

INSPECTION REPORT

Nova Training Ltd

14 January 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's **learnirect** provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

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

Inadequate provision

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

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

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

SUMMARY

The provider

Nova Training Ltd head office is in Willenhall town centre. It provides advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships, NVQ training and Life Skills training programmes. There are two training centres in Netherton, one in Telford and one in Willenhall. Learners work towards NVQs in engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional and retailing, customer service and transportation.

Overall judgement

The overall quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, engineering, technology and manufacturing training is unsatisfactory. Business administration, management and professional and retailing, customer service and transportation training are satisfactory. Life Skills training is good. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

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

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- open management style
- good links with outside organisations
- good initiatives to improve retention rates
- particularly good pastoral support
- well-structured and well-planned Life Skills training programme

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor use of management information
- ineffective self-assessment and action-planning
- ineffective progress reviews
- poor retention and achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better sharing of good practice across the organisation

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 24 days at Nova Training Ltd (Nova) in January 2002. They interviewed 59 learners and carried out 48 interviews with staff. They observed 12 training sessions carried out by Nova staff at employers' premises and at Nova training centres. Inspectors visited 24 workplaces and interviewed 13 workplace supervisors. All the Nova training centres were visited. Inspectors examined a range of documents, including 46 individual learning plans, 35 learners' portfolios, records of assessment and internal verification documents, reports from awarding bodies, promotional materials and the company's policies and procedures. Inspectors also studied the company's development and action plans and the self-assessment report, which was produced in November 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Business administration, management & professional	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Foundation programmes	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	5
Total	0	1	4	6	1	0	0	12

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Nova was founded in September 1992. The current managing director became the sole owner of the company in July 1996. There are three other directors and 50 members of staff. Nova provides foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships, NVQ training for young people and the Life Skills option of the Learning Gateway. Training is provided in the training centres and on-the-job. There are two New Deal clients, one working towards an NVQ in customer service and one working towards an NVQ in information technology (IT). New Deal was not inspected. The company has four training centres. The training centre in Willenhall, which is also the head office, provides the Life Skills and commercial training programmes. Adjacent to the head office is a recruitment agency owned by Nova. The Life Skills training, commercial and motor vehicle training programmes are provided at the two training centres in Netherton, near Dudley. The Telford training centre in Shropshire provides training programmes in motor vehicle and performing manufacturing operations. At the time of inspection, Nova is negotiating a new lease to increase the size of its premises in Telford. Nova also operates a commercial garage workshop and MOT testing centre and an auto-gas centre in Netherton. These facilities are used to train and assess learners. Each of the four training centres has a centre supervisor. The Netherton and Telford training centres also have centre managers. Training is funded through contracts with the Black Country and Shropshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

3. The main employment sectors in the Black Country are manufacturing, which accounts for one in three jobs, and retailing. There is growth in the support industries such as computing and logistics. Eighty-seven per cent of employers are small companies employing fewer than 25 people. Shropshire is a rural county, but only 7 per cent of the population are employed in agriculture. The main employment sectors in Shropshire are manufacturing, wholesaling and retailing. There is also growth in the manufacturing of electronic equipment. In May 2001, the unemployment rate in the Black Country area and in Shropshire was 5.1 per cent and 2.2 per cent, respectively, compared with the national average of 3.1 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the Black Country and Shropshire is 11.5 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively, compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent. In 2001, the proportion of young people achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in the Black Country and in Shropshire was 36.7 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively, compared with a national average of 49.2 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

4. Retention and achievement rates are generally poor across all areas of training, but are improving. In retailing, customer service and transportation and engineering, technology and manufacturing a range of initiatives have been introduced to improve retention rates. Retention rates in these areas have steadily improved although achievement of the modern apprenticeship framework is still poor in retailing, customer service and transportation.

5. Training is good for learners on engineering, technology and manufacturing training programmes. Learners are able to work in a commercial garage, an MOT centre and an autogas centre. There is particularly good pastoral support for learners at the training centre and in the workplace. Off-the-job training is poor for modern apprentices in this area of learning. Training sessions are poorly planned with no clear aims or objectives. There is effective provision of work placements for learners on business administration, management and professional training programmes. Nova has good working relationships with companies able to provide work placements in this area of learning and many learners are eventually employed at their work placement. Initial assessment of learners in this area of learning is effective and there are effective assessor visits in the workplace. Those learners who have been on the training programme for some time have completed their NVO but are only now tackling their key skills. Learner support is good in retailing, customer service and transportation and every effort is made to provide learners with a work placement relevant to their own individual career aims. Assessment practices are good and assessors have good working relationships with the learners. There is poor off-the-job training and learners are not provided with adequate learning materials.

