

INSPECTION REPORT

YH Training Services Ltd

25 February 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

YH Training Services Ltd is based in Scarborough, North Yorkshire and provides training at six sites in the north of England. It provides work-based learning for young people in business administration, accountancy, information technology, retail and customer service and performing manufacturing operations. There are currently 710 young people on these learning programmes.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, training in all occupational areas is satisfactory, as are the leadership and management of the company.

GRADES

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

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

Information & communications technology	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- good training
- good work placements
- good partnerships with employers
- effective learner support

KEY WEAKNESSES

- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- weak induction

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better initial assessment

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 39 days at YH Training Services Ltd in February 2002. They visited 47 workplaces, and interviewed 104 learners, 34 workplace supervisors and employers, and 47 members of YH Training Services Ltd staff. They observed 25 training sessions, as well as a number of progress reviews and assessments. A range of documents was examined, including 51 portfolios of evidence, 85 individual learning plans, training materials and quality assurance policies and procedures. YH Training Services Ltd completed its most recent self-assessment report in October 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	3	8	2	0	0	0	13
Information & communications technology	0	4	1	1	2	0	0	8
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	4
Total	0	7	12	4	2	0	0	25

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. YH Training Services Ltd was established in 1975 as a group training association to meet the training needs of the motor industry in the north of England. The current owners took over the company in 1985 and have extended the training to cover more occupational areas. The head office is in Scarborough. The company has five training centres in Yorkshire, Humberside and Lancashire. It also provides training in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. It provides work-based learning for young people in business administration, accountancy, information technology (IT), retailing and customer service and performing manufacturing operations. Training is carried out on the job and in the company's training centres. YH Training Services Ltd employs 62 staff, 46 of whom work full time. The company has a managing director and a director of training and development. There is a central training and development team and an administration and personnel team at head office. Four training centre managers and two training centre supervisors are responsible for the management of the training centres and the area activities. They report to the managing director.

3. YH Training Services Ltd currently trains 710 young people, most of whom are employed. There are 490 foundation modern apprentices, 190 advanced modern apprentices and 30 learners on other work-based learning programmes. There are 40 learners on work-based learning programmes for adults. These learners were not included in the inspection. The training is funded by the North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Humberside Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). The company also has a contract with the National Contract Service, formerly the National Training Partnership (NTP). Through this it operates in South Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Lancashire. The company also has a small number of self-funded learners.

4. In October 2001, the unemployment rates in North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, and Humberside were 1.9 per cent, 3.4 per cent and 4.9 per cent, respectively. The national average was 2.9 per cent. The company draws learners from the coastal areas of Scarborough and Bridlington, which rely partly on seasonal work. This has an effect on training needs, particularly in the retail sector. The proportions of the local population from minority ethnic groups in North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Humberside are 0.7 per cent, 8.2 per cent, and 1 per cent, respectively. The national average was 6.2 per cent. The proportions of school leavers who gained five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in 2001 in North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Humberside were 58 per cent, 34 per cent, and 49 per cent, respectively. The national average was 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

5. Most learners who complete their programme of training achieve all the targets on their apprenticeship framework. The overall retention and achievement rates on the training programmes are satisfactory, but the achievement rates of learners completing advanced modern apprenticeships in information and communications technology (ICT) and retailing and customer services are low. Most learners in both these occupational areas are on foundation modern apprenticeships or other work-based learning programmes, which show better achievement rates. Accountancy learners have good rates of achievement in modern apprenticeships.

