 4.1 per cent and 1.5 per cent, respectively. The rate for England as a whole is 6.2 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

4. NEETA's work-based provision is unsatisfactory. On-the-job training takes place in good-quality, professional salons, and training is provided in times and places that meet learners' needs. However, on- and off-the-job training are not effectively planned so that learners can gain maximum benefit from them. Progress planning and reviewing are weak. There is little involvement by employers in any aspect of the training programmes. Achievement rates on all programmes are poor. Retention rates on the modern apprenticeships are also poor.

Life Skills

5. Life Skills training for young people is satisfactory. The programme offers a wide range of activities and is successful in enabling learners to broaden their life experience and grow in confidence. Individual learning plans do not fully capture individual needs, aims and levels of attainment. Progress reviews lack specific learning goals and measures of achievement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

6. NEETA is a small private company employing 25 people. For a number of years, the company has responded to changing markets and operated successfully. It has developed from a training agent, providing assessment and action-planning for unemployed adults, to a substantial provider of hairdressing, Life Skills and adult employability skills. In response to weaknesses identified in the TSC inspection report, the company moved its head office to the centre of Gateshead. This training centre includes facilities for Life Skills training. Training centres for hairdressing in Sunderland and Gateshead were closed and provision was transferred to an existing site in Washington and new premises in Gateshead. These were used for teaching background knowledge. This arrangement was found to be unsuccessful, so the company acquired a new, city-centre site in Newcastle, which it developed as a salon. This opened on the first day of the inspection. Three further training centres have been acquired, in Newcastle, South Shields and Blyth, for the provision of basic employability training. The Newcastle training centre is also used for Life Skills training.

7. The board of NEETA consists of the chair and managing director, the company secretary and the operations director, who is also responsible for day-to-day operational management of the business. The self-assessment report, published in December 2000, evaluates provision in response to the previous TSC inspection, but not in relation to the 'Common Inspection Framework' introduced in April 2001. NEETA has held the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisations performance through its people, since 1991 and has been accredited with other national and international quality assurance standards since 1992. There is a wide-ranging quality assurance system which includes up-to-date procedures covering most aspects of the company's operation.

STRENGTHS

- good strategic development of premises to meet changing demands
- good internal communications
- good staff development procedures
- strong emphasis on equal opportunities in Life Skills programme
- good access to most premises for people with mobility difficulties
- good quality assurance procedures

WEAKNESSES

- no strategy to improve retention and achievement rates
- insufficient awareness of responsibilities on the part of employers
- ineffective monitoring of equal opportunities practice
- poor learner contract
- ineffective promotion of equal opportunities
- inadequate self-assessment process
- insufficient quality assurance procedures

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more appropriate reports to the board
- more thorough staff individual learning plans
- better quality assurance procedures which focus on learning and the learner

8. NEETA has responded flexibly to the environment in which it conducts its business. It has responded to government initiatives by expanding into basic employability and Life Skills training and withdrawing from health, care and public service provision which was no longer viable. The company has a business development action plan which has the potential to drive the business forward, but it does not identify or deal with important weaknesses in the provision.

9. Following the previous inspection, the company established two new training co-ordinator roles which were intended to improve communication between trainers and employers, and to improve co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training. One of these posts is currently vacant. Communication with employers has improved, but employers are not effectively involved in the assessment of learners and they are not aware of their responsibilities in terms of NVOs and modern apprenticeship requirements. There is no training plan which covers the whole training programme and employers' assessment of learners. The contract with employers does not set out clearly their responsibilities. Some of these weaknesses were identified in the Training Standards Council's (TSC's) inspection report but not in NEETA's self-assessment report.

10. Managers involve staff well in developing the business. NEETA has a well-established staff consultative committee. Meetings have formal agendas covering important aspects of the business. However, the committee has failed to deal with poor retention and achievement rates and other aspects of quality assurance. NEETA has no clear strategy for improving poor retention and achievement rates or weaknesses in the development and assessment of learners' key skills. Many learners fail to complete their apprenticeship framework because they do not achieve the necessary key skills.

11. The arrangements for ensuring that LSC contracts are complied with are satisfactory. However, NEETA does not use management information effectively to provide the board or individual staff with regular reports about trends in learners'

retention and achievement rates, equality of opportunity or health and safety. Nor does the company set clear targets for improving performance in these areas.