Life Skills

6. Life Skills training is well structured and well planned and work placements are well matched to learners' individual learning needs. There are effective weekly progress reviews between the learner and the trainer and individual learning plans are kept up-to-date. Specific targets are not set during the monthly progress reviews with the personal advisers. Basic skills support is effective, with all learners carrying out an initial basic skills assessment. Accommodation at the training centres for learners on Life Skills training programmes is inadequate.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

7. There are six members of the management team. The managing director is responsible for the overall strategic planning of the company. The operational director is responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the company, and reports directly to the managing director. There is also the deputy to the operational director, the management services executive and the two training centre managers, who are based at Telford and Netherton. There are four training centres, each with its own supervisor. The training centre supervisors attend meetings with senior management staff. The management services executive is responsible for quality assurance and the operational director is responsible for equal opportunities. There is an equal opportunities policy and a quality assurance policy and procedures. Self-assessment has been carried out for the past four years. The most recent self-assessment report was produced in November 2001.

STRENGTHS

- open management style
- good links with outside organisations
- good initiatives to improve retention rates
- good staff review process
- clear user-friendly complaints and grievance procedure
- extensive internal audit process

WEAKNESSES

- poor use of management information
- ineffective progress reviews
- ineffective self-assessment and action planning
- insufficient monitoring and evaluation of training
- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- poor communication with employers

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of resources for equal opportunities training
- wheelchair access to training centres
- all procedures to be consistent with policies
- ensure employers use an equal opportunities policy

8. There is effective internal communication. Staff are able to discuss issues informally with the management team, such as problems with the training programme and areas for possible development. Senior managers are involved in all issues relating to training

provision and staffing. The operational manager carries out all the management staff reviews and is reviewed in turn by the managing director. The deputy operational manager reviews the staff at the training centres in Willenhall and Netherton and the Telford centre manager reviews the Telford staff.

9. The company has good links with other relevant organisations in the community. The operations director is a member of the Connexions Board and the local Lifelong Learning Partnerships and is also a board director of Prospects Careers. The company is involved with three groups representing minority ethnic communities in the area. It has taken part in training events and careers sessions aimed at learners from minority ethnic communities. The company is also working with a local college. Staff from the college are teaching on Nova's training programmes and Nova is planning to use the college's staff development resources and expertise.

10. The company has recently revised its initial assessment and induction procedures. A new initial assessment system has been introduced, and the induction process and materials have been revised. Evaluation of these new systems shows that retention rates are now improving. A new recruitment officer was appointed in November 2001 to recruit employees from local companies on to Nova training programmes, and has prepared useful information sheets on each NVQ provided by Nova. These are distributed during visits to the workplace by the recruitment officer. He also attends assessor meetings to learn more about NVQs. Information about the various training and apprenticeship programmes is not given to visited companies, and employers do not fully understand the key differences between the training programmes. Currently the follow-up visit is carried out by Nova assessors.

11. There are frequent staff reviews. Clear targets are set at the reviews. Some members of staff are accountable to a number of different people. For example, assessors are accountable to both their internal verifier and the operations director or their training centre supervisor. Some staff members are reviewed by two or three different people. The internal verifier carries out two out of every three of the assessors' reviews. The third review is carried out by the deputy operations director. Staff are able to discuss their performance frequently with their managers, and are clear about what targets are set, and by when they have to be achieved.

12. There is poor use of management information. The company collects data about retention and achievement rates. Managers do not use this information as the basis for their own management decisions. They do not carry out detailed analyses of these data. The company monitors the ethnicity, gender and disability of everyone who contacts the organisation about training. There are no specific targets set for the recruitment of people with disabilities or those from minority ethnic groups. There are no targets set to rectify the gender imbalance on the vocational training programmes. The equal opportunities monitoring data are presented at staff meetings with customer feedback data. These data are not analysed for trends or discussed at quality assurance or other staff meetings. There is a poor response to questionnaires given to learners. No work has been carried out to monitor why learners do not return their

questionnaires. Questionnaires are not relevant to those learners who are employed. Questionnaires are not given out consistently to learners and the workplace supervisors across the training programmes.

13. Learners' progress reviews are ineffective in all occupational areas. Targets for achievement are not set. Progress reviews do not focus on specific issues. Workplace supervisors and employers do not systematically contribute to the review process. Written prompts are provided to ensure learners are questioned about equal opportunities and health and safety issues. The questions are general and do not encourage learners to discuss issues. Some progress review forms contain only a few lines of general comments. Learners are not always given a copy of the progress review form. There is no system for evaluating learners' comments. Progress reviews are now audited. Two Life Skills trainers and one trainer from each of the Netherton and Telford training centres have received training in carrying out progress reviews. Assessors do not systematically encourage learners to use the reviews as evidence, for key skills and NVQ units.

