

INSPECTION REPORT

Project Management (Staffordshire) Limited

11 March 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 **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

Project Management (Staffordshire) Limited is a limited company based in Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent. It offers programmes of work-based learning for young people and training in Life Skills.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Training in construction, engineering, technology and manufacturing and foundation for work is good. Training is satisfactory in retailing, customer service and transportation. The leadership and management of Project Management (Staffordshire) Limited are good.

GRADES

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

Construction	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

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

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

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- high rates of retention, achievement and progression into employment and further training
- well-devised additional activities
- effective promotion of work-based learning
- good planning
- productive links with external bodies
- good quality of learners' work
- good work placements
- frequent assessment in response to learners' progress
- good promotion of equal opportunities
- good staff development
- thorough self-assessment and effective action-planning

KEY WEAKNESSES

- inadequate procedures to assure quality
- lack of targets relating to retention and achievement
- delays in monitoring health and safety at some employers' premises
- poor reviews of learners' progress

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- broader range of assessment methods in engineering
- better learning materials
- systems for communicating information about learners
- more thorough recording of internal audits
- thorough internal verification throughout the company

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 32 days with Project Management (Staffordshire) Limited (Project Management) in March 2002. The inspection covered work-based learning for young people and training in Life Skills. Inspectors interviewed the managing director of Project Management and carried out 68 further interviews with managers and staff at Project Management and its subcontractors. They interviewed 109 learners, carried out 35 interviews with workplace managers and supervisors and visited four subcontractors. They examined 72 portfolios of evidence, 80 individual learning plans and other documents relating to the training provider's work. They examined data on retention and achievement. Inspectors observed and graded 10 lessons. They studied the self-assessment report and action plan, which had been produced in October 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	6
Foundation programmes	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	0	6	3	1	0	0	0	10

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Project Management was formed in 1982 to provide occupational and personal development for young people and adults. The company is based on a single site in Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent. It employs 39 staff and provides training for 404 government-funded learners. Four learners are foundation modern apprentices, 304 learners are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and 96 learners are following foundation programmes. Project Management also provides commercial training, using the profits to enhance its government-funded training. In addition, the company has places for 26 for pupils aged 14 to 16 who have been excluded from school or are at risk of exclusion. Project Management uses subcontractors to provide some of the training, assessment and internal verification.

3. Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds the training. The area's traditional steel, coal, ceramic and tyre industries are being replaced by industries based on new technology and leisure and tourism. The area has received government and European funding to tackle deprivation. In September 2001, the rate of unemployment in Staffordshire was 3.5 per cent, compared with a national average of 2.9 per cent. Of the unemployed, 31.3 per cent were aged 18 to 24, compared with 26 per cent nationally. In 1999, 67 per cent of school leavers in Staffordshire continued in full-time education. Ten per cent entered government-funded training and 6 per cent entered part-time education. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs), at grade C or above in Staffordshire was 48.2 per cent, compared with a national average of 50 per cent. The proportion in Stoke-on-Trent was much lower, at 35.6 per cent. The 1991 census found that the proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups was 1.9 per cent in Staffordshire as a whole and 3.1 per cent in Stoke-on-Trent, compared with a national average of 6.4 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

4. Learners in construction produce a wide range of good evidence for their portfolios. They attend good work placements with supportive employers. A high proportion of learners progress to regular employment. However, there is little target-setting during reviews of learners' progress. In engineering, technology and manufacturing, rates of retention and achievement are high. Learners produce good practical and academic work. Assessment is frequent and responsive to the needs of learners and employers. Reviews of learners' progress are poor. In retailing, customer service and transportation, retention and achievement rates are high. Learners benefit from good work placements and frequent and responsive assessment in the workplace. However, progress reviews are poor.

Life Skills

5. Rates of retention and progression to further training are high. The Life Skills learning programme is good. However, some learning materials are poor.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

6. Project Management employs 36 full-time and three part-time staff. Its senior management team comprises the managing director, the general manager and the company secretary. The general manager is responsible for training and the company secretary is responsible for accounts and administration. Both report to the managing director. Six managers and departmental leaders report to the general manager. Seven accounting and administrative staff report to the company secretary. Project Management has policies and procedures on equality of opportunity and on quality assurance. The company was accredited in 1997 with the Investors in People Standard, an award for organisations that improve their performance by investing in their staff. In August 2000, it was accredited as a provider of good-quality training in basic skills. Both accreditations still apply. Project Management produced its third and most recent self-assessment report in October 2001.

