

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
JUNE 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION MAY
2002

The Laird Foundation



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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
- ◆ learning and job preparation programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus
- ◆ education and training in prisons, at the invitation of her majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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.

Grading

In summarising their judgements about the quality of provision in curriculum or occupational areas and about the quality of leadership and management, including quality assurance and equality of opportunity, inspectors use a five-point scale. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

SUMMARY

The original inspection of The Laird Foundation was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for engineering, management of training and quality assurance. These areas have been reinspected against the requirements of the *Common Inspection Framework* by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. The sections of the original report dealing with engineering, management of training and quality assurance have been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website (www.ali.gov.uk).

At the original inspection, The Laird Foundation provided training in construction and engineering and satisfactory training in the carpentry and joinery skills required by these industries, including ship repair. At reinspection, all the construction learners were subcontracted from another training provider and engineering training is good, with consistently high achievement at level 2 NVQ, a wide range of training and support, and good assessment practice. Resources in the training centre are excellent. There is slow progress for some learners at level 3 NVQ and assessors do not make sufficient use of work-based evidence. Training programmes are well promoted to socially disadvantaged groups but there is insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace. Support is satisfactory, with good initial training activity taster sessions, to assist both learners and employers in the selection of specific trade skills. At reinspection, the management of training is good. The work with employers is well planned and the training provider has strong local partnerships. Quality assurance is satisfactory, but a new management system is not used fully. The Laird Foundation is improving its work continuously but some of the quality assurance systems are incomplete.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Engineering	2

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good retention rates
- ◆ excellent training resources
- ◆ good guidance programme for new learners
- ◆ good engineering training
- ◆ good business planning
- ◆ highly effective partnerships
- ◆ good involvement of staff in self-assessment

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progression for learners at NVQ level 3 in engineering
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities with employers
- ◆ incomplete quality assurance arrangements

INTRODUCTION

1. The Laird Foundation is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. Partners from public and private sectors, together with local community groups, formed the company in February 1998. The Laird Foundation is based in Birkenhead, and provides training and education facilities for young people entering the ship-repair and engineering industries on Merseyside. Training programmes lead to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3. The company's facilities include workshops, classrooms, offices and a dock. In May 2000, the Laird Foundation was supporting work-based learning for 234 engineering modern apprentices at seven local employers. Eighty-five per cent of the learners were employed at the major engineering partner, which went into receivership and made all of the learners redundant. The Laird Foundation took responsibility for the learners and, with the support of local partners, the local Learning Skills Council (local LSC) and European funding, identified suitable jobs for 68 per cent of the learners and helped 65 per cent to complete their modern apprenticeships ahead of schedule. This incident put enormous pressure on The Laird Foundation resources since, within one year, the number of learners increased by over 50 per cent. Since the original inspection in June 2000, the company has refurbished its premises, restructured its business and increased its staff.

2. At the original inspection in April 2000, the unemployment rate in Wirral was 7.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.8 per cent. At reinspection, the unemployment rate in Wirral had decreased to 5.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 2.9 per cent. According to the 1991 census, one per cent of the population of Wirral are from minority ethnic groups. In April 2000, the proportion of 16 year olds in Wirral continuing in full-time education was close to the national figure of 69 per cent. At reinspection, this proportion had increased to 70 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers in Wirral achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 46.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2001, the percentage of school leavers in Wirral achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or above increased to 51 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

3. At the original inspection, The Laird Foundation contracted with the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral Training and Enterprise Council (CEWTEC) for government-funded work-based learning. The first group of 18 engineering modern apprentices and two construction modern apprentices started training with The Laird Foundation in September 1997. The second group was an additional intake of 106 modern apprentices in September 1998. In September 1999, the rapid growth continued with an intake of 107 engineering learners and 11 construction modern apprentices. During July 1999, The Laird Foundation accepted the transfer of a number of third- and fourth-year learners following the closure of a local training provider. At reinspection, the Laird Foundation contracted with the

Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council. There are 104 engineering learners and no construction learners. The Laird Foundation continues to provide construction training, but as a subcontractor. The number of learners in each of the occupational areas for the original inspection and for the reinspection are shown below.