6. Training is satisfactory in all areas of learning. Seventy-six per cent of the sessions observed were satisfactory or better, and 28 per cent were very good. Learners are given good support by YH Training Services Ltd staff. The company has excellent partnerships with employers. Induction is poor for all employed learners, but is better and more detailed for learners who are not employed. The company has acknowledged this weakness and begun to rectify it. The company has detailed and thorough quality assurance procedures. There is close monitoring of the numbers of learners starting the training programmes, those retained and those achieving qualifications. All staff are involved and understand this process. However, the targets set are unrealistic and unachievable. There is good understanding and effective action on harassment, although there is insufficient promotion of equal opportunities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

7. YH Training Services Ltd was established in 1975 as a group training association. The current owners took over the company in 1985. It has four directors. Two of them run the company and two are shareholders. The company has five training centres throughout Yorkshire, Humberside and Lancashire. It has two managers who co-ordinate activities in South Yorkshire and Lancashire. It also provides training through the National Contract Service in South Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire. The managing director, the director of training and development and the employee development manager form the executive management team. This group meets fortnightly. Monthly management meetings take place for the training centre managers and supervisors, and for local teams. The director of training and development, with a team of three training and development managers, is responsible for the company's training and internal verification. This director and the employee development manager are responsible for staff recruitment and training. The company has an equal opportunities policy which is reviewed annually. It has quality assurance policies and procedures. YH Training Services Ltd produced its first self-assessment report in 1998. The most recent self-assessment report was produced in October 2001.

STRENGTHS

- thorough induction for new staff
- comprehensive staff development
- open and consultative management
- good staff understanding of harassment issues
- comprehensive quality assurance system

WEAKNESSES

- no formal monitoring of staff turnover
- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- ineffective targets for achievement

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better communications with employers
- more efficient central recording system
- better monitoring of applicants

8. There is a thorough induction process for new staff, which takes place at the head office and in their local workplace. All staff are supported by an allocated mentor within the company. There is a three-month training plan for new staff, which is closely monitored. Their progress is reviewed monthly for the first three months of

employment. The company has a thorough and comprehensive employee handbook. This covers employees' rights and responsibilities, information about career structure and clear information about salary scales and progression routes through them.

9. Staff have access to a comprehensive development programme. They are given both time and financial support towards the cost of training. They can work for qualifications at all levels, including higher education, short accredited qualifications such as mentoring awards, and short training programmes such as drug awareness sessions. An effective system exists for staff to identify and record continuing professional development gained both on the job and through formal training. Staff development needs are identified at professional review and development interviews, which take place twice a year. New staff with occupational competence but no training experience are required to complete relevant qualifications within an agreed time.

10. YH Training Services Ltd operates an open and consultative approach to management. There are clear aims which are understood by all the staff. Training centre managers develop their own business plans which influence the strategic direction of the whole company. These are summarised in the overall business plan. The company shares good practice through regular management meetings and all staff attend a development day every six months. There are good working relationships and effective communication between the managing director and the training centre managers and their teams. The managing director receives monthly reports on new learners, and on achievement and retention rates. Minutes of meetings are detailed and comprehensive and are shared with staff throughout the organisation. There is a regular staff newsletter, but no similar newsletter for employers.

11. The company does not formally monitor its staff turnover. Staff leavers are recorded in the executive management team minutes but no detailed analysis of this information takes place.

12. The company's management information system has been developed to meet the requirements of its various contracts, both geographically and with different funding bodies. Different systems are used in different training centres. The head office collates the data. The progress of individual learners cannot be monitored from head office. Applications for training are not thoroughly monitored. The company does not analyse how long it takes applicants to gain a work placement and whether learners' gender, disabilities or ethnicity has any influence on this. The company acknowledged this weakness in its self-assessment report and is investigating a new management information system.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

13. There is an equal opportunities policy and staff and managers have a good understanding of harassment issues. During their induction, staff are given detailed training on how to eliminate harassment and oppressive behaviour. They effectively apply this when dealing with learners in the workplace. In one case, a learner was moved to a more suitable work placement. YH Training Services ensures employers have a written equal opportunities policy before they are able to employ learners. The company has recently developed a detailed contact form for potential learners. This effectively checks learners' eligibility and employer suitability and commitment to training. It also monitors learners' ethnicity. Staff are informed of their rights and responsibilities and these are reinforced by a comprehensive staff handbook. They are able to discuss any problems with the company directors. Staff are aware of the Public Interest Disclosure Act (1998), which protects individuals following disclosure of information in respect of victimisation. Good internal communications was identified as a strength by the company in the self-assessment report. Learners receive information on equal opportunities as part of their induction. Some learners watch a video on equal opportunities, but this is not carried out consistently across all occupational areas. Other learners have poor recall of equal opportunities issues. Equal opportunities issues are discussed during progress reviews.