STRENGTHS

- well-devised additional activities
- effective promotion of work-based learning
- good planning
- productive links with external bodies
- open and consultative management
- good staff development
- good management of training
- good promotion of equal opportunities
- good awareness of equal opportunities among staff
- thorough self-assessment and effective action-planning

WEAKNESSES

- lack of targets for increasing retention and achievement rates
- little sharing of good practice
- delays in monitoring health and safety at some employers' premises
- insufficient reinforcement of equal opportunities in the workplace and during progress reviews
- inadequate procedures to assure quality

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- further development of communication systems
- better guidelines for staff and employers on bullying and harassment
- better access to learning for people with restricted mobility
- more thorough recording of internal audits

7. Project Management enhances its learning programmes with a wide range of extra activities which learners take up with enthusiasm. These include outdoor activities, such as rock-climbing, abseiling, potholing and water sports. Learners practise cooking and serving food and other domestic tasks, while taking part in these activities. Learners also have the opportunity to take part in adventure activities and sport. The company owns a canal narrowboat for learners' use. Learners take good care of the facilities and equipment.

8. Project Management promotes work-based learning effectively. It has built very good relationships with local schools. A wide range of local and national providers of work-based learning and pupils from 27 schools attended the company's yearly careers event. The company is working effectively with new local industries to promote work-based learning to their staff. This has increased take-up of training by people who have had few other opportunities to participate and has improved productivity in several companies. Project Management has worked with the local council on projects funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) to provide learning opportunities for young people who have not been successful at school. These projects benefit the local community as well as providing training. They have improved estates in the city and helped to build relationships between younger and older people in the community.

9. The business development plan is updated every six months. Staff receive copies of the plan each time it is updated and are familiar with its contents. The plan contains a mission statement and an introduction supporting the statement. The main body of the plan sets out detailed corporate targets, together with dates for achieving them and the names of the staff responsible. A section of the plan gives details of the staff development necessary to achieve the targets. The plan also contains a summary of the company's strategy and objectives. The company uses this plan, together with the self-assessment action plan, to make ongoing improvements.

10. The company has built productive links with external bodies and is continuing to extend these. Together with the local council, it has successfully bid for money from the ESF to fund painting and decorating projects, projects to clear and maintain gardens for elderly people, and projects to provide soft furnishings. An arrangement between Project Management and two other training providers allows each of the three to refer learners to the one that can best meet their needs. Links between Project Management and training providers in Germany, Holland and Spain allow some learners to travel to those countries. The company has excellent relationships with local employers, which provide good work placements and opportunities for employment.

11. The senior management team adopts and encourages an open and consultative management style. It encourages staff throughout the organisation to use the same style when managing learners. The senior managers are well known to all staff and learners. Staff appreciate managers' open-door policy, which contributes to high morale. Project Management has created an environment in which teamwork flourishes.

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12. Staff appraisals are effective and well recorded. Each appraiser has an appropriate number of staff to appraise. Appraisals take place once each year. They focus on development rather than performance. The system for dealing with poor performance is inadequate. It has no stages in between informal discussion and the disciplinary procedure. Targets for individual staff that relate to the company's objectives are set out in the business development plan but are not discussed during appraisals. However, reviews of progress against personal targets take place during appraisals.

13. Project Management encourages all its staff to undertake training and other development. Most staff development relates directly to learners' needs. However, staff are also encouraged to pursue their own interests. The current emphasis is on basic skills, managing anger, key skills and working with disadvantaged learners. Project Management records all staff development thoroughly. Staff turnover is very low.

14. Training is well managed. Training towards many NVQs takes place entirely in the workplace. Project Management designs training in the workplace to tie in with employers' other activities. Many employers focus on productivity. Their learners must remain productive to obtain bonuses and maintain their incomes. As employers realise the benefits of training, training plans are developing and improving.

15. Project Management lacks targets for improving rates of retention and achievement. The teams that deliver each learning programme are not aware of their retention and achievement rates. Nor do they have clear targets for increasing rates of retention and achievement. Project Management does not set its subcontractors targets for retention and achievement. Nor do the subcontractors routinely set their own targets.

16. Staff do not share good practice effectively. Some learning programmes are managed exceptionally well, while others within the same occupational area are not. Some excellent practice in managing learning programmes has not been shared across the organisation. Project Management also fails to identify good practice in the companies it works with. Project Management lacks a system for identifying and sharing good practice.

17. Many visits to monitor health and safety at employers' premises are behind schedule. Some staff underestimate the importance of these visits and consider them unnecessary unless they have particular concerns about an employer. Initial health and safety checks on employers are thorough and well recorded. Project Management monitors health and safety at its own premises well. It carries out frequent and thorough inspections, keeps full records of the results and swiftly implements any necessary actions.