14. There is a detailed contract with all employers who provide work placements. This contract is adapted for use by employers whose staff are learners at Nova. There is no information, produced specifically for employers, to fully explain their involvement in the work-based learning programme. Employers do not receive information about the training programme and its content. Employers do not fully understand the requirements of the NVQ, the modern apprenticeship framework, or their role as workplace supervisors. No information is given about the benefits of the training programme to their employees and their own organisation. Employers are not sufficiently involved in developing learners' individual learning plans or in learners' progress reviews.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

15. There is an equal opportunities policy and a policy statement. Learners have a general understanding of equality of opportunity. Although managers and staff understand equality of opportunity, there is no specific action plan to effectively implement the equal opportunities policy. The business development plan states that a plan for implementing equality of opportunity will be produced, but no date is set for this to be carried out. There has been no recent equal opportunities training for learners. Only a small number of staff have had equal opportunities training in the last two years and there is no plan for this training to be passed on to other staff. There are some equal opportunities training resources, but staff are generally unaware of them. None of the training centres have been adapted for those with restricted mobility. Before a learner starts a work placement, Nova carries out a thorough health and safety audit. There is no procedure to ensure that workplaces will protect learners from possible abuse or harassment. There is no procedure to check whether employers have their own equal opportunities policy or to provide them with Nova's policy. Some assessors check whether employers have their own equal opportunities policies, but others do not. This practice is not monitored.

16. The proportion of the local population from minority groups varies from 18.6 in Wolverhampton to 1.6 in Shropshire. There are more staff from minority ethnic groups in those areas with a higher proportion of minority ethnic learners. There are no policies or relevant activities to promote training to minority ethnic groups. Data are not analysed to inform recruitment processes. There are more people with disabilities in the Life Skills training programmes than on the other training programmes, but the overall numbers are very small. Nova's marketing materials show learners with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and do not restrict images to traditional gender roles. Learners generally follow traditional occupations for their gender. For the last three years, a third of learners on the administration training programme have been men. The marketing materials also state that the company supports equality of opportunity and shows that it has met the requirements for the 'positive about disability' kitemark. Learners fully understand the complaints procedure, which is shown in the form of a flow chart. It applies to either a complaint about training, or a grievance a learner might have in the workplace.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

17. There is a well-established internal audit system. Staff members fully understand the internal audit procedures. The company does not ensure that all the procedures are consistent with the policies. For example, the recruitment policy states that no application should be rejected by one person alone, but does not mention that more than one person needs to be involved in the initial sifting, shortlisting and first interview processes. Internal verification is well planned in most occupational areas and is being developed to meet the new requirements of the awarding bodies.

18. Self-assessment has been carried out for four years. Feedback from learners and employers is poor. The self-assessment process is not sufficiently thorough to improve learners' achievements. Data does show, however, that retention rates are improving. The self-assessment report did not accurately identify all of the strengths and weaknesses. Planned actions to rectify weaknesses are not always carried out. There has been no structured, planned evaluation of the quality of the training. Some trainers have been observed in training sessions, but this was in response to particular concerns, rather than as part of a routine staff development process. There are plans to observe trainers as part of the new internal verification arrangements, but this has not yet started in any of the occupational areas.

Good Practice

An initial assessment form has been adapted for ease of use by left-handed learners. The columns to tick for answering each question about Life Skills have been placed down the left-hand side of the page. This question sheet has also been prepared using a larger font for ease of use by partially-sighted learners.

Poor Practice

Nova's equal opportunities statement refers clearly to 'employees' and does not mention the learners.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	86	4

19. There are 86 learners on work-based learning programmes in engineering, technology and manufacturing. Motor vehicle training takes place in the two training centres at Telford and Netherton. Training for engineering and performing manufacturing operations is carried out in the workplace. There are 17 advanced modern apprentices, 19 foundation modern apprentices and 50 learners on other work-based learning programmes for young people. Most learners are recruited by referral from career offices, through school career events or in response to advertisements. Prospective learners carry out an initial assessment of their basic skills and vehicle component recognition. This is followed by interviews with work placement officers and employers. There are two induction procedures. Learners are given information on the NVQ training programme, health and safety and equal opportunities. The employer induction covers an introduction to the company, conditions of service and safe use of tools and equipment. The training centre in Telford has a small workshop equipped for tyre-fitting. The Netherton training centre has a commercial working garage for repairs. It is also a registered centre for converting vehicles to autogas and an approved MOT centre. Both training centres have classrooms for off-the-job training. Of those learners who attend the Netherton training centre, 60 per cent have additional learning or social support needs. Most modern apprentices are employed in small garages, with some working in large commercial dealerships. Learners are monitored by workplace supervisors. Modern apprentices attend the training centre on a day-release basis for their off-the-job training and guidance for compiling their portfolios of evidence. Learners without work placements attend the training centre full-time until a work placement is found. Assessors visit the workplace at least every four weeks to carry out progress reviews assessments.