	MODERN APPRENTICES	NATIONAL TRAINEES	TOTAL
Carpentry and joinery	13	0	13
Fabrication and welding	146	3	149
Mechanical engineering	52	0	52
Electrical engineering	36	0	36
Total	247	3	250

At reinspection the number of learners were:

	ADVANCED MODERN APPRENTICES	FOUNDATION MODERN APPRENTICES	PREPARATION PLUS	TOTAL
Carpentry and joinery	0	0	13	13
Fabrication and welding	45	3	13	61
Mechanical engineering	17	0	13	30
Total	62	3	39	104

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. At the original inspection, three members of the management team attended several training workshops with the TEC and Training Standards Council (TSC) on the self-assessment process. Most of the staff in The Laird Foundation were made aware of the self-assessment process and staff with particular responsibility for specific areas were consulted. Feedback from learners and staff was used to substantiate the report findings. The draft report was subject to significant modification following an audit of the training by a specialist team from the TEC. The Laird Foundation produced its final self-assessment report in February 2000. The report provided substantive information on the development of the training and described its socio-economic context. The report identified the strengths and weaknesses of each occupational and generic sector and referred to supporting evidence. At reinspection, The Laird Foundation employed two consultants to extend the self-assessment process and involve all staff. The self-assessment report was based on the *Common Inspection Framework* and provided good critical analysis of the company. The report identified progress in remedying the weaknesses following the original inspection and the inspectors agreed with many of the judgements contained within it.

5. At the original inspection, four inspectors spent a total of 16 days with The Laird Foundation. The inspectors interviewed 59 learners and made 10 workplace visits, where they met 12 workplace supervisors. The inspectors interviewed 17 staff at the training centre responsible for off-the-job training and 11 of The Laird Foundation's staff. The inspectors examined 35 learners' files and 36 portfolios, and other paperwork contracts, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, quality assurance processes, minutes of meetings, promotional arrangements, and management and quality assurance evidence. The inspectors also observed one learners' review and observed and graded 11 off-the-job training sessions.

6. At the reinspection, four inspectors spent a total of 16 days with The Laird Foundation. The inspectors interviewed 27 learners, who represented 26 per cent of the total, visited 10 employers, carried out 42 interviews with staff and observed five teaching sessions and four learners' progress reviews. The inspectors reviewed a variety of evidence, including 21 portfolios of evidence. The grades for the observations are shown overleaf.

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Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	0	0	1	1	0	2
Engineering	0	3	4	2	0	9
Total	0	3	5	3	0	11

Grades awarded to instruction at the reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	GRADE 6	GRADE 7	TOTAL
Engineering	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	5
Total	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	5

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

7. There are 13 trainees in carpentry and joinery programmes, all of whom are modern apprentices. They began their training in 1997 and 1999. Eleven first-year trainees are currently following NVQs at level 2 and two third-year trainees are working towards NVQs at level 3 having completed their NVQs at level 2. The first year of training is done off the job in The Laird Foundation's training centre, where training and assessment is carried out up to the NVQ at level 2. The first 11 weeks are spent on a rotational off-the-job training programme having 'tasters' of the specific occupational skills that the trainees are able to learn. The major local employer provides on-the-job training upon commencement of the level 3 programme. Level 3 trainees attend the training centre on day release for further off-the-job training and assessment. The retention rate for the modern apprenticeship scheme is currently 100 per cent. The self-assessment report provides a range information and lists five strengths and two weaknesses. Some strengths were considered to be no more than normal practice by inspectors, and others were validated. Inspectors agreed with the identified weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality training resources
- ◆ well-structured off-the-job training programmes
- ◆ good rate of retention
- ◆ good integration of key skills with NVQ training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace
- ◆ lack of rigour in assessment of some level 3 units

8. Material resources for training are good and trainees have access to a range of good-quality materials and equipment for training on and off the job. Trainees have a high regard for the quality and range of the off-the-job training. Trainees recognise the relevance of experience in the workplace to the off-the-job training they receive at level 3. There is a range of well-developed training and assessment rigs in the training centre's workshops. These rigs mimic workplace conditions to help trainees learn actual job skills and be assessed on these. Trainees welcome the opportunities they are given to acquire good craft skills and they produce work of a high standard. Trainees have regular assessment opportunities during their training in the training centre. The training programmes are clearly recorded with good systems of monitoring trainees' progress. The learning support materials encourage and enable trainees to produce good portfolios of assessment evidence at level 2. Trainees have good working relationships with their trainers who are

GOOD PRACTICE

To enhance their training experience and provide workplace opportunities, first-year learners are given the opportunity of project work on live construction contracts. This work experience is valued by the learners as it provides opportunities to practice skills learned off the job. The projects provide a transition stage between off- and on-the-job training.

occupationally qualified and have assessor qualifications.