18. Communications within Project Management are satisfactory. However, there are no regular meetings of the senior management team. The organisation has no system for team briefings. Trainers who work at the training centre meet fortnightly but those

who work at other locations do not meet regularly. The main purpose of the fortnightly meetings is to check the programme of activities. Other important issues are not discussed. Some recent initiatives have improved communications. Elected representatives of staff now report the views and suggestions of staff to senior managers at a management forum. A newsletter is now circulated among staff. Project Management communicates well with external organisations. Meetings are regular, well recorded and productive.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

19. Project Management promotes equality of opportunity throughout the organisation. It guarantees all applicants a place on one of its learning programmes, regardless of their background. The company organises well-attended careers fairs to publicise learning opportunities to local school pupils. It has helped several learners with disabilities to obtain full-time employment. Data on equal opportunities are collated quarterly. Analysis of the data for 2000 and 2001 has identified under-represented groups and has been used to guide recruitment. Project Management promotes equal opportunities in its promotional materials. Project Management works with the local LSC and an organisation that promotes racial equality to produce promotional materials that target minority ethnic groups. Materials are produced in Urdu. Gender stereotyping is avoided. Currently, the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is similar to the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the local community. Eighteen per cent of learners are women. Project Management's equal opportunities policy takes into account current legislation and complies with the requirements of the local LSC. The policy is reviewed each year. It is included, together with the disciplinary and grievance procedures, in the learners' logbook and the staff handbook. The policy is explained to learners and staff at their induction. At their induction, learners also watch a video promoting equality of opportunity. A learners' charter is displayed at the training centre setting out learners' rights and responsibilities.

20. All staff are trained in equal opportunities every two years. The training is comprehensive, covering interviewing, local demographics and rehabilitation of young offenders. All staff have a deep understanding of all aspects of equality of opportunity.

21. Project Management does not systematically monitor employers' promotion of equal opportunities. Several employers have no equal opportunities policy. The company has sent these employers a copy of its own equal opportunities policy but has not followed this up. Learners' views on equal opportunities are not sought during progress reviews unless they happen to arise during the discussion. Although Project Management does not systematically monitor and reinforce equal opportunities in the workplace, it acts swiftly to resolve any problems that arise. It has stopped the display of inappropriate materials in one workplace and ended discrimination in one employer's criteria for selection.

22. Complaint procedures form part of the disciplinary procedures. Anti-harassment is covered by the equal opportunities policy. Project Management lacks separate policies on bullying, harassment and substance misuse. There is a complaints box in the canteen but there have been no complaints in the past year.

23. Wheelchair users cannot access all parts of the training centre. Project Management is continuing to discuss how to improve access with the local LSC. However, the layout of the premises makes it difficult to provide access for people with mobility difficulties. Project Management interviews people who cannot use its training centre at the careers centre or in their homes.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

24. Self-assessment is thorough. All staff were involved in producing the self-assessment report. Effective action-planning leads to continuous improvement. The business development plan contains an action plan that is linked to the self-assessment report. Many actions are carried out before their target dates. All staff have copies of the business development plan. Action-planning has led to a newsletter, which has improved communications with staff, learners and employers. The training centre is undergoing extensive refurbishment to improve the facilities for training and assessment and an Internet café is being built. Computer-based systems are being introduced to monitor all learners' progress in a consistent way. The self-assessment report sometimes fails to distinguish between procedures at the training centre and procedures in the workplace.

25. Project Management has recently appointed a quality assurance manager. It now has written policies and procedures to assure quality. However, the arrangements to assure quality are not followed consistently and do not yet cover all aspects of training. The company has recently introduced surveys to gather feedback from learners, employers and staff but the response rate has been too low for these to produce useful information. Project Management has recently updated its staff handbook to include information about the quality assurance system. Staff understand their roles in assuring quality but do not understand how these relate to the quality assurance system as a whole. Training sessions are not observed, although the quality of training is noted during assessment. Practices vary in different parts of the organisation.

26. Project Management uses paper-based management-information systems and has few networked computers. This makes it difficult to obtain and manipulate data. The company does not analyse data on retention and achievement to identify trends. Information about performance is collated by individual departments but is not analysed centrally. However, the company uses a database effectively to follow up early leavers.

27. Project Management used to rely on six-monthly audits by a consultant. The quality assurance manager has recently assumed responsibility for internal auditing. The recording of internal audits remains insufficiently thorough.