14. YH Training Services Ltd collects data about learners' ethnicity, gender and disabilities. The data are not analysed to help managers make decisions. Staff are not clear about their own responsibilities or their contribution towards promoting equality of opportunity in the workplace. There is no monitoring or analysis of recruitment, retention and achievement data to identify under-represented groups, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Staff training is planned to remedy this. YH Training Services Ltd has recently established a working group to monitor equality of opportunity. Currently, the group has no clear targets. The company does not systematically promote its training to under-represented groups. However, inspectors found examples of individual members of staff actively promoting and ensuring effective work placements for young people with additional learning needs.

15. The company is currently working to increase access for learners with limited mobility in some of its training centres, which are located in listed buildings.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

16. YH Training Services Ltd has comprehensive quality assurance arrangements. Most learners who complete their training programme achieve all the targets on their apprenticeship framework. As the self-assessment report indicates, learners' performance is carefully monitored by managers and training staff. Data are used effectively to indicate how well learners are doing. Achievement and retention rates, and the quality of training are standard agenda items at meetings of senior managers, managers and trainers. Action is taken to continuously improve the training and the achievement rates. The company has a set of clear procedures for its work. A quality audit system is used to sample all areas of the company's work and ensure that the procedures are followed. The results of the audits are reported monthly at the quality assurance meeting, and action is taken to ensure that the procedures are complied with. Thorough methods are used to collect the views of learners and employers. Questionnaires are used to collect learners' views during, and at the end of, their training programme. The views of employers and staff are also collected. The company has recently introduced a questionnaire for learners starting their training programmes. Currently, there has been an insufficient number of responses to this questionnaire. The questionnaires are evaluated at the monthly quality assurance meetings and action is taken to resolve any problems. Trainers and managers record the views of learners and employers on the quality of training when visiting work placements. There is a system of observation to ensure that the company's trainers provide good training. No overall reports are produced on the quality of training. The company holds an international quality assurance standard, and Investors in People, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

17. There is ineffective setting and monitoring of targets for achievement rates, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. There is poor monitoring of retention and achievement rates by individual trainers. Targets are set for recruitment and for the retention and achievement rates for individual learners, the training centres and for the company as a whole. Targets are based on the requirements of the former training and enterprise councils (TECs) and the local LSCs. Performance against targets is measured monthly. Although most targets for recruitment and the number of learners on the training programmes are met, the targets for achievement are not. Between September 2001 and February 2002, only 43 per cent of the learners achieved their apprenticeship frameworks. There are no targets for the recruitment rates of men and women or for learners from under-represented groups.

18. The self-assessment report used for this inspection was the fifth produced by the company. It took account of the views of learners and employers. Staff make a major contribution to self-assessment and are included in all aspects of the process through regular meetings and questionnaires. They are consulted on the draft versions of the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with a number of the judgements in the report and found some additional strengths and weaknesses. Some of the strengths were found to be no more than normal practice. Judgements are supported by evidence in the areas of learning, equal opportunities and quality assurance but not for the other areas of

leadership and management. In a number of instances, the evidence consists of reworded judgements. Although the action plan is clear it does not cover all the weaknesses in the self-assessment report.

19. There are effective internal verification procedures. There is a clear internal verification policy and the company prepares internal verification sampling plans. Internal verification is mainly based on the observation of assessments and monitoring of learners' portfolios of evidence. Occupationally qualified internal verifiers interview learners to make sure they understand the assessment process. Assessors are given verbal and written feedback following internal verification. There are regular meetings of internal verifiers. These are used to help maintain consistency of standards across the company, and to provide training and updates from the awarding bodies. Reports from external verifiers are positive about the company's internal verification arrangements.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	184	3