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			47		27		26		14
Still in training			0	0	3	11	10	38	6	43
FMA framework completed			4	9	1	4	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			6	13	0	0	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework			44	94	23	85	16	62	8	57

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	1		31		12		5		8
Still in training	1	100	4	13	3	25	3	60	6	75
AMA framework completed	0	0	9	29	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed	0	0	8	26	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed	0	0	7	23	0	0	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework	0	0	18	58	9	75	2	40	2	25

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started			56		41		40		111
Still in training			0	0	0	0	2	5	48	43
Individual learning plan completed			10	18	8	20	3	8	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan			46	82	33	80	31	77	63	57
NVQ level 1 completed			14	25	12	29	16	40	3	3
NVQ level 2 completed			6	11	0	0	0	0	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good training for learners on the full-time tyre and exhaust training programme
- effective initiatives to improve retention rates
- effective use of commercial garage
- particularly good pastoral support

WEAKNESSES

- poor off-the-job training for modern apprentices
- inadequate links between on- and off-the-job training
- poor achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- improve internal verification planning
- develop ways of sharing good practice between centres

20. There is good training for learners on the full-time tyre and exhaust training programme. Learners work in modern tyre fitting companies for work experience. Trainers are well qualified with relevant industrial experience. Most trainers are qualified assessors. Two recently appointed trainers are working towards the assessor qualification. Training is carried out in the workshops using industrial standard equipment. Learners carry out good practical experience, which is supported by the theory lessons. Learners gain basic skills and a good understanding of health and safety. Learners receive additional training on vehicle systems and carry out minor vehicle repairs and servicing.

21. There are effective initiatives to improve retention rates. Many learners have additional learning and social needs. The company is piloting a project to improve learners' social skills, encourage teamwork and develop trust. A scheme has been introduced to motivate learners in which learners are awarded stars according to their progress and achievement. Each activity achieved is recorded on a progress chart displayed in the workshop. Learners can exchange stars for items such as tools. To encourage teamwork learners are appointed as group leaders each week in the training centre. The leaders are responsible for organising their group's practical working activities, maintenance of tools and equipment and safe working conditions. Retention rates have improved. In 1999, the retention rate for foundation modern apprentices was 11 per cent, rising to 38 per cent in 2000 and 43 per cent in 2001. The retention rate for advanced modern apprentices was 25 per cent in 1999, 60 per cent in 2000

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and 75 per cent in 2001. The retention rate for learners on other work-based learning programmes was 20 per cent in 1999, 13 per cent in 2000 and 43 per cent in 2001.

22. There is effective use of a commercial garage. Two qualified staff supervise the garage at Netherton training centre. Learners work in the garage and carry out small repairs and servicing. The MOT centre gives learners experience in vehicle inspection. The autogas centre allows learners to work on a variety of vehicles and keep up to date with new developments.

23. Nova staff provide particularly good pastoral support for learners at the training centre and in the workplace. They have frequent contact with learners and visit them in the workplace every four weeks. Visits take place more frequently if required. Learners are able to discuss problems and issues with staff. Staff are sensitive to learners' individual needs. Specialist staff in the training centres provide learners with additional support for literacy and numeracy. Help with transport is also provided. For example, one learner has a scooter, provided by the local Wheels to Work project, and another has a lift from Shrewsbury with a member of staff.

24. Off-the-job training for modern apprentices is poor. Classroom training sessions are not planned well. Lesson plans do not give clear aims and objectives. Learners on heavy vehicle training programmes receive no off-the-job training specific to heavy vehicle systems. Learners are not fully involved in the training in the classroom. There is a lack of resources. For example, there are insufficient vehicle system components to help learners understand complex motor vehicle systems. Handouts are satisfactory. There is no screen for use with an overhead projector and transparencies are projected on to a wall and are difficult to read. The classroom accommodation at Telford is poorly ventilated. Lessons are disrupted by noise from the adjoining workshop. Two new classrooms are not yet ready to be used. The classroom accommodation at Netherton is small and inadequately heated. Noise from the MOT testing centre makes it difficult for learners to concentrate effectively.

25. There are inadequate links between the on- and off-the-job training. Off-the-job training and assessment are inadequately linked to what learners do in the workplace. There is no structured training programme for learners. The collection of evidence is not planned during progress reviews. Learners collect evidence as and when it arises. Most workplace supervisors are not sufficiently aware of the requirements of the NVQ and do not understand their responsibilities.