28. The internal verifiers meet regularly with the assessors to plan internal verification and to sample work. All assessors' work is checked twice each year. Internal verification is insufficiently thorough in some areas. The company does not monitor the consistency of internal verification. The procedure for internal verification is clear but different practices have developed in some areas in response to external verifiers' requirements. The company's effective centralised monitoring of assessment leads to good planning of internal verification.

Good Practice

A former learner with a disability now works full-time as a building services technician at the training centre.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	79	2

29. Project Management provides training in construction leading to NVQs at levels 1 to 3. The company is an accredited training centre for qualifications in painting and decorating, and has 27 learners working towards level 1 NVQs and 36 learners working towards level 2 NVQs in that trade. Learners in other trades attend local further education colleges on a day-release basis. Four learners are following NVQs at level 2 in gas installation and one is following an NVQ at level 3. Three bench joiners, three plumbers, two wood machinists, one site carpenter and one learner in electrical installation are following level 2 NVQs and one site carpenter is following a level 3 NVQ. No learners in the occupational area of construction are foundation or advanced modern apprentices.

30. Most learners start their training at the company's training centre. They participate in a three-week taster programme before deciding which trade to follow. The company carries out an initial assessment of learners' basic skills during this period. Most learners are then allocated to employers and start working towards NVQs at level 1 or 2. Most new learners in painting and decorating attend a 26-week scheme with the local council that involves redecorating empty homes. These learners also attend the training centre for one day each week to receive training in background knowledge and help with building portfolios for their level 1 NVQs. Their workplace supervisors help them gather evidence from the workplace towards their portfolios. A well-qualified assessor and a trainer provide training at the training centre and regularly visit learners in the workplace. Some learners are placed with appropriate employers. A development officer reviews the progress of college-based learners, visiting them frequently at college and at the workplace. A specialist consultant carries out internal verification for learners based at the training centre. Other internal verification is subcontracted to the college. Most learners who achieve the targets on their individual learning plans continue in regular employment.

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	56		88		60		63									
Retained*	47		43		35		28										
Successfully completed	1		12		30		25										
Still in learning	46		31		2		0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- good career guidance for learners on taster programme
- effective and motivating training at the training centre
- good range of evidence in portfolios
- good work placements with supportive employers
- good monitoring of learners' progress
- high rate of progression to regular employment

WEAKNESSES

- weak links between training in the workplace and training at college
- little target-setting during progress reviews

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- closer monitoring of subcontracted colleges

31. Many learners join the training scheme on the recommendation of past learners or family members. Others join as a result of career events or school visits to the training centre. Those who attend the three-week taster programme receive good counselling

and make informed choices of career. Realistic targets are set during this period and recorded on individual learning plans. Trainers make good use of learning materials. Staff assess learners' basic skills and arrange any necessary additional learning support. Learners in painting and decorating receive good training in the company's workshops. Staff at the training centre maintain close links with their workplace managers and supervisors. Learners who join the local council's scheme to redecorate empty homes have their progress closely monitored. They carry out work of an appropriate quality and quickly learn to work in teams.

32. The quality of teaching at the training centre is good. Learners benefit from well-motivated staff who understand their needs. The company is moving its painting and decorating workshop into spacious and well-resourced premises. However, some areas lack extraction and adequate ventilation. Learners understand the requirements of their qualifications and can effectively cross-reference evidence towards their NVQs. Painting and decorating portfolios are comprehensive and contain good photographic evidence. Staff provide good feedback on learners' work, which helps them to make progress. The procedures for internal verification are appropriate and meet the requirements of the awarding body. There are good systems for monitoring learners' progress. Staff and learners are clear about learners' achievements.

33. Through its good reputation, Project Management has built up a large pool of employers that are willing to offer work placements. Several employers are former learners. Project Management checks all work placements to ensure that they are of a good quality. The work placements provide learners with opportunities to gain the skills they need to achieve their qualifications. Most learners are given appropriate responsibilities. Learners often work with little supervision. Employers ensure that learners have appropriate tools to carry out their work and encourage learners to build up their own tool kits. Assessors visit learners frequently at the workplace and at the training centre or college to monitor their progress. During the early stages of their training, many learners receive weekly visits in addition to their 12-weekly progress reviews. Staff are supportive towards learners. They give learners clear information about the procedures for raising any problems they are experiencing and deal with learners' concerns promptly.

34. Of those learners who achieve the targets on their individual learning plans, more than three quarters progress to regular employment in their chosen trades. Rates of retention have improved over the past four years, especially since 2001, with 84 per cent of learners remaining in training.