9. The employer recognises the importance of providing a range of training opportunities in the workplace. Although the training programmes in the workplace are unplanned, the trainees are given the opportunity to practice the skills they develop on the foundation level 2 programme when they are placed with the main employer. There are no previously decided training structures. Trainees are given the opportunity to work with a range of different craftsmen within the workplace. In addition, trainees, where appropriate, are able to work without direct supervision. Trainees are well motivated and enjoy the variety of their training. All the trainees who have begun with The Laird Foundation are still in training. None have left early.

10. Trainees have the opportunity during the taster programme to commence collecting evidence relating to key skills. This is further developed during their training and is effectively integrated within the NVQ training programme. Also, as part of their assessment evidence for level 3, trainees are encouraged to use witness testimony from the workplace.

11. Opportunities to plan assessments in the workplace are missed. There is an over-emphasis on the use of written evidence produced by the trainee and supported by workplace witness testimony. There is little use of assessment by direct observation of the trainees' performance in the workplace.

12. On an informal basis, employers do receive some information from The Laird Foundation's staff about the trainees' NVQ programmes. However, work-based supervisors lack awareness of the requirements and range of the NVQ at level 3. The level 3 assessments are poorly planned and trainees and workplace supervisors are not fully aware of the range of tasks required to complete a unit. There is a lack of rigour in the assessment tasks for some level 3 units. The current internal verifier has a construction industry background but lacks occupational experience in carpentry and joinery. Trainees' progress reviews do not set targets related to the units and elements in the NVQ. Effective links between on- and off-the-job training are reduced by the lack of focus in target setting for the trainees.

Engineering

Grade 2

13. At reinspection, there are 104 learners, of whom 39 are on the Preparation Plus programme, three are foundation modern apprentices and 62 are advanced modern apprentices. No learners are women. Forty-five advanced modern apprentices are working towards NVQs in fabrication and welding and the rest are working towards NVQs in mechanical engineering. The three foundation modern apprentices have achieved their NVQ at level 2 and are now working towards an NVQ at level 3 in fabrication and welding. Of the 65 modern apprentices, 41 are employed, three are on work experience and 21 learners are based at the training centre. These learners were made redundant from the major engineering partner in

2001 and are supported by The Laird Foundation to secure full-time employment. There has been no new recruitment of advanced modern apprentices since August 2000. Learners spend their first 11 weeks of training experiencing the various trade skills on offer.

14. The rest of the first year involves completion of the NVQ at level 2, additional NVQ units and additional vocational qualifications. On completion of the first-year off-the-job training, learners start work at their employer or work-placement provider. Most level 3 NVQ learners attend the Laird Foundation's training centre one day each week for off-the-job training. All learners receive a progress review every three to six weeks to monitor their individual learning plans. Learners are assessed in the workplace and in the training centre. There are no work-based assessors among the employers, but workplace supervisors monitor learners' performance on-the-job. The Preparation Plus training programme started in January 2002, and is designed to help young people make effective choices about engineering training and work. Eighty-one per cent of these learners are still in training.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor assessment practices
- ◆ inconsistent level of knowledge among qualified NVQ level 2 trainees
- ◆ slow progression at level 3
- ◆ poor awareness among trainees of standards at NVQ level 3

15. At reinspection, three of the weaknesses have been partially rectified and one is now a strength. The weakness of slow progression at level 3 NVQ has improved and now affects only some learners. Learners qualified at NVQ level 2 have a satisfactory level of knowledge and learners working at NVQ level 3 have a satisfactory awareness of the NVQ standards. This is reinforced during progress reviews. Inspectors agreed with two of the five strengths and one of the weaknesses given in the self-assessment report and identified two further strengths and one weakness. Inspectors gave a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement at NVQ level 2
- ◆ wide range of training and support
- ◆ good assessment practice
- ◆ excellent training resources