26. Achievement rates are poor. The achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices in 1998-99 and 1999-2000 were 9 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. The achievement rates for learners on other work-based learning programmes achieving their NVQ at level 1 in 1998-99, 1999-2000 and 2000-01 were 25 per cent, 29 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. Thirty-eight per cent of the learners who enrolled in 2000-01 are still in training. The achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices in 1998-99 is 38 per cent. These data relates to a previous motor vehicle qualification and there are no data for those learners who joined the training programme in 1999-2000 and

2000-01.

Poor Practice

During off-the-job training, one learner incorrectly completed a handout for the rotation and position of gears in a gearbox. The trainer did not effectively check this and the learner left the lesson with inaccurate reference information.

Business administration, management & professional**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	31	3

27. There are 31 learners on work-based learning programmes in business administration, management and professional. All learners are recruited from the careers service or directly from employers. All learners carry out an initial basic skills test. Basic skills support is provided at the training centre for one day each week. Additional learning needs are also assessed. Of these, 23 learners are foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 2, five of whom are employed and the rest are in work placements, some with the training provider. Four learners are advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3. All of these are employed, two by the training provider. Four learners are on other work-based learning programmes. Two of these are employed. All training is provided through the training centre in Willenhall. A significant number of learners in work placements gain permanent employment. There are three full-time members of staff who provide training, guidance and support. They visit learners in the workplace every two weeks to carry out assessments. They also carry out regular monthly progress reviews. All three members of staff have adviser and assessor qualifications. Two have internal verifier qualifications. All training, except for key skills, is carried out on the job by workplace trainers, mentors or supervisors.

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			39		38		23		25
Still in training			1	3	0	0	7	32	15	60
FMA framework completed			4	10	8	21	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			8	21	11	29	1	5	0	0
Left without completing the framework			34	87	30	79	16	73	10	40

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			11		10		6		1	
Still in training			1	9	0	0	2	33	1	100
AMA framework completed			1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			2	18	3	30	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed			3	27	1	10	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework			9	82	9	90	4	67	0	0

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started			40		18		26		2	
Still in training			0	0	0	0	1	4	2	100
Individual learning plan completed			8	20	5	28	0	0	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan			32	80	13	72	25	96	0	0
NVQ level 1 completed			5	12	6	33	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			11	28	1	6	0	0	0	0

STRENGTHS

- effective work placement practices
- frequent and useful workplace visits by assessors
- effective initial assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- some late completion of key skills

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- ensure all learners have copies of their review forms
- ensure all assessor/verifiers meet new NTO occupational competence requirements
- evaluate information to employers and parents about learners' progress

28. There is effective provision of work placements. The company has good working relationships with local employers. Appropriate work placements are found in a wide range of workplaces. If a work placement is unsuitable, a more appropriate placement is found. Many learners are eventually employed at their work placement. Some learners are on work placement with the training provider. Learners can also work towards a range of additional qualifications. These include first aid, and basic computer literacy courses. All learners found to have poor IT skills are expected to take the basic computer literacy course, which is provided through distance learning, with a test at the training centre.

29. There are effective workplace visits by assessors. Apart from the range of additional qualifications provided at the training centre, all other training is provided on the job by the assessors, workplace supervisors and mentors. Assessors carry out assessment in the workplace every two weeks, or more frequently if necessary. There is detailed action-planning at each visit, which is recorded on an activity sheet. The learner receives detailed written feedback on the assessment and receives effective guidance on what needs to be done for the next visit. Learners collect a good range of work-based evidence for their portfolios. Completed units are recorded on a detailed assessment form which also gives the learner written feedback. Learners fully understand the assessment process and their own progress. Portfolios of evidence are particularly good. Progress reviews are carried out every four weeks by the assessor involving the learner and the workplace supervisor. The training provider has recently modified its review form to allow the workplace supervisor to give written feedback and comments. This is to make sure that workplace supervisors are well informed about learners' progress and any further on-the-job training requirements. Learners and workplace supervisors do not always keep a copy of the completed review form. IT resources are good at the Willenhall training centre. There is a computer suite with 18 computers networked to three printers. There is also Internet access and all software is up to date. Learners do not spend sufficient time at the training centre to use these facilities effectively.

30. There is an effective initial assessment process. A computer-based key skills assessment has been introduced as part of the induction process. Key skills are now fully integrated with the NVQ and use the same work-based evidence where appropriate. Those learners who have been on the training programme for some time have completed their NVQ but are only now tackling their key skills. One advanced

modern apprentice completed his NVQ at level 3 almost a year ago and is still working on his key skills.