35. The training provided by the local colleges of further education is not as good as the training provided at the training centre. Learners study in groups with other students at the college. These sometimes fail to meet their specific needs. Some learners do not receive training in key skills at college. Links between learners' activities at college and at work are weak, with little gathering of evidence from the workplace. Few learners who attend college have logbooks for recording their activities at work. Project Management has no service level agreements with the subcontracted colleges.

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Frequent assessors' visits have resulted in better handling of learners' problems at college. However, the company does not monitor the subcontractors thoroughly to ensure that they are meeting learners' specific needs. The subcontractors produce six-monthly reports on each learner's progress but these lack detail.

36. Although Project Management records achievement of overall targets, it rarely uses progress reviews to set short-term targets for learners. Few learners have target dates for achieving their qualifications.

Engineering, technology & manufacturing**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	196	2

37. Project Management provides training towards a wide range of NVQs at levels 1 and 2 in engineering and manufacturing for over 100 employers. Most employers are based within six miles of Stoke-on-Trent. Learners can specialise in general engineering, welding and fabrication, gas installation, furniture production and restoration, glass processing and production occupations. They work towards NVQs at levels 1 and 2 in performing engineering operations and NVQs at level 2 in performing manufacturing operations and machining, assembly and processing skills. Training is provided at the training centre, in the workplace and by local subcontractors. The learning programmes take between six months and two years to complete. Four foundation modern apprentices are working towards level 2 NVQs and 192 learners are following other work-based learning programmes leading towards NVQs at levels 1 and 2. Half the learners are recruited directly by their employers. Project Management offers three to four weeks' preparatory training to learners before they start their work placements. Learners practise a range of skills and their suitability for various occupations is assessed. Workplace mentors and supervisors provide on-the-job training. Four of Project Management's staff are qualified to teach key skills to learners. Six qualified assessors and two internal verifiers carry out assessment and internal verification at the training centre and in the workplace. Some employers have qualified work-based assessors. Project Management's staff carry out initial assessments of learners attending the training centre. Learners attend a day's induction to their learning programmes. This takes place in the training centre or at the workplace or both. At their induction, learners sign a checklist to confirm that they understand their role and responsibilities. Assessors arrange day-to-day support for learners. They visit learners every four weeks during the first three months of training. After the first three months, they review learners' progress at least once every 12 weeks. Individual learners' records are held at the company's head office, or with larger employers, in secure offices at the workplace.

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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)															
	2000-01														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	6														
Retained*	4														
Successfully completed	0														
Still in learning	4														

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people															
NVQ Training															
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99								
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	232		170		327		73								
Retained*	181		94		238	73	47	64							
Successfully completed	4		79		238	73	47	64							
Still in learning	177		15		0	0	0	0							

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- high rates of retention and achievement
- good quality of learners' work
- frequent assessment in response to learners' progress
- wide choice of work placements
- effective monitoring of learners' progress

WEAKNESSES

- lack of planned training in some workplaces
- poor understanding of NVQs by some employers
- poor reviews of learners' progress

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better access to portfolios for learners
- broader range of assessment methods in engineering
- more thorough updating of individual learning plans

38. Rates of retention and achievement are high. In 1998-99, 64 per cent of learners achieved the targets on their individual learning plans. In 1999-2000, the proportion was 73 per cent. Over the past four years, the rate of retention has averaged 70 per cent. During the same period, 84 per cent of learners progressed to employment.

39. Many learners produce work of a quality better than that required to achieve their level 2 NVQs. Those who are working towards engineering foundation NVQs, carry out tests on the welds they produce to assess the quality of their work. Learners take great pride in their work and are proud of their achievements. In the workplace, learners perform appropriate production tasks. Most learners specialise in glass production, mobile phone servicing or furniture manufacturing.

40. Learners are assessed frequently, as their progress demands. Qualified assessors visit most learners in the workplace every one to four weeks to carry out assessments. They visit some companies with learners on short courses for four days of the week. Assessors make additional visits as required, to meet the needs of learners on shifts and of those who work at weekends. They use a wide range of assessment methods. Assessments take place when learners complete elements and units. The assessors establish good relationships with employers. They can negotiate with employers to broaden the range of tasks that learners carry out. The assessors are in control of portfolio-building. Most portfolios remain with the assessor at all times. This means that some learners do not have daily access to the paperwork they need. Some managers, however, keep portfolios in the workplace. The portfolios are satisfactory and meet the awarding bodies' requirements. All learners have their assessor's telephone number and can contact their assessor at any time. Internal verification is satisfactory.