20. There are 184 learners on work-based learning programmes in business administration, management and professional. In accounting, there are 17 foundation modern apprentices, 51 advanced modern apprentices and 20 learners on other work-based learning programmes. Learners in accounting work towards a professional certification at foundation, intermediate and technician levels and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2, 3 and 4. In business administration, there are 67 foundation modern apprentices and 29 advanced modern apprentices. Learners are recruited to the business administration training programme through schools, the careers service, employers, advertising and by word of mouth. Following recruitment, learners are given an initial assessment and an induction. If the learner is not employed, trainers help them produce a curriculum vitae, and YH Training Services Ltd finds a work placement or employment for them. In accountancy, most learners are in full-time employment and have been recruited to accounting posts by their companies. Learners are employed in a wide range of organisations, such as accountancy practices, manufacturing, services, retailing and health services. Learners may join the training programmes at any time of the year. Accountancy learners begin work for their key skills qualifications at an early stage in their training and prior achievement is used to obtain exemptions from key skills tests. Learners receive off-the-job training at one of the five training centres or at their place of work. The company's trainers carry out weekly assessments and progress reviews in the training centres. Further progress reviews are conducted during visits to the learners' workplaces, which take place every eight weeks.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	35		52		58		27		15		28				
Retained	0		10		23		14	52	7	47	15	54				
Successfully completed	0		10		25		14	52	7	47	15	54				
Still in learning	33		29		18		0	0	0	0	0	0				

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	77		83		54		31		14		1				
Retained	5		26		32	59	23	74	10	71	1	100				
Successfully completed	5		26		32	59	23	74	9	64	1	100				
Still in learning	58		26		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	28		1		11		43		31						
Retained	5		1	100	5	45	18	42	15	48						
Successfully completed	5		1	100	5	45	18	42	15	48						
Still in learning	20		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0						

STRENGTHS

- good off-the-job training
- particularly flexible off-the-job training
- good retention and achievement rates for accountancy learners
- good work placements

WEAKNESSES

- weak induction
- insufficiently precise action-planning
- insufficient involvement by employers in the review process

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better IT resources

21. Off-the-job training is good. Staff provide a wide range of activities including portfolio-building, structured lessons, and training in basic IT, communication, and numeracy. Staff effectively relate the training to the learners' employment and qualification aims. Learners make good progress in acquiring the skills they need at work. Some also receive company training in additional work-related skills. Learners are highly motivated and generally enthusiastic about their off-the-job training sessions. They have a good understanding of their training programmes. Training sessions are well planned. Although adequate, IT equipment and software in one training centre are not good. Accountancy learners have a scheme of work, session plans, and assessment schedules. The trainers provide a variety of suitable assignments that enable learners to develop and practise their skills. Materials for learners are plentiful and handouts are readily available. Accountancy learners benefit from training sessions presented by specialists in taxation and auditing.

22. There is a particularly flexible approach to off-the-job training. If learners are unable to attend their daytime off-the-job training, evening classes and training in the workplace are made available. Portfolios of evidence contain a wide range of evidence to demonstrate that they have developed work-based competences. Assessment practices are good. Assessments are supplemented by discussions with the learners during weekly training sessions.

23. Accountancy learners have good achievement rates and they are clearly aware of their progress. Their success rates in professional accountancy assessments are excellent and their achievement of the advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks is good, with a 58 per cent average success rate between 1996 and 1998. For accountancy learners on foundation modern apprenticeships, the achievement rate was constant at 78 per cent between 1997 and 1999. The retention rates between 1996-97 and 1998-99 averaged 66 per cent on modern apprenticeships. There have been significant improvements in the retention rate of accountancy learners in recent years.

24. There are good work placements. Training provider staff have good links with most employers. Learners are employed under permanent contracts at the start of their training programmes. Learners who are not employed are provided with suitable work

placements very soon after their training begins. They follow a six-week basic accountancy training programme before starting their work placement and usually gain employment within six months. Many employers provide good, varied experience and most give additional training. Most of the learners' work supervisors understand the off-the-job training programme and plan related workplace activities. Many employers now use the company for recruitment. There is good individual learner support. Learners benefit from easy access to their trainer for additional support either during or after the formal training sessions. All learners are given telephone contact numbers for their trainers. Trainers give learners effective training and carefully check their understanding of new concepts and tasks. Revision sessions are held in the weeks before the professional accountancy examinations.