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress for learners at NVQ level 3
- ◆ inadequate use of work-based evidence

16. Achievement rates are good. The achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 2 are 100 per cent in 1997-98, 98 per cent in 1998-99, 84 per cent in 1999-2000, 94 per cent in 2000-01 and 100 per cent in 2001-02. The achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices are also good, with 100 per cent in 1999-2000 and 93 per cent in 2000-01. The engineering foundation training has been replaced by the new performing engineering operations award at NVQ level 2. The retention rate of learners on the engineering foundation training is satisfactory.

17. The Laird Foundation provides a wide range of training and support for learners. One example is the new Preparation Plus training programme, which is well structured and provides good training in a variety of engineering disciplines. Learners achieve an engineering qualification at NVQ level 1 and carry out work experience with a local engineering company. Learners then progress to modern apprenticeships. This training helps the learners to make effective career choices in engineering. Progress reviews are regular and thorough and most employers are involved in the process. The progress reviews take place every three to six weeks and cover vocational education, occupational training and qualifications, assessment and key skills. Clear targets are set, reviewed and agreed with the learner and employer. Most employers are very committed to providing learners with a range of personal and vocational development activities, including visits to a variety of businesses in Britain and Europe. Learners are also able to develop good team-working skills during sailing training. These development activities help learners to develop their personal and key skills, and broaden their vocational knowledge and skills. Shortly before the reinspection, a major employer of The Laird Foundation's learners closed, and over 80 per cent of these learners were made redundant. The Laird Foundation worked particularly well with local working partners to help the learners complete their modern apprenticeships and gain jobs. There are clear training plans for each engineering discipline, which forms part of the service level agreement with employers and confirms the employer's responsibility to the learner. The workplace co-ordinators work effectively with the employer to identify the skills they can provide the learner. This is well recorded and a copy is given to the employer, learner and training provider.

18. There is good assessment practice. Assessors visit learners in the workplace every three to six weeks to carry out progress reviews and observations. Assessors often take digital photographs of learners during their work as additional evidence, which reduces the need for learners to write detailed and lengthy technical reports and helps them to prepare for final assessment. Some learners, however, rely on the assessors to monitor their progress towards completing their NVQ. The monitoring information used in the workplace lacks detail and is not used effectively to monitor learners' progress and prepare them for assessment.

19. The Laird Foundation has excellent resources in the training centre. There are separate practical workshops for each trade area, which are fully equipped for a variety of fabrication and welding and engineering disciplines. There is a range of

well-equipped classrooms, including specialised rooms with computer-controlled engineering systems, computer-aided design and engineering drawing. Learners have good access to all of the classrooms and specialist computer systems to aid their progression through the NVQ and vocational studies. There has been an extensive development programme to enhance the facilities and resources of the training centre, which supports school pupils, learners and commercial training for regional engineering enterprises. Use of video links and electronic presentations have been effectively developed for both classroom and training workshops. The drop-in centre for jobsearch is inadequate. There is no telephone or stationery and some of the reference books are out of date.

POOR PRACTICE

During a workplace observation by a workplace co-ordinator/assessor a learner was carrying out a grinding operation. While the learner used the correct health and safety techniques and wore the appropriate personal protective equipment, the co-ordinator/assessor failed to obey health and safety rules by not wearing eye protection.

20. Learners working towards an NVQ at level 3 make slow progress. Five learners in their fourth year of training have not completed their NVQ at level 3. However, four of the five learners are close to completing the modern apprenticeship framework. There are 28 learners in their third year of training who have made insufficient progress towards completing their modern apprenticeship. These learners have completed two NVQs at level 2, which was identified as a weakness in the original report. While many learners have gained jobs, these learners have not produced sufficient work-based evidence and have completed few units of their NVQ at level 3. These learners are only accredited at the end of the training programme.