41. Over 100 companies offer work placements and permanent employment to learners. These offer good opportunities for learners to build their skills and gather

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evidence in a wide range of engineering and manufacturing occupations. There is open access to learning programmes in both engineering and manufacturing. The three-week preparatory training, guides learners into fields they want to work in or into closely related areas. The training that takes place in the workplace is good. Any problems are quickly detected and resolved. Employers value Project Management's role in supplying potential learners and overseeing learners' training. Production in one company has increased as a result of learners' training. Learners benefit especially from training in health and safety.

42. Project Management has clear, well-presented charts that indicate the progress of all learners. The charts are generated by computer and are updated weekly. They show learners' achievement of elements and units of their qualifications. Staff can easily detect any slow progress from the charts and take remedial action. As they are filled in, the charts increase learners' confidence and motivation. However, a few learners, in smaller companies, have not seen the charts and are unclear about their progress.

43. Some training in the workplace is not planned. Some employers do not tailor learners' tasks to the NVQs that they are working towards. Learners work in teams, each with a skilled operative, and learn by watching the operatives carry out tasks. The operatives then assist learners in developing their skills. This meets employers' demands but does not always help learners to meet the requirements of their NVQs.

44. Some employers and learners do not understand the structure and content of learners' NVQs. These employers are unable to guide learners effectively and support them in achieving their qualifications. They do not appreciate the value of NVQs and the benefits of training for the company and the learner. Communications between these employers and the development officers are weak.

45. Project Management does not systematically assess new learners who are already in employment. The initial assessment of other learners is effective. Regular assessors' visits do identify learners' individual needs, which are met effectively. However, learners can be some way into their training before this happens. Some learners with larger employers are unwilling to admit to having learning difficulties.

46. Learner's progress reviews are poor. The development officer briefly discusses the findings of the progress review with the workplace supervisor following discussion with the learner. The development officer rarely meets with the learner and the workplace supervisor together. The form for recording the progress review does not have a section for the workplace supervisor to comment on the learner's progress. Some progress reviews are carried out through discussion over the telephone. Equal opportunities is not reinforced during progress reviews. Project Management identified this weakness in its self-assessment report and has introduced new paperwork for progress reviews which take place at the training centre. The revised paperwork is not yet used for all progress reviews in the workplace. Many learners are not set appropriate targets at their progress reviews.

47. Learners in engineering are assessed when they attend the training centre on day release. They do not gather evidence from the workplace, where they spend most of their time. Assessors do not observe learners carrying out day-to-day activities in the workplace.

48. Learners' working towards units of their NVQs are assessed on an ongoing basis. Learners' achievement of units is not recorded on their individual learning plans. Some plans do not accurately record the NVQ the learner is working towards.

Good Practice

One employer has a dedicated area for learners to practise producing window components. The employer encourages good health and safety practice from the early stages of training. Tools and equipment are well organised. The employer uses this learning environment to improve health and safety in the department as a whole.

Poor Practice

In manufacturing, assessors observe learners and set them questions to test their background knowledge. Some answers had been written down by assessors, although the learners involved had no difficulties with writing. Other answers had been left blank but assessors had recorded that the units had been completed.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	33	3

49. Project management offers training towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in distribution and warehousing. Most of the learners work for two local employers. Most learners have worked for their employers for between six months and three years. One learner was placed with an employer after completing the foundation programme. Project Management recruits learners through marketing at the employers' premises. Thirty-one learners are working towards level 2 NVQs and two learners are working towards level 3 NVQs. Assessors carry out an induction and an initial assessment in the learner's workplace. Training takes place in the workplace. Assessors visit learners every two to three weeks to observe them in the workplace. The assessors also carry out reviews of learners' progress. Project Management employs two qualified assessors and two qualified internal verifiers to cover NVQs at level 2. One of the assessors is based at one of the employer's premises most of the time. One of the assessors is also a qualified trainer. Assessment and internal verification for level 3 NVQs are carried out by a subcontractor.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	75		121		144		178								
Retained*	45		75		90	62	123	69								
Successfully completed	17		65		90	62	123	69								
Still in learning	23		10		0	0	0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- high rates of retention and achievement
- good work placements
- frequent and responsive assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ineffective initial assessments
- weak internal verification
- poor reviews of learners' progress

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- wider range of assessment methods
- distance learning materials

50. Of the 178 learners who started in 1998-99, 63 per cent stayed in training and achieved their NVQs. Of the 144 learners who started in 1999-2000, 63 per cent stayed in training and achieved their NVQs. In 2000-01, 121 learners started training. Of these, 54 per cent have achieved their NVQs and a further 8 per cent are still in training. In 2001-02, 75 learners had started learning programmes by the time of the inspection. Of these, 17 had achieved NVQs by the time of the inspection and 23 were still in training. One learner has transferred to a foundation programme with Project Management. Most learners who stay in training achieve their NVQs. Project Management recognised this strength in its self-assessment report.