25. The induction process is weak. Induction is brief and few learners were able to recall its content clearly. Most learners are unclear about how and with whom they can lodge a complaint. There is no reinforcement of the content of the induction during training. Some learners in administration are not aware of whether they are exempt from key skills or when they will begin key skills training. The trainers draw up individual learning plans, working closely with the learners and their employers. There is insufficient use of the initial assessments of learners' skills carried out during induction. Basic skills assessment is inadequate. For accountancy learners, credit is given for prior achievement, particularly in the area of key skills.

26. There is insufficient involvement of employers in the review process. Learners have their progress and performance at work and in training reviewed regularly. Action plans are produced, based on recently assessed work or progress made. The review process includes the setting of short-term objectives. Some objectives are insufficiently detailed. Copies of progress review paperwork and action plans are given to learners but are not routinely given to employers. The learner's workplace supervisor is rarely present during the progress review, although trainers and workplace supervisors often meet separately. Not all workplace supervisors are fully informed of the progress of their learners.

Good Practice

A learner with additional learning needs was given considerable additional support, which included tutorials and intensive pastoral care. This support was continued for a year after the withdrawal of funding. Due to his condition, the learner lost his work placement and YH Training Services Ltd provided a further work placement. Extra time for examinations was agreed with the examining body and the learner achieved all the targets in his advanced modern apprenticeship framework.

Information & communications technology

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	19	3

27. There are 19 learners on work-based learning programmes in ICT. There are three advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3 in using ICT. There are 14 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs in using, installing and supporting ICT. Two learners are on other work-based learning programmes, working towards NVQs at level 1 in using ICT. Learners are recruited throughout the year, using advertising, referrals from the careers service and employer contacts. All learners have an initial selection interview and an induction. Employed learners are given a half-day induction. Learners who are not employed have a two-day induction. YH Training Services Ltd provides additional learning support when appropriate. Learners are employed, or on work placement, with a range of employers and work-placement providers in the ICT, retailing and education sectors. All advanced modern apprentices are employed in local businesses. All employers are checked for suitability and for health and safety. There are two learners on work placement with YH Training Services Ltd. All learners are visited in the workplace every six weeks for assessment and progress reviews. Off-the-job training takes place in four of the training centres. Learners can also attend day-release training. Most of the learners who are not employed attend a training centre on a day-release basis. Some employed learners attend a training centre for half a day a week.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	4				13				4		6				
Retained	0				2	15			2	50	0	0				
Successfully completed	0				0	0			2	50	0	0				
Still in learning	3				0	0			0	0	0	0				

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	16		16		5		8		16		5				
Retained	0		0		4	80	3	38	5	31	3	60				
Successfully completed	0		0		3	60	3	38	5	31	3	60				
Still in learning	9		5		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1994-95			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts					6		10		11		28				
Retained					2		6	60	6	55	13	46				
Successfully completed					2		6	60	6	55	13	46				
Still in learning					2		0	0	0	0	0	0				

STRENGTHS

- good on-the-job training
- good assessment practices
- good work placements

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices
- inadequate off-the-job training
- weak induction

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better action-planning

28. On-the-job training is good. Training is specific to each learner's job role. Work produced by learners is good and their NVQ portfolios are well organised. Trainers are

well motivated and enthusiastic and vary training methods to suit individual learning needs. Learners are encouraged to negotiate appropriate work projects with their workplace supervisors. Learners speak highly of the support they receive from the trainers.

29. There are good assessment practices. Assessors visit learners frequently. In most cases, assessment is effectively planned in advance with the learners, often with the direct involvement of workplace supervisors, and in accordance with the learners' job role. There is good assessment of learners during their day-to-day work. Agreed assessment dates are often changed to take account of learners' work pressures. Questioning is used effectively to encourage learners to take a full and active part in the assessment process and to test their knowledge. Staff clearly identify the assessment of key skills, and learners understand the process. Some learners have a poor understanding of the assessment appeals procedure. Assessment is well recorded, with clear links to the NVQ requirements. Most individual learning plans are complete and up to date. Assessors provide comprehensive verbal and written feedback to learners.