21. There is insufficient use of work-based evidence. Some learners do not effectively cross-reference their evidence to the NVQ and their progress is unclear. Some staff have not assessed some of the tests completed by the learners and the workplace supervisors have not validated the work-based evidence. There is no agreed criteria for assessors marking each NVQ unit. Assessors make a judgement on the quality of the evidence based on their own experience rather than on criteria agreed by the assessors, the internal verifier or the quality manager.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

22. The Laird Foundation has an equal opportunities policy supported by procedures which comply with current legislation. The policy meets TEC requirements and has recently been reviewed and updated. The policy applies to all staff and trainees. The induction process for both trainees and staff includes reference to the policy and the company's commitment to equality of opportunity. Minority ethnic groups and women are under-represented on training programmes, but trainees from socially disadvantaged areas in the region form approximately 60 per cent of the trainees. The Laird Foundation has an equal opportunities monitoring group comprising assessors, instructors, administration staff, two apprentices and the personnel manager from the main employer. The group held their first meeting in early April and the co-ordinator reports group suggestions to the management team of The Laird Foundation. No date was set for the next

meeting. Below 1 per cent of trainees are women or are from minority ethnic groups. The Laird Foundation has set itself a target of 4 per cent for both these groups, and would particularly like to attract women into areas such as fabrication and welding. The self-assessment report identified four strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors considered some strengths to be no more than normal practice and validated others. Another weakness was identified during the inspection. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good targeting of training opportunities to socially disadvantaged groups
- ◆ strong external links used to encourage under-represented groups
- ◆ well-informed trainees on harassment and bullying policies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient staff training
- ◆ weak monitoring of employers for equal opportunities

23. The Laird Foundation, through its commitment to equal opportunities, has recognised that because of high levels of social deprivation in the area the priority of social inclusiveness needs to be addressed. Through its links with the careers service and schools in the region, the company has targeted disaffected pupils from schools in areas with high levels of deprivation. In addition, wider links have been established within the secondary school sector, local multi-cultural organisations and the careers service with the aim of targeting under-represented groups in the engineering and construction industries. The company has also been involved in the awarding body's initiatives to overcome gender stereotyping in engineering. The company has produced a promotional video which highlights training, employment and career opportunities which are available in the industries concerned. Young people from under-represented groups such as women and those from minority ethnic groups, can be seen as role models in the video. The video is widely distributed to appropriate organisations in the area. Young people from these organisations attend The Laird Foundation in groups and are able to sample the full range of vocational training on offer. The training centre has been developed with good accessibility for people with mobility difficulties or physical disabilities. There are suitable ramps to all ground floor entrances.

24. At induction, trainees and staff are given an overview of the equal opportunities policy. Recently this has been reinforced by the production of a booklet covering a range of equal opportunities issues, including harassment, bullying, appeals and grievance procedures. The booklet aids the knowledge and understanding of equal opportunities of staff and trainees.

25. Although equal opportunities are covered at induction, there is no training offered to training staff to help them improve their own awareness of equal opportunities. The current staff development plan makes no reference to training in equal opportunities. A recent modification to the trainees' review documents

prompt the reviewer to raise the subject of equal opportunities with the trainee. However, there has been no formal training provided to the staff in this key role. Issues relating to equal opportunities are missed during the trainees' review process.

26. Employers offering training to The Laird Foundation trainees are aware of its equal opportunities policy and encouraged to support it. If companies do not have policies of their own then, they are asked to adopt The Laird Foundation's policy. Monitoring of equality of opportunities in recruitment and selection procedures has recently been implemented, but there has yet to be an analysis of the impact of the procedures. Monitoring of the effectiveness of the policy in the workplace has recently commenced but the monitoring process is not yet effective. During visits made by The Laird Foundation's staff to the workplace, opportunities to address the display of pictures which some may find offensive are not being taken with employers.