51. Two local employers employ most of the learners. Both are supportive of NVQs and of training in general. They celebrate their learners' achievements through award ceremonies and in their publicity material. Local newspapers are used to publicise learners' achievements and the benefits to employers of NVQ training. The employers allow Project Management's staff to visit at any time and allow assessments to take place whenever the need arises. The assessors have filing cabinets and desks at the employers' premises. Learners move around the warehouses to gain the evidence they need for their NVQs. All the employers provide appropriate work experience for learners. One employer has asked Project Management's assessors to use their observations of learners to provide advice about how to increase productivity.

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52. Frequent assessors' visits have enhanced relationships between assessors, learners and workplace supervisors. One assessor is based at an employer's premises for most of the time and is in daily contact with learners. The assessor has an office at the employer's premises. The assessors work outside normal office hours when necessary. They are sensitive to employers' needs and conduct assessments accordingly.

53. Learners receive an induction to the workplace from their employers and an induction to their NVQs from Project Management. Project Management does not take learners' previous experience into account when drawing up their individual learning plans. Two learners had achieved NVQs before joining their learning programmes. Although this was recorded in their individual learning plans, their previously gained knowledge and skills were not accredited. During an initial occupational assessment, learners identify NVQ units that they can gather evidence towards in their roles at work. Learners do not assess their current skills and training needs during the initial assessment. Individual learning plans do not record learning needs and preferred styles of learning. The initial assessment does not cover individuals' special assessment requirements or assessment preferences. Individual learning plans do record how frequently learners' progress will be reviewed and which NVQs and units they are pursuing.

54. The internal verifiers lack the up-to-date occupational competence that is required by the awarding bodies. External verifiers have commented on this twice but Project Management has not arranged for the internal verifiers to update their skills and knowledge. Internal verification has failed to rectify the lack of planning of assessments. Although the internal verifiers observe the assessors, they do not check that they are meeting all the national standards for assessors. Internal verification has not highlighted the need for a greater variety of evidence in learners' portfolios. Assessors' meetings do not cover the regular updates and guidance received from the awarding body.

55. Assessors complete the records of learners' progress reviews with little involvement of learners. They record the unit numbers of the NVQ that the learner is working on and of the units that the learner has achieved, but they do not record the competences that learners have acquired. The assessors record learners' achievement of units on a matrix. Learners are not encouraged to complete any part of the progress review form themselves. Some assessors are not confident that they can complete the form correctly. Workplace supervisors sign the form after the progress review has taken place. They are not familiar with learners' NVQs and cannot use information gathered during progress reviews to assist learners' progress. The records of progress reviews are kept in learners' files with copies given to the learners. Learners have little understanding of the process.

56. Assessors observe learners' performance for each element of their NVQs. Learners also answer written questions to demonstrate their background knowledge. Learners do not produce any other types of evidence. All learners' portfolios are very similar. Learners are not encouraged to suggest activities that could generate evidence or to describe workplace evidence. Learners do not have distance learning materials to help

them develop their knowledge.

Good Practice

The managing director of Project Management is involved in learners' inductions. When groups of new learners enrol to take NVQs, the managing director visits their workplace to give a presentation welcoming them and explaining the benefits of NVQs.

Foundation programmes

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	96	2

57. Project Management provides the Learning Gateway's Life Skills programme. It also offers preparatory training for learners with additional learning needs. This training consists of a 12-week prevocational programme. Project Management has obtained additional funding to support learners for up to 52 weeks if required. This enables it to offer training to all who apply. Learners approach Project Management directly or are referred from the careers service or the Employment Service. Project Management assesses the basic skills of new learners and identifies the skills they need to get a job. Learners can obtain help with finding employment throughout their time on the learning programme. During the first three weeks, learners can attend taster sessions in areas such as painting and decorating, gardening, building and basic engineering. They normally spend one week trying out each activity. During this time, learners and staff regularly discuss the most appropriate occupational route for the learner to follow. Learners on the Life Skills programme go on work placements in carpet-fitting, gardening and painting and decorating. Learners who succeed in these work placements are then placed with an employer for further work experience. During the work placements, learners have regular reviews to discuss their progress. Learners progress from these programmes to mainstream learning programmes leading to NVQs in a range of occupational areas, such as engineering, painting and decorating, manufacturing and construction. Project Management sets each learner four personal milestones to help them progress to further training or employment.