31. Retention and achievement rates are poor for modern apprentices. Of the 125 foundation modern apprentices who started training between 1998-99 and 2001-02, 90 left without completing the full framework. For that same period, 20 learners achieved their NVQ at level 2, 12 completed the full framework and 23 are still in training. Of the 28 advanced modern apprentices who started training between 1998-99 and 2001-02, 22 left without completing the full framework. For that same period, five learners achieved their NVQ at level 2, four at level 3 and only one learner completed the full framework. There are four learners still in training. Of the 86 learners on other work-based learning programmes who started training between 1998-99 and 2001-02, 70 learners left without completing their individual learning plans and three are still in training.

32. Nova has recognised this problem and has already taken steps to address it. Over the last year the learner starts policy has been changed from one which in effect accepted all comers at any level to one which attempts to match entrants to the most appropriate qualification and level. This is reflected in the interviewing of applicants and in the basic and key skills assessments now in use. In addition, significant staff changes over the last six months or so have closed down the focus of assessor activity more effectively. Skillscans are routinely used as part of initial assessment to cross-reference job activities to the standards, and a much fuller and longer induction is also designed to ensure that learners enter and are working at the right level. The provider believes that these measures will improve the retention and achievement rates. It is too soon to confirm this. However, recruitment rates for advanced modern apprentices and other NVQ learners have dropped markedly in the current year as a result of this selection and there are already some indications that retention is improving. At the time of inspection the sample is too small to be sure of this.

33. Of the three visiting Nova assessors, one experienced assessor, who is also an internal verifier, does not meet the new Council for Administration specification for occupational competence. The provider has recognised the need for her to meet the requirements and intends to train her to NVQ level 3 as soon as she has finished her current intensive programme of customer service, integrated business technology and key skills qualifications. Inspectors observed an assessment by her and graded it as good.

34. Some employers have an understanding of the NVQ and learner frameworks but many do not. They rely on the assessment planning and review process to draw attention to any planned work experience or training necessary to meet the requirements. However, the frequency of contact between assessors and employers and the newly introduced review form are expected to achieve the improvements planned in the self-assessment report both for this and for giving progress information to employers. The need to develop a report system to give better learner progress information to parents, identified as an improvement in the self-assessment report, has

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not yet been done.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	53	3

35. There are 53 learners on work-based learning programmes in retailing, customer service and transportation. Learners are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in warehousing and customer service and key skills qualifications. Learners are recruited by direct referrals from the careers service, through contact with Nova or are recruited directly from employers. There are 14 advanced modern apprentices and 18 foundation modern apprentices. There are 21 learners on other work-based learning programmes. Thirty-four learners are employed. Training is carried out from the two training centres in Willenhall and Netherton. Learners with basic skills needs attend one of the training centres once a week and work towards a basic skills qualification. All training is carried out on the job by the employer or through additional training provided by the assessors. There are seven assessors who are also trainers. Assessment is carried out twice a month. Five of the assessors are appropriately qualified and two are working towards assessor qualifications. Two assessors have a training qualification. Learners attend a one-week induction at the beginning of their training programme. Progress reviews are carried out once a month by the assessors. Key skills are not assessed until learners have completed their NVQ.

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			24		24		17		24
Still in training			0	0	2	8	4	24	12	50
FMA framework completed			1	4	0	0	2	12	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			2	8	2	8	2	12	0	0
Left without completing the framework			23	96	22	92	11	65	12	50

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	1		7		19		28		4	
Still in training	1	100	2	29	1	5	7	25	3	75
AMA framework completed	0	0	1	14	0	0	3	11	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed	0	0	2	29	6	32	1	4	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed	0	0	2	29	6	32	1	4	0	0
Left without completing the framework	0	0	4	57	12	63	18	64	1	25

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started	1		47		42		48		24	
Still in training	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	8	17	71
Individual learning plan completed	0	0	15	32	5	12	1	2	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan	0	0	24	51	37	88	41	85	3	12
NVQ level 1 completed	0	0	13	28	7	17	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed	0	0	10	21	3	7	0	0	0	0

STRENGTHS

- particularly good learner support
- good assessment practices
- improving retention rate of foundation modern apprentices and learners on other work-based learning programmes

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement of modern apprenticeship framework
- poor off-the-job training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- systematic use of vocational initial assessment for all learners
- further development of training/coaching skills for staff

36. There is particularly good learner support, a strength not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Those learners who have previously carried out the Life Skills training programme are given workplace tasters before joining the full training programme. Every effort is made to provide learners with a work placement relevant to their own career interests. If work placements are unsuitable, further appropriate work placements are found. One learner, who is finding it difficult to get employment, has completed two work placements and an NVQ at level 1 in distributive operations. The learner is now working towards the warehouse NVQ at level 2. Assessors initially visit learners twice a month and then up to once a week towards the end of their training programme. This provides learners with good additional support and guidance, including jobsearch assistance. If a learner's attendance is poor, assessors make additional visits to the workplace as well as make daily phone calls to the employer to monitor the learner. Learners with additional learning needs attend the training centres once a week to work towards basic skills qualifications.