Trainee support

Grade 3

27. The Laird Foundation operates a training scheme for which the significant majority enter employment with one major employer. Most trainees apply directly to The Laird Foundation for a training place. They apply either direct from school or through the local careers service. They attend The Laird Foundation's training centre for entrance selection tests. The test covers numeracy and literacy. All trainees are given an interview following testing. Trainees to be employed with employers other than the major employer are referred to their employer for an interview in addition to The Laird Foundation's interview and tests. Trainees destined for the major employer are not interviewed by the employer. The employer relies on The Laird Foundation to recruit on their behalf. A minority of trainees is selected and employed directly by other employers and sent to The Laird Foundation for training. During the first week at the training centre, trainees receive a three-day induction, which covers terms of service, health and safety, the NVQ and key skills qualifications. During the first 11 weeks of training, trainees undergo taster training in which they have a short period of time training in all trade areas. During this period, reports are prepared on their employability, trade suitability and progress. On completion of this period, trainees are allocated to a particular engineering discipline. During the first year of training, progress toward their NVQ is formally reviewed every eight weeks by a member of the training centre's staff. On completion of their first-year engineering foundation training, trainees enter the workplace for a projected three-year work-based training period. During this period, trainees receive a formal progress review every eight weeks in addition to informal visits in the workplace. A member of The Laird Foundation's staff is assigned to the role of reviewer and assessor for trainees in the workplace. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Excellent guidance programme for entrants
- ◆ good enhancement of training experience
- ◆ wide range of support systems

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal assessment of basic skills and key skills on entry
- ◆ little focus on NVQs during progress reviews

GOOD PRACTICE

The Laird Foundation runs a schools link programme for 14- to 16-year-old pupils. First-year learners work with these pupils and act as mentors to them. The experience gained by the learners is used as evidence for the key skills unit on working with others.

28. The first 11 weeks of training involve spending time in each individual trade area. After each mini-period of training, the relevant trainer makes an assessment of trainees' capabilities and performance. The process also acts as a protracted assessment of a trainee's basic skills ability. At the end of the 11-week period, trainees are told which discipline they will be allocated to. Numbers for each trade in the major employer are ultimately dependent on the identified demands, but take into consideration trainees' abilities and aspirations. The Laird Foundation's staff attempt to find alternative work placements for those trainees who choose a different trade area to that which they were recruited and who cannot be accommodated by their original employer. They have successfully replaced all such trainees. Trainees are able to make an informed choice on their future career.

29. In addition to NVQ and key skills training, trainees have many opportunities to enhance their training. Sailboat training and outdoor courses are on offer. Use is made of European-funded schemes to send trainees to member states for work experience. Recently, 12 trainees were based in a factory in Vienna for a two-week period and two were based in a shipyard in Belgium. Prior to leaving for their work placements, trainees were given a short language course. The funding for the venture is raised in collaboration with three like-minded organisations who share the allocated places. Trainees benefit from the experience. In the last year, 15 trainees attended a two-day conference for young managers at a local sixth-form college. They acted as group leaders and led small groups of sixth-form students through a variety of tasks, which were designed to create team-working and problem-solving skills. The trainees enjoyed the experience which enhanced their own skills.

30. Trainees are well supported in the workplace and in the training centre. Reviewer assessors are in frequent contact with work-based trainees in addition to the formal progress review interviews which are held every eight weeks. The Laird Foundation's training centre is situated adjacent to the major employer. Trainees find it easy to drop in from the site to the training centre. The reviewer/assessors also have an office on the main employer's site and trainees can visit them by booking an appointment. The major employer released some trainees for a four-week revision period prior to their higher national certificate (HNC) examinations. This extended revision period was spent at The Laird Foundation's training centre. The Laird Foundation is also involved in an unusual support project. A major high-street retailer has donated 30 mountain bicycles to The Laird Foundation.

Trainees have to undergo an initial fitness and medical test. After a six-month period these tests will be repeated and trainees who pass these tests will be allowed to keep the bicycles. This initiative assists trainees in getting to and from work and raises their awareness of health and fitness. In keeping with this attitude, The Laird Foundation was instrumental in arranging for all trainees to undergo meningitis C vaccinations during a time of concern in the local area. During the first year of training, detailed attendance records are kept and monitored. The purpose of this, apart from administrative reasons, is to observe trends in trainees' absences. The information is passed to the centre manager for investigation and to consider additional support for some trainees. This particularly applies to trainees who may have personal and social problems. The Laird Foundation's staff have good links with external support bodies for such matters.