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

Work-based learning for young people															
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	99		119		175										
Retained*	74		104	87	133	76									
Successfully completed	56		104	87	132	75									
Still in learning	7		0	0	0	0									

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
Life Skills																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	177		204		200											
Retained*	139		165		151											
Successfully completed	62		127		138											
Still in learning	12		38		39											

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- good Life Skills learning programme
- good, personalised support for learners
- effective communication with other agencies
- high rates of retention and progression to further training

WEAKNESSES

- some poor learning materials
- poor co-ordination of preparation learning programme

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- greater use of learners' feedback in planning training
- systems for communicating information about learners

58. The Learning Gateway's Life Skills programme is well designed. Learners undergo a comprehensive initial assessment that identifies their strengths and weaknesses. Project Management identifies needs for additional learning support through effective assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Learners' personal and social skills are assessed at induction. Learners and staff agree on activities to develop these skills. Learners have thorough individual development plans, which are regularly updated to record their achievements. Project Management uses milestones effectively throughout the learning programme. Learners receive a certificate for each milestone they achieve.

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Taster sessions in various occupational areas help learners to choose their future learning programme. During the taster programmes, learners' skills are continually assessed and learners develop the skills required for the workplace. All learners can attend basic skills sessions, which are well taught. Learners' basic skills portfolios contain good work. Assignments in basic skills are linked to the occupational areas that learners hope to progress to. Learners have effective and frequent progress reviews. The co-ordinator of the learning programme has developed a thorough system for recording learners' achievements and progress. Work experience with the local council helps learners to develop their skills. One former learner is now working as a supervisor for learners on work experience with the council. This provides a good role model for the learners. When learners are ready to start individual work experience, Project Management matches their needs carefully to those of the employer. Project Management's staff provide regular support to the learner and the employer throughout the work placement and deal with any difficulties promptly. Learners benefit from additional activities that develop their skills in teamwork and assist their personal and social development. These include football, paint-balling and various outdoor activities, such as canoeing, rock-climbing and survival.

59. Learners receive good support throughout the learning programme. They can request a review with an individual member of staff at any time. Staff deal sympathetically and professionally with sensitive personal and social issues. They recognise the need to give good advice and sometimes contact external agencies for specialist guidance or refer learners to appropriate specialists. Learners take part in jobsearch regularly if they are finding it difficult to make their choice of career. Staff guide learners who have unrealistic aspirations to help them make appropriate choices. Staff work effectively with individuals and small groups to develop the skills that learners need to get a job. These include personal presentation, communication, performing well at interview, timekeeping and behaving appropriately in the workplace.

60. Project Management communicates effectively with external agencies to ensure that learners' progress is continually monitored and their needs are met. The careers service visits Project Management weekly to monitor learners' personal development plans and to raise any problems with staff and learners. The youth offending team regularly liaises with Project Management about individual learners. Staff meet regularly to review learners' progress and to plan appropriate support. Project Management liaises with the police, social services, and housing associations. Staff help learners to develop strategies to overcome their difficulties.

61. Rates of retention are high. The rate of retention for the Learning Gateway was 72 per cent in 1999-2000 and 2000-01. At the time of the inspection, the rates of retention for 2001-02 were 83 per cent for the Learning Gateway and 86 per cent for the preparation learning programme. A high proportion of learners have progressed from preparation training to other learning programmes. Of the 99 learners who started their training in 2001-02, 32 transferred to the Learning Gateway, 28 progressed to mainstream learning programmes, nine progressed to employment, six progressed to further education, and two transferred to other training providers.

62. Some learning materials are poor. Many handouts are badly copied and presented. Few use pictures and diagrams. Some materials have been used for several years and are now out of date. The learning packs for taster sessions are of little use to learners with poor literacy and numeracy skills. Many of these are too complicated and fail to use terms that learners understand. Learners find the feedback on their occupational assessments difficult to understand.

63. The preparation learning programme is poorly co-ordinated. Individual learning plans do not adequately identify learners' needs. Learners have no short-term targets. Milestones are not used effectively. Some learners have received certificates for achieving milestones but do not fully understand what they have achieved. Some learners are unaware that they are working towards specific milestones. Learners do not fully understand what is expected of them. There is no member of staff with responsibility for collating information about learners' progress and using it to identify ways of improving achievement. Project Management makes no written records of learners' additional learning needs. It makes few records of learners' achievements during taster sessions.

64. Project Management collects adequate feedback from learners. However, the questionnaire does not produce information that can help with planning the learning programmes.

65. Project Management lacks systems for communicating information about learners. Although communications are satisfactory, the company lacks procedures to prevent poor practice.