12. Managers provide good support to staff to enhance their professional and personal development. Staff performance is formally appraised each year, and this serves to identify training and development needs, taking account of individuals' aspirations and the priorities of the business. Some of the targets for improvement are imprecise. This hinders measurement of achievement. Individual learning plans do not have clear milestones and there is no reference to whether previous targets have been achieved. The company has coped well with a high staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting staff by employing people with few qualifications and investing in their development. However, there is no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of staff training. This was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection, and was recognised in NEETA's self-assessment report.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 4**

13. NEETA's operations director is responsible for the company's approach to equal opportunities. The company has equal opportunities and anti-harassment policies. These have been produced with staff in mind, rather than learners. The policies are reviewed annually to ensure that they are up to date. However, there are no procedures for evaluating whether or not policy is applied effectively. For example, NEETA does not set itself performance targets in this area, and there are no reports to the board on the company's equal opportunities practices. Job descriptions do not make clear the responsibility staff have for promoting equality of opportunity.

14. The company has demonstrated its commitment to widening participation by expanding its provision for young people and adults who are hard to motivate and who are having trouble finding employment. Its foundation training programme in hairdressing enables those with limited basic skills to begin a vocational training programme of their choice.

15. All learners receive a copy of a training agreement, which refers to the concept of 'equal treatment', but refers them elsewhere for further explanation. In addition, hairdressing learners receive copies of the company's equal opportunities statement. The documents provide little guidance for learners on what equal opportunities means for them in the classroom, the off-the-job training workshop or the workplace. There is, for example, no indication of what support is available for people with poor reading and writing skills or with learning difficulties or disabilities. The training agreement is a lengthy document written in an awkward style, and in some cases has been poorly reproduced. All learners receive the same version of the document, regardless of the standard of their reading skills.

16. The Life Skills programme is designed to give young people a good understanding of the meaning of equality of opportunity. Learners are encouraged to identify and overcome the prejudices they may experience as young people and, in some cases, as ex-offenders. They are also challenged to reconsider their attitudes to other groups. Although equal opportunities issues are difficult to tackle, tutors revisit them throughout the programme. By contrast, learners on the hairdressing programme show little awareness of what equal opportunities means either for themselves or for their clients.

17. NEETA lacks a clear strategy for promoting equal opportunities. Although the learner profile matches that of the area overall in terms of ethnicity and disability, there are high concentrations of minority ethnic groups in some communities. These groups have not been targeted. There are very few male learners in hairdressing. The company is operating in an increasingly competitive environment, but relies almost exclusively on its existing employer base to recruit learners. It has not worked with these employers to encourage them to review their own recruitment practices, and does not monitor equal opportunities practice in the workplace. Some publicity is carried out, including a high-profile demonstration event in a popular local shopping mall. However, generally, the company is not effective in targeting venues frequented by young people. Although

there are examples of learning materials being revised to take account of specific learning difficulties, for example, dyslexia, the materials used by learners are not formally reviewed to ensure that they promote diversity. Equal opportunities is not considered when NEETA decides whether or not to proceed with a new course or training programme.

18. Although employment practices are not formally evaluated, NEETA has started to redress the gender imbalance in its workforce by employing more men. The proportion of men on its staff has increased from 28 per cent to 33 per cent since the previous inspection. Two male hairdressing staff are good role models for potential learners.

19. NEETA's premises are not well signposted but, with one exception, are easily accessed by people with mobility difficulties. The company made a conscious effort to improve access since the previous inspection.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

20. The company employs a consultant twice each year to ensure that its quality assurance policies and procedures are kept up to date. Many aspects of the company's business are covered by these procedures. However, there are insufficient procedures which focus on the individual needs of learners and how their performance will be systematically measured and improved. Some important procedures are not included in the management of quality assurance. For example, there are no procedures for accrediting prior learning, producing and disseminating management information or assuring the quality of key skills development. NEETA does not monitor the quality assurance arrangements of its employers.

21. Internal verification is satisfactory. The hairdressing programme co-ordinator acts as internal verifier for NVQs. While there are no written procedures for internal verification, the assessment and recording process for off-the-job training is clear and understood by staff. Employers, however, are not sufficiently involved in on-the-job assessment. NEETA has learners in training with 65 employers, only one of whom uses work-based assessors. NEETA's trainers carry out almost all workplace assessment, but there is no monitoring of this work. There has been no monitoring of assessors in the workplace.