37. There are good assessment practices. Assessors have good working relationships with learners and employers. Assessment is carried out frequently and is well planned and recorded. Learner's individual learning needs are taken into account when planning assessment. Assessors are fully aware of the business needs of the employers. There is good use of observation. Assessment records are well maintained and learners' progress is recorded for internal verification. Portfolios of evidence are well presented and are kept by the learner. Learners are fully involved in matching work-based evidence to the NVQ. Learners with special assessment requirements are given support by the assessors.

38. Retention rates for foundation modern apprentices and learners on other work-based learning programmes have improved. The retention rates for foundation modern apprentices in 1998-99, 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02 are 0 per cent, 8 per cent, 24 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. No learners were retained on other work-based learning programmes between 1998 and 2000. For 2000-01 and 2001-02 retention rates are 8 per cent and 71 per cent respectively.

39. Changes in the current year to the standards of the customer service NVQ, and the internal promotion of two assessors, have had an impact on achievement rates. Few learners achieve the full modern apprenticeship framework. Since 1998, only three foundation modern apprentices and four advanced modern apprentices have achieved the full framework. Although learners have an initial assessment of their key skills, and there are new key skills learning materials, learners who have been on the training

programme for more than a year are not assessed for key skills until they have completed their NVQ. Key skills training and assessment is not integrated with the training programme for most learners and some learners are delayed from achieving the full framework. One assessor is beginning to link key skills training with the NVQs in customer service. Progress reviews are not used to collect evidence for key skills.

40. Off-the-job training is poor. The induction programme and any additional learning support takes place at the training centre. There is no planned off-the-job training. All training is carried out in the workplace by assessors, who are also trainers, or the employers. Assessors carry out the training with individual learners. This is poorly planned. There is inadequate use of training materials by the assessors. Learners are not provided with effective training materials to support their learning between assessor visits. One assessor, however, uses an employer's training package for merchandising training. Copies of handouts are poorly produced and are not used consistently by the assessors. Assessors record where assessment and training is carried out but do not use this to update the individual learning plans. Some portfolios of evidence contain certificates of attendance for employer's courses. These are not used to update the individual learning plans.

41. Three new assessors have been employed in the past four months and most learners have been allocated to these assessors. Only one of these assessors has the assessor qualification and none have training or coaching qualifications. The self-assessment report has recognised through the development plan that training material for the vocational part of the programme is required. The target date for this to be met is June 2002. Systematic use of vocational initial assessment and skill scanning is not happening and this would ensure that all learners' training needs could be met and training could be planned with the employers or with off-the-job training sessions. This would also give learners different experiences and allow them to be observed in different environments while mixing with, and communicating with different people. Training or coaching skills training has not been carried out with new assessors and not all learners are receiving challenging or inspiring learning experiences.

Good Practice

Nova staff have helped two learners become learner assessors. The previous experiences of these new assessors will enable them to empathise with learners.

Poor Practice

Decisions by unqualified assessors are not countersigned by a second assessor.

Foundation programmes

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	42	2

42. There are 42 learners on the Life Skills option of the Learning Gateway. The training is provided at the two training centres in Willenhall and Netherton. The Life Skills training programme lasts for up to 15 weeks. Learners can stay on the training programme for longer if necessary. Learners attend the training centres for a minimum of 16 hours over four days each week. On the remaining weekday learners attend the training centres for their progress reviews. Learners are referred from the careers service. Learners receive an induction on their first day, with most learners completing a nationally recognised screening test. At the Willenhall training centre learners plan their activities for the next week during their progress review. The Netherton training centre has a four-week rolling programme of activities for learners. This includes individual and group work to develop basic skills, jobsearch skills, personal and communication skills, and IT skills. One learner at the Willenhall training centre is on work placement and two other learners have interviews arranged to start a work placement. At the Netherton training centre five learners are on work placement and seven other learners are working towards a motor vehicle tyre maintenance qualification. External organisations contribute to the training programme. Learners can attend a five-day residential activity course. Some learners' work towards externally accredited qualifications in IT, emergency first aid and food hygiene. Progress reviews are held each week with the training co-ordinator and monthly with the personal adviser. Staff have training backgrounds including instruction in outdoor activities. Basic skills trainers are appropriately qualified.