30. The company ensures that learners have good work placements. Workplace supervisors effectively help learners gain valuable additional skills in the workplace. In one work placement, a learner was encouraged to work in a customer service environment to develop a wider range of skills. Workplace supervisors are involved in identifying learners' training and personal development needs. Learners receive comprehensive feedback on their work projects. They have access to good resources. A range of IT hardware is available to learners completing the installation and support qualification.

31. There are poor retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices, a weakness not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Between 1996 and 1998, only 20 per cent of learners achieved all the elements of their individual learning programme and only two learners completed the full framework. In 1999-2000, a total of 13 advanced modern apprentices started the programme but none completed the framework and 85 per cent had left before they had completed their apprenticeship. Achievement rates are higher for foundation modern apprentices and learners on other work-based learning programmes.

32. There is inadequate off-the-job training for those learners on day-release training programmes. The training is not well structured and does not adequately maintain the learners' interest. Learners are given time to build their portfolios of evidence, but do not receive enough individual support on carrying this out effectively. Learners have experienced difficulties due to staff changes. At such times, guidance has not always been good, and there have been periods when learners have not been given enough to do. There is insufficient co-ordination of training and assessment.

33. Induction is weak. Few learners are able to recall the contents of the induction. Induction programmes do not give enough information about the training programme and assessment methods. Some learners watch a video on equal opportunities and take

part in a discussion on discrimination. Most learners, however, are unclear about the appeals procedures and their rights and responsibilities under the equal opportunities policy.

34. Although learners' action plans are satisfactory, some are insufficiently detailed and learners are not adequately involved in their production. Learners do not always understand what they are expected to achieve. Learners' comments, recorded on progress review documents, are inadequate and are often repetitive.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	501	3

35. There are 501 learners on work-based learning programmes in retailing, customer service and transportation. There are 107 advanced modern apprentices, 392 foundation modern apprentices and two learners on other work-based learning programmes. Most learners are already employed when they start training. Learners who are not employed are recruited from careers service referrals and found suitable work placements. Most of these learners obtain permanent employment with their work-placement provider. Employers and work-placement providers are local retailers or other customer service organisations. A small number of local warehouses are also used. On-the-job training is provided by employers and off-the-job training by training-provider staff. Learners are assessed in the workplace by observation and by using evidence from employers. Learners are visited regularly for progress reviews and learner support. There are structured training sessions for groups of learners at some of the company's training centres. These are mainly in key skills.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	98		119		22		19		11		3				
Retained	1		4		6		6	32	5	45	1	33				
Successfully completed	1		4		2		3	16	3	27	1	33				
Still in learning	75		24		6		2	11	0	0	0	0				

Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	437		235		88		11									
Retained	32		58	25	51	58	0	0									
Successfully completed	32		34	14	32	36	4	36									
Still in learning	329		58	25	4	5	1	9									

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96				
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	5		9		44		45		40		140					
Retained	0		9	100	33	75	36	80	35	88	79	56					
Successfully completed	0		6	67	13	30	22	49	31	77	58	41					
Still in learning	2		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					

STRENGTHS

- particularly effective individual learner support and guidance
- excellent links with employers
- good work placements
- good off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices
- inadequate initial assessment
- weak induction
- poor assessment planning

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of workplace supervisors
- better use of unannounced observation during internal verification visits

36. There is particularly effective individual learner support and guidance. Staff respond promptly and effectively to learners' individual learning needs. They arrange workplace visits according to the needs of employers and learners. Pastoral support is also good. For example, one trainer is dealing with a difficult case of harassment and providing exceptional support to the learner throughout the process. Trainers have good working relationships with learners and work with them to identify possible areas for training and assessment during their visits. Most individual training is not structured but is based on the specific needs of the learner, identified through discussions about progress made since the last visit. Trainers give constructive feedback to learners following assessment. Learners are motivated by the enthusiasm of the trainers and work towards the completion of short-term action plans.