31. There is no formal initial assessment of basic skills on entry to the training programme. A shortfall in a specific area of basic skills may remain undetected. There are no systematic arrangements to identify how individual trainees may benefit from additional learning support or training to rectify learning difficulties. During the initial 11-week programme, new trainees do undertake a range of tasks such as written and basic numerical work applicable to specific jobs, which do assist in identification of those in need of additional learning support. These are well integrated into the work tasters they are sampling. Recently, one trainee was identified in need of numeracy and literacy support. This support was delivered by an outside agency, but not until the trainee had been on the programme for four months. There is no key skills test on entry to the modern apprenticeship programme. Individually tailored key skills programmes are not developed. All trainees undergo the same key skills training programme regardless of their ability. Plans are being implemented to introduce entry tests for key skills and basic skills for the trainees. In addition, a systematic method to accredit trainees with previous learning or achievement in key skills is planned. At present there have been some examples of key skills accreditation, but in one case this was done when key skills training was close to completion.

32. Reviews of trainees in the workplace lack focus on progression towards the NVQ and key skills. Within the action planning section of the report, the comments relating to training and assessment do not give incremental targets and dates to enable trainees to progress efficiently. In many cases, the trainees' workplace supervisors are not present at the review. The workplace supervisor cannot readily assist the trainee in identifying opportunities for the trainee to gain evidence. These factors contribute to the slow progress of some trainees towards their qualification, with the trainee sometimes collecting evidence which is not appropriate.

Management of training

Grade 2

33. Following the original inspection, The Laird Foundation's restructured management and training teams divided the company's activities into four services

comprising training, education, enterprise and conferences. The Laird Foundation is led by the chief executive who reports to a board of eight directors drawn from the private, public, and community and voluntary sectors. The management team comprises three managers, responsible for the training centre, the systems and the training resources. There are four team leaders based at the training centre and four learning co-ordinators, who co-ordinate learners' training, progress reviews and assessments. There is a work-based team leader and five learning co-ordinators, who are responsible for assessment and internal verification in the workplace. There is also a co-ordinator responsible for health, safety and equal opportunities. At the original inspection, The Laird Foundation was working with seven companies and at reinspection is working with 43 companies.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ inadequate planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient staff resources
- ◆ lack of involvement of workplace supervisors in key skills and NVQ processes
- ◆ lack of objective target setting for staff

34. At reinspection, all four weaknesses have improved and one has become a strength. The Laird Foundation increased its resources and now employs 34 staff. Staff are appraised, trained and set targets. Workplace supervisors are involved in the NVQ and key skills throughout the learners' progress reviews. There are no work-based assessors, although two companies have indicated their interest in this role. The self-assessment report accurately identified improvements to management of training and acknowledged that the management information system was under-utilised. Inspectors gave a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

Three learners made redundant at the major employer were employed as technicians by the Laird Foundation. They have gained new skills in joinery and IT and qualified as coaches. They are a great asset to the Laird Foundation because they relate so well to school pupils and learners. They are currently training as assessors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good business planning
- ◆ highly effective partnerships
- ◆ good communication
- ◆ well-planned on-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistent use of management information

35. The Laird Foundation has a well-established business-planning process with clear objectives, a good understanding of the local economy and an accurate analysis of the company's strengths and weaknesses. Staff are involved fully in business planning and have a clear understanding of the performance targets for achievement. The plan is shared annually with staff and is reinforced regularly through its appraisal process. The board and the management team have a clear sense of strategic direction and are well informed about the changes in the engineering sector. The Laird Foundation has carried out effective market research

through surveys of local companies and identified several areas for growth.

36. The Laird Foundation has highly effective working partnerships with schools, local companies, community organisations, other training providers and the local LSC. These partnerships are well managed and well co-ordinated, such as, the support package for redundant modern apprentices arranged with the local authority, the local LSC and employers. The chief executive is an active member of local education and training groups. The board members represent the private, public and voluntary sectors and give useful support to the management team. The Laird Foundation is a key partner in local regeneration activities and runs a successful programme with the local education authority for Year 10 and 11 pupils from local schools to sample training in engineering, construction and key skills. Recently, The Laird Foundation worked effectively with a number of training providers to identify benchmarks for performance and to share good practice. It has worked well to deal with the loss of its major employer and the massive redundancy of its learners.