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

Foundation Programmes										
Foundation Programmes	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started			29		57		122		111
Still in training			0	0	0	0	3	2	39	35
Gained job with training/progressed to further training and/or planned learning completed			15	52	18	32	62	51	40	36
Left without either			21	72	46	81	101	83	72	65
Gained job with training			8	28	9	16	21	17	15	14
Progressed to further training			7	24	9	16	41	34	25	23
Planned learning completed			8	28	11	19	3	2	0	0

STRENGTHS

- well-structured and well-planned training programme
- effective use of work placements
- continuous reviews and recording of learning
- effective basic skills support

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate accommodation
- no target-setting and recording for development of personal skills

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better information exchange and records for work placements
- clearer process for communication with parents or carers

43. The training programme is well structured and well planned. The learner agrees their timetable at their weekly progress review. Although there is an overall structure to the programme, including planned activities, there is enough flexibility to allow learners to plan activities suitable to their own individual learning needs. Specific basic skills training is provided throughout the Life Skills training programme. Other activities, such as planning trips out, are used for the development of basic skills and personal skills.

There are planned outside visits and a local college provides half-day courses such as use of Internet, personal presentation, and local history. Learners can work with a local organisation for one day each week to complete a project for the community. Once this is completed, learners are able to attend a residential course. All learners are given jobsearch training. Learners from both training centres sometimes carry out particular activities and trips together. Activities are arranged to reflect and celebrate cultural diversity. All learners complete an individual project and also take part in group activities. Learners interested in developing IT skills join other learners to take externally accredited qualifications.

44. There is effective use of work placements. Work placements are found promptly and are well matched to learners individual learning needs. Work placements cover a wide variety of occupations and vary in size, from small charity shops to large retail outlets. They are also arranged so that the learners' attendance can vary in length of time during the week. The overall length of the work placement can also vary. Most learners have completed more than two placements and some as many as five. Work placements are effective in helping learners find out their own career aspirations. Many learners have gone on to further training or employment during their work placements.

45. Progress reviews are effective. All learners have a progress review each week with trainers. Learners receive their allowance after each progress review. Learners provide feedback about the previous week's activities and what they have learnt. This feedback is used to inform decisions about the following week's activities. The trainer records this feedback and adds comments on the learners' progress and learning. Individual learning plans are updated at each progress review. Any other issues or additional learning support is recorded in the learner's file. Monthly progress reviews are carried out with the learner's personal adviser. Targets set with the personal adviser are reviewed at each progress review. Although comments on progress reviews sheets are general, the frequent and regular reviewing of learners' progress helps maintain learners' motivation and confidence. Certificates provided by the training provider are given to learners when they complete skills such as problem-solving and jobsearch skills.

46. There is effective basic skills support. All learners carry out an initial basic skills assessment. Some learners carry out a basic and key skills assessment. For those learners who need additional basic skills support, a detailed action plan and individual learning plan is drawn up and reviewed each week. Basic skills support is given on an individual basis and also in small groups. All trainers have carried out relevant basic skills training. The organisation has a nationally recognised standard for basic skills provisions. Learners demonstrate and report progress being made. Many of the basic skills activities are in the context of the learners' interests or work placement.

47. Accommodation at the training centres is inadequate. There is not enough table space for all the learners to work on their individual projects. Heating facilities are inadequate. The room used for IT has no windows and is poorly ventilated. There are no designated rooms for private discussion or counselling. Training sessions are easily disturbed by noise from other training rooms. In one training room a large pillar in the

middle of the room obstructs the vision of those sitting the other side of it.

48. Targets are not set during the monthly progress reviews with the personal adviser. Learners write their individual development plan with their personal adviser. General goals are set during this process, such as improving confidence. Progression of this type of learning continues to be referred to in general terms. No specific targets are set to give a more objective view of the learners' progress or to ensure that the learner is aware of their own progress. During progress reviews a general reference is made to the link between activities and the skills developed by the learner, but it is not translated into specific targets relevant to each learner.

49. When learners go on work placement the workplace supervisor receives a general introductory letter but no specific details regarding the learner, the purpose of the work placements or what the learner will be doing. The employer is given no general information about the Life Skills training programme. No records are kept of contact or visits by the trainer. Not all work placements complete the tick box assessment of the learners. Parents or carers can attend the initial interview with their son or daughter but only find this out on request. For those learners who have no objection to their parents being contacted, no general information is sent to them to tell them what Life Skills is about and how they can be involved.

Good Practice

There is effective use of NVQ unit performance criteria to help workplace supervisors record learners' training and assessment. A statement by the learners on how they have met the criteria is countersigned by the workplace supervisor.

Poor Practice

Learners repeat a basic and key skills assessment during a learning session run by an external trainer. The trainer was not aware that the information was already available.