22. The self-assessment report failed to identify serious weaknesses in learners' retention and achievement rates. It did not take into account the opinions of learners and employers, and did not back up judgements with clear data. At times, NEETA identified examples of normal practice as strengths, and judgements were not always clear. There are no quality assurance arrangements for monitoring training or the effectiveness of assessment and internal verification procedures.

Poor Practice
<i>The learner contract contains a clause in which NEETA reserves the right to search learners on the premises. This gives the message that learners are not equal partners in teaching and learning.</i>

AREAS OF LEARNING

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	107	4

23. NEETA offers NVQs in hairdressing at levels 1, 2 and 3. These are offered as part of foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships and a foundation level hairdressing programme. Currently, there are 33 advanced modern apprentices, 47 foundation modern apprentices and 27 learners on NVQ training programmes. All modern apprentices and most level 1 NVQ foundation learners are employed. Other learners on the foundation NVQ hairdressing programme attend NEETA's training centre on a full-time basis. Learners are recruited throughout the year, mostly by referrals from employers and the careers service. NVQ training arrangements are agreed between employers and NEETA. NEETA has two training centres. The Washington training centre is on the first floor of a modern building near the town centre. The training centre in Newcastle upon Tyne, which is adjacent to a prestigious city centre development, opened during the week of the inspection. Learners have transferred to this training centre from NEETA's Gateshead headquarters, which offered training only in background knowledge. Both training centres are open four days a week. Most level 2 NVQ learners attend one day a fortnight throughout the year. Assessment takes place both off the job and in the workplace. A few learners have all their training in their salons, and NEETA's staff visit to provide training in background knowledge and carry out assessments. All salons provide practical skills training for their learners on a regular basis. The modern apprentices are all working towards key skills awards. The hairdressing team of five trainers/assessors is led by a co-ordinator, who is also the internal verifier. Four trainers have been employed by NEETA for less than a year. Two staff are qualified trainers and four are qualified assessors. The other two trainers are working towards assessors qualifications and one assessor is working towards the internal verifier qualification. All the hairdressing staff are experienced hairdressers with commercial salon skills. One of NEETA's directors is also a hairdresser, and has worked on various development projects with the hairdressing lead body.

The provider was unable to give an accurate analysis of learners' retention and achievement rates for the year 2001-02 other than by local LSC contract period.

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			52		44		36		
Still in training			6	12	16	36	11	31		
FMA framework completed			19	37	7	16	2	6		
NVQ level 2 completed			28	54	11	25	3	8		
Left without completing the framework			22	42	19	43	23	64		

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	31		21		47		32		
Still in training	0	0	3	14	6	13	18	56		
AMA framework completed	13	42	15	71	1	2	0	0		
NVQ level 2 completed	25	81	9	43	17	36	13	41		
NVQ level 3 completed	16	52	9	43	3	6	0	0		
Left without completing the framework	27	87	11	52	40	85	13	41		

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started	76		17		21		18		
Still in training	3	4	2	12	4	19	9	50		
Individual learning plan completed	28	37	6	35	8	38	3	17		
Left without completing individual learning plan	43	57	9	53	7	33	6	33		
NVQ level 1 completed	7	9	2	12	11	52	5	28		
NVQ level 2 completed	29	38	4	24	3	14	2	11		

STRENGTHS

- good-quality salons
- flexible training arrangements

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate planning of training programmes
- ineffective target-setting
- inadequate monitoring of workplace activities
- poor retention and achievement rates of modern apprentices

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better co-ordination of practical training and NVQ training
- more sharing of good practice

24. Learners work in good-quality salons, which provide a wide range of hairdressing services. NEETA's new training salon in the centre of Newcastle compares well with commercial, city salons. The Washington training salon is less up to date, although adequate for training in commercial hairdressing skills. Senior salon staff and NEETA trainers are good hairdressing role models. Standards of hairdressing skills are high. The salons have good resources, with most having modern equipment, smart decor and a range of good hairdressing products. Employers provide regular on-the-job training in their salons. Most salons offer a broad range of treatments relevant to the skills in the NVQs. In addition, learners' skills are enhanced by attendance at specialist seminars and workshops run by leading manufacturers and by participating in local and regional hairdressing competitions. These are organised by NEETA and employers.