37. The Laird Foundation has an open management style and there is good communication between staff, who have a good understanding of the performance of the business. There are regular meetings between managers, team leaders and assessors and a full staff meeting each week, all of which have agreed agendas and are minuted. Staff are fully committed to developing young people and preparing them for employment. There is a good planning process with employers, which identifies training opportunities and matches them to the demands of the modern apprenticeship. Experienced engineers from The Laird Foundation identify the product and the manufacturing capability of each company and agree the learner's training, providers' and employers' responsibilities and activities during the modern apprenticeship. This training plan forms part of the service level agreement between the employer and The Laird Foundation. There are revised guides for employers which are easy to follow, well produced, and detail the commitment and expectations from The Laird Foundation. The staff training is satisfactory and the appraisal process is regular. Staff have adequate qualifications and good experience. There are three staff with key skills qualifications. The ratio of training staff to learners is adequate. Assessors are generally responsible for between 16 and 30 learners each.

38. There is inconsistent use of the management information. Some training staff have their own system of planning and recording information about the learners. Trends in learners' performance have not been identified or shared with all staff. The management information system was revised last year and a new system has been operating since January. The system is being developed to be accessible to all staff, but does not yet inform and involve all of them sufficiently. There is no routine report to staff or employers which identifies and summarises learners' progress. The management team discuss regularly the contract performance at their meetings and refer to reports from the systems manager.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

39. The Laird Foundation has a quality assurance policy and a quality assurance system. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the management team and is led by the resource manager. The quality assurance manual contains 32 procedures, which cover the key stages in training, assessment and verification of training. These have been updated as a result of an internal audit. Quality assurance is discussed at both management and general staff meetings. The Laird Foundation is an accredited training centre and provides a range of vocational and educational qualifications in construction and engineering. The chief executive has overall responsibility for self-assessment, although staff throughout The Laird Foundation are consulted as part of the self-assessment process.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements for training
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of off-the-job training
- ◆ inconsistent practices in training and assessment
- ◆ weak internal verification

40. There have been improvements in all four identified weaknesses. Quality assurance is satisfactory but incomplete and there are some inconsistencies in its implementation. Off-the-job training is monitored formally and the teaching of learners has improved. However some trainers have not been observed. Inconsistent practices in training and assessment are no longer a weakness and there is good assessment practice in engineering. The quality of internal verification has improved but there are some inconsistencies. The latest self-assessment report, produced in November 2001, did not identify strengths specifically relating to quality assurance, instead focusing on leadership and management as a single area. The report identified two weaknesses. The inspectors identified two strengths, agreed with one weakness and identified a further weakness. The inspectors gave the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective development planning to improve training
- ◆ good involvement of staff in self-assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ insufficient formal feedback

41. The development plans are regularly reviewed and updated to identify actions taken and progress made. The training provider effectively evaluates how the

business is performing. Before the reinspection, a comprehensive report was written which evaluated the actions taken, a significant number of which had been completed either fully or partially. For example, there are now effective working relationships with 43 employers,

42. Staff are involved fully and understand their role within the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report was both critical and well matched to inspectors' judgements. Staff attended a workshop where the process was clearly explained and they were able to provide feedback. This was used to develop the self-assessment report and reinforced the good communication within the training provider.

43. Staff use quality assurance procedures, but there are some inconsistencies in the way they are implemented. Two quality assurance procedures are missing. The annual self-assessment process and the collecting of formal feedback have both been carried out, but not as part of the quality assurance audit. Regular internal auditing has not taken place. The first complete audit of all the procedures was completed at the end of 2001. The revised procedures have started to influence some areas, such as progress reviews, assessment and verification. These changes have been introduced only recently and it is still too early to assess their impact. There are inconsistencies in the way some procedures for internal verification and observation of teaching are implemented and documentation is completed. The frequency of observed assessments is not consistent. The feedback given to assessors is inadequate. The observations of teaching are not systematic and where unsatisfactory teaching has been identified it has not been followed up with effective feedback.

44. Formal feedback is not systematically collected and used to improve performance. A questionnaire was sent to learners and employers in November 2001, which was the first survey since 1999. All learners, and 50 per cent of employers, responded. The employers' questionnaires were devised poorly and did not identify the strengths and weaknesses of the training providers' performance. Some employers' comments raised questions which have yet to be answered. The summary of feedback produced for staff contained some inaccuracies and was misleading. The learners' feedback summary was difficult to interpret and it was not possible to relate feedback given to the questions asked. Learners' feedback was not anonymous. There is no process to collect and evaluate formal feedback from staff.