37. There are excellent and well maintained links with local employers. Employers approach the company to find young people suitable for employment and training. Many young people who start in training positions become employed. At some training centres, employers are invited to join learners at structured, off-the-job, key skills training sessions. This updates employers' own knowledge of key skills and of the framework requirements and helps them to provide support for learners with key skills training in the workplace. It also becomes a focal point for the sharing of ideas and good practice between local employers.

38. Work placements are good. Employers provide good environments and resources for training, and encourage learners to take part in apprenticeships and NVQ training programmes. Some employers have comprehensive training schemes for new employees. Workplace supervisors and managers provide ongoing training for learners. Some are familiar with the requirements of the qualifications. Many employers enable learners to collect evidence by performing tasks outside their normal job roles. This helps learners develop additional skills which help them progress in their careers. One workplace supervisor is encouraging a learner by using the achievement of an advanced modern apprenticeship as a criterion for promotion. Learners gain high levels of occupational competence and many produce portfolios of evidence of a high standard.

39. There is good off-the-job training. Learners attend the training centres for key skills training and portfolio-building. The training centres are well resourced. Learners are given structured project assignments which relate to their work, and individual guidance to help them gain key skills awards. The sessions are well planned and well taught. Trainers use effective question and answer techniques and make good use of visual aids. There is a good selection of training handouts to help learners work independently.

40. There are poor achievement rates on the advanced modern apprenticeship programme. Achievement rates dropped from 33 per cent in 1996 to 13 per cent in 1999-2000. Achievement rates on the foundation modern apprenticeship and NVO programmes are higher. Retention rates on the advanced modern apprenticeship programme range from 33 per cent in 1996-97 to 55 per cent in 1999-2000. Retention rates are satisfactory for the foundation modern apprenticeship programme and good for those learners on other work-based learning programmes.

41. Initial assessment is inadequate, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Learners are interviewed at the start of the training programme, but this does not provide a good basis for assessing learners' skills. Learners complete a questionnaire to see if their job role matches the requirements of the apprenticeship framework. This questionnaire also helps identify the training programme level that the learner will follow, but it does not assess the learners' competence. There is insufficient testing of basic skills. Learners who are not employed are given a test at the beginning of the training programme. This test is not always given to employed learners. Learners who need additional learning support attend group basic skills sessions. Some learners' basic skills needs have not been identified until after the training programme has begun. The company is currently implementing a new initial assessment procedure.

42. The induction is weak, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Learners complete a workplace induction questionnaire to check their knowledge and understanding of health and safety and equal opportunities. A training agreement is issued which contains basic information on equal opportunities, confidentiality, grievances and appeals, health and safety, additional learning support and computer software. The agreement is insufficiently detailed. Many learners do not remember receiving the training agreement and are unfamiliar with its content. Many learners do not know how to make an appeal. The company's appeals procedure has recently been updated but the new procedure has not yet been implemented. The information given to learners at induction is not reinforced during the training programme. A comprehensive induction pack has recently been developed, but it is too soon to evaluate its effect.

43. Assessment in the workplace is satisfactory, but the planning of assessment is poor. Learners work towards short-term targets and forward planning is poor. There is insufficient distinction between learners' progress towards their NVO and their progress in the workplace. Progress reviews are not linked to individual learning plans. There is too much reliance on evidence of competence through everyday work activities. Although workplace supervisors and managers are occupationally competent, they are insufficiently involved in the assessment process.

44. Routine internal verification is carried out in accordance with an annual plan. Assessors are observed and portfolios of learners' work for each assessor are examined. Internal verification is satisfactory, but there is insufficient use of unannounced observation of assessors as part of this process.

Good Practice

Learners are encouraged to work towards additional qualifications over and above those required for the modern apprenticeship framework. For example, learners who achieve four optional retailing units in the customer service modern apprenticeship framework are supported by the training provider to complete the full retailing NVQ.