25. The two hairdressing centres open four days a week throughout the year, giving a good choice of days for learners to attend. The daily programme is divided equally into background knowledge and practical sessions. Alternatively, learners can receive all their training in their salons, supplemented by visits for NVQ background knowledge training from NEETA's staff. Learners work at their own pace on different NVQ units in mixed ability groups. There are good ratios of learners to trainers in both background knowledge and practical sessions, with approximately six learners to one trainer. In addition, help with literacy and numeracy is provided for the level 1 NVQ learners by a basic skills trainer. Resources for teaching background knowledge include textbooks for each NVQ level, handouts and videos. Trainers use learning materials which are the same for all learners. Trainers have regular meetings, although there is little sharing of good practice at these meetings. The trainers usually work with learners on a one-to-one basis for short periods between clients. Learners are encouraged to attend the training

centres for tests of their background knowledge. Employers are given financial incentives to encourage them to release learners to attend the training centres.

26. On- and off-the-job training are not effectively linked. Employers are not involved in deciding the order in which their learners take the NVQ units, and have insufficient information about the structure and content of the award. Practical training carried out by senior salon staff is usually not co-ordinated with the NVQ training. NEETA's progress reviews are intended to link on- and off-the-job activities. The company does not collect information about the practical training activities that are carried out in the learners' salons, but relies on the learners to record this on the progress review sheets. Currently, the process is ineffective because the review forms are often completed inadequately. The assessment of NVQ background knowledge and practical skills is not effectively linked. Some learners complete many background knowledge assessments in advance of their related practical assessments. This is not good practice. There are too few clients at practical sessions on NEETA's premises. Practical assessments do not always take place as planned, resulting in wasted visits to salons for assessors. NEETA's staff do not use their visits to carry out tasks such as health and safety checks.

27. Target-setting is ineffective throughout the learner's training programme. The individual learning plan does not include milestones or target dates. If dates are entered on the plans for the NVQ and key skills awards, these stipulate the maximum length of time the learner can stay on the training programme, and are set without any reference to the individual learner's potential or pace of work. Progress reviews do not focus upon effective and timely NVQ completion, or set challenging targets for learners to work towards. Learners are unsure about the rate of progress expected of them and how their achievement of NVQ units will ultimately result in the achievement of the overall qualification. Employers are not involved in progress reviews, and their views about their learners' progress in the salon are rarely sought. They do not contribute to the target-setting for learners for the period between progress reviews, even though this might require them to set suitable work situations. Learners' progress to higher NVQ levels and the implications of this are not always fully discussed with employers.

28. Practice in the workplace is not adequately monitored. The internal verification process does not effectively support the assessors in their assessment of learners' practical skills in their salons. There are no formal, recorded observations of assessment in the workplace. Staff who are working towards their assessors' qualifications are inadequately monitored. Assessment decisions made by unqualified staff over many months have not been scrutinised properly. Practical training in the salons is not observed or evaluated to ensure that it is helping learners to achieve NVQs. The current methods of asking employers for their views about NEETA are ineffective and there is insufficient information available for effective programme evaluation.

29. Retention rates for foundation modern apprentices declined dramatically in 2000-01, dropping from 52 per cent to 36 per cent. Since April 2001, 16 of the 47 learners who started on this training programme have left early. The retention rate for advanced modern apprentices has fluctuated from 73 per cent in 1997-98 and 1998-99, to 15 per

cent in 1999-2000 and 55 per cent in 2000-01. However, the six learners who started since April 2001 are still in training. Retention rates on the foundation NVQ hairdressing programme declined from 50 per cent and 52 per cent in 1998-99 and 1999-2000, respectively, to 36 per cent in 2000-01. The retention rate for 2001-02 is 82 per cent.

30. The achievement rate on foundation modern apprenticeships is poor. The achievement of targets on individual learning plans and level 2 NVQs is declining. The maximum possible achievement rate for 1999-2000 starters is 53 per cent, and for 2000-01 starters it is 47 per cent. The foundation NVQ hairdressing programme is not effective in helping learners achieve their NVQ in hairdressing. The achievement rate for NVQs on this programme is poor. If all those currently in training complete their full learning programme, the achievement rate will still be less than 60 per cent.

Foundation programmes**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	42	3

31. The Life Skills programme was established in 2000-01 in Gateshead and subsequently extended to Newcastle. There are currently 42 young people on the training programme, half in Gateshead and half in Newcastle. NEETA has followed the guidance of the local LSC and adopted a framework for the training programme which focuses on the development of personal and social skills necessary for independent living or achieving employability. Learners attend for a minimum of 16 hours each week. This is increased on a phased basis to 30 hours each week if learners maintain a regular schedule. There are financial incentives for achieving good attendance and refraining from disruptive behaviour. Learners are expected to stay on the training programme for 19 weeks. This may be extended, if appropriate, to 26 weeks. Learners who have attended for 26 weeks, but have progressed very slowly, are referred to their personal adviser from the careers service. In some circumstances, their period of training may be extended by a further 26 weeks. A bonus of £50 is paid to learners who are judged to have completed the training programme. Many learners are deprived in terms of income, employment, health, education and housing, and have had few opportunities to benefit from the resources available in their locality. Discretionary payments are made from Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funds to assist those whose financial difficulties affect their ability to learn. Three tutors give the training. Another member of staff provides basic skills support to learners with literacy and numeracy difficulties. A programme co-ordinator's post is currently vacant.

STRENGTHS

- good range of activities for learners
- good personal gains for many learners
- good training facilities

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient opportunities for work experience
- poor use of individual learning plans
- poor action-planning and target-setting

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better basic skills training for Life Skills tutors
- more agencies involved in the training programme

32. The Life Skills programme does not follow a fixed schedule, but is planned to accommodate the needs and interests of new learners as well as those who have been on the training programme for some time. Activities include visits to local landmarks, travelling on the local tram system, attending a court hearing, and outings to local leisure facilities. These visits are followed by related classroom activities. When there is a high level of interest, a more sustained piece of work may be developed, such as the production of a collection of writing based on a single theme. Tutors meet regularly. Although they do not evaluate the programme formally, ideas and experiences are shared, and initiatives which have been successful are repeated. NEETA makes good use of external agencies to broaden the training programme, drawing, for example, on a disability awareness organisation and local theatre companies. However, there are no agencies from sectors such as health education contributing to the programme. There are too few work placements. NEETA recognises this weakness and has begun to remedy it.

33. Learners' written work shows that they have made important personal gains. Learners who have spent some time in training can now see real possibilities of moving on to further training or finding employment. Over an eight-month period, approximately half of those who left the programme went on to other training and/or employment. The attendance of some learners is poor, but this is carefully monitored by NEETA.

34. The facilities at both sites are good, with spacious workrooms which give suitable space for one-to-one support as well as group activities. Computers are available when needed. Learners at both training centres have their own rest areas, which they can decorate to their own taste.

35. Each young person has a learning plan which is developed gradually over a period of time. Initial assessment of learners is approached with caution, bearing in mind learners' previous educational experiences. There is a strong emphasis on self-assessment, and learners fill out questionnaires to help them clarify their aims and aptitudes. Despite this, individual learning plans do not give a clear, specific and comprehensive indication of individual learning needs or interests. Initial assessment practices are not consistent, with tutors using different self-assessment materials.

36. NEETA uses a nationally recognised test to identify those learners who have significant difficulties with basic skills. It is not clear what purpose this test now serves, as a basic skills tutor now examines learners' written work for characteristics which indicate underlying difficulties. This tutor is well qualified for the task and provides an analysis of each learner's work. However, learners are unaware that this has been

done. Their individual learning plans do not include either the analysis or any proposed learning strategies.

37. Learners and tutors meet regularly on a one-to-one basis to discuss progress, but there is too little action-planning. Targets are not specific, and there are no clear measures of progress or achievement.

38. The standard of teaching is satisfactory. Tutors are respected by learners, taking a firm stance with them, but doing so with warmth and good humour. Lessons are planned carefully, but tutors are sensitive to emerging interests, or to particular crises faced by individual students, and adapt their plans accordingly. Learning materials are clear and well presented. Learners are constantly challenged to reconsider their attitudes towards themselves and other people. Most of those present are willing participants, but there are sometimes problems with group dynamics. In a session on equal opportunities, for instance, young men dominated the discussion. On the other hand, in a drama workshop where learners were being encouraged to explore issues of choice and morality, a professional writer and an actor ensured that everyone participated. In some cases, tutors fail to teach new skills, or to reinforce key learning points. Learners' work is well organised and well presented. However, tutors do not encourage learners to use learning styles that would help them to overcome difficulties with basic skills. Tutors have had no formal training in this area.