

INSPECTION REPORT

Heathercroft Training Services

18 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 **learn**direct 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

Heathercroft Training Services is located in Eastbourne, East Sussex. The company provides training and assessment programmes funded by the local Learning and Skills Councils for Sussex, Kent and Medway, London South, and London West. It also provides some privately funded training. At the time of inspection, there were 391 learners on programmes funded by local Learning and Skills Councils, comprising 47 foundation modern apprentices, 330 advanced modern apprentices and 14 other learners working towards NVQs. Of these learners, 366 were on programmes in health and social care. The rest were on programmes in business administration and management, and customer service. These programmes were not inspected because of the small numbers of learners involved.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, training in health and social care is unsatisfactory. Leadership and management are also unsatisfactory. The arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity are satisfactory, but quality assurance is unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

Health, social care & public services	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- effective learning in the workplace
- good staff training and development

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement rates
- inadequate planning of training
- inadequate initial assessment
- slow progress of some learners
- poor target-setting
- ineffective quality assurance arrangements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better assessment in the workplace
- more sharing of good practice

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 20 days at Heathercroft Training Services (HTS) between 18 February and 22 February 2002. They visited 36 workplaces, and interviewed 71 learners and 16 workplace supervisors. Inspectors carried out 34 interviews with HTS staff. They observed reviews and one training session which was graded as good. They examined a range of documentary evidence which included learners' portfolios and records, progress review documents, assessment records, external verifiers' reports, minutes of meetings, policies, procedures and promotional literature. They also studied the most recent HTS self-assessment report, produced in September 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Health, social care & public services	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. HTS was established in 1991. Its premises in Eastbourne are used both for administration and training purposes. HTS provides work-based learning for young people, mainly in health and social care. Most training takes place at the learners' workplaces. On-the-job training is supplemented by one-to-one coaching by HTS staff in the workplace. Most assessments are carried out by workplace supervisors, who have trained as assessors. HTS employs 28 full- and part-time staff. It has a general manager, an operations manager, a quality assurance and equal opportunities manager, an administration manager, and a business development manager.

3. HTS currently has 391 learners funded by local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). Most of them are employed. There are 47 foundation modern apprentices, 330 advanced modern apprentices and 14 other learners working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs). HTS provides training and assessment for learners in four local LSC areas, Sussex, Kent and Medway, London South, and London West.

4. Eighty-three per cent of learners work in Kent and Medway or Sussex. Unemployment in these areas, at 2.3 per cent and 1.8 per cent respectively, was below the national average for September 2001, of 2.9 per cent. The unemployment rates were slightly higher in the London West and London South areas, at 3.1 per cent and 2.5 per cent respectively. The proportion of 16 year olds achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in June 2001 was 52 per cent in Kent and Medway and Sussex, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the 1991 census was 2.3 per cent in Kent and Medway and 1.9 per cent in Sussex, compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent. GCSE pass rates in London South are similar to those in Kent and Sussex, while those in London West are around the national average. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is 10.2 per cent in London South and 27 per cent in London West.

Work-based learning for young people

5. HTS provides work-based learning for young people, mainly in health and social care. There are 366 learners on programmes in health and social care of whom 321 are advanced modern apprentices and 45 are foundation modern apprentices.

6. Achievement rates for modern apprentices are poor. Between 1997-98 and 1999-2000, fewer than 12 per cent of learners achieved all aspects of the relevant apprenticeship framework. Over 30 per cent of those who successfully completed their apprenticeship did so after their planned completion date. Of learners who started in 2000-01, over 30 per cent have already left the programme with no achievements.

7. The quality of training is unsatisfactory. HTS does not provide any off-the-job training for employed modern apprentices. Employers provide some good training but this is not planned to meet the requirements of the relevant NVQ. Some learners are unable to complete their NVQ within the agreed timescale. Some have not had visits from tutors or assessors for several months. Workplace supervisors have insufficient knowledge of learners' progress to provide adequate coaching. Initial assessment is inadequate. Learners do not have detailed learning plans and agreed targets. Neither employers nor learners have a clear understanding of what is needed to complete the programme successfully. Credit is not always given to learners who already have some of the required key skills. Nevertheless, all employed learners are acquiring new skills and knowledge in the workplace. Most have regular visits from tutors. There are excellent relationships between tutors and learners. Non-employed learners on work placements receive good off-the-job training.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

8. HTS is located in Eastbourne, East Sussex. Its premises are used both for administration and training purposes. It is an approved assessment centre. The company was founded in 1991 to provide training for the care industry. Most learners are based in care homes for the elderly, in Sussex, Kent, South London and West London. Learners can join training programmes at any time of the year. The company has recently been reorganised. The executive board consists of four members. The company employs 28 full- and part-time staff. There is a general manager, a quality assurance manager, an administration manager, and an operations manager. All were appointed in the six months prior to the inspection. The previous general manager is acting as the new general manager's mentor and as the company's part-time business development consultant. There are three operational co-ordinators, one each for care programmes, management programmes and key skills. The co-ordinator for care is also a recent appointment. There are 11 assessor/tutors who visit learners in the workplace. There are two key skills specialists in information technology (IT) and the application of number. All teams report to the general manager. The company has an equal opportunities policy and a range of other policies including one on health and safety. There is a quality assurance policy and associated procedures. Since 1998, the company has produced four annual self-assessment reports. The latest one was completed in September 2001.

STRENGTHS

- effective communications
- good business planning
- good staff training and development

WEAKNESSES

- poor management of some training arrangements
- inadequate management information system
- poor target-setting
- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- ineffective quality assurance arrangements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- clearer action points in minutes of meetings
- more detailed quality assurance policy
- more sharing of good practice
- better assessment in the workplace

9. Communications within the company are effective. Locating the operational team coordinators in the same office has improved communication and the sharing of good practice. Staff are regularly updated on company-related issues. For example, every three months, all HTS staff meet for a half-day briefing. An informative newsletter for staff, learners and employers is circulated every three months. Operational teams meet regularly and minutes are produced and circulated. In general, minutes of meetings do not include clear action points that could be reviewed at a later date. The company is efficiently managed. The management style is open and trusting. Over the past three years, HTS has traded profitably. Employees receive regular updates on how the company is performing. Over this period, the number of publicly funded learners has doubled from approximately two to four hundred. The company ensures that it meets the requirements of funding and awarding bodies. The business plan contains targets for the number of learners expected to start and succeed each year. Tutors now have individual targets to help achieve these totals. Staff are aware of the key objectives of the company. However, the business plan does not contain any targets related to quality improvement. The link between the development plan and business plan is not clear. Different teams have operational plans, but these are not clearly linked to the business plan. Unlike previous years, the general manager wrote the current business plan without consulting other staff. Staff training and development are good. All employees are regularly appraised. The company has maintained its accreditation as an Investor In People, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people, for the past five years. The company gives a high priority to training its staff. For example, all tutors have received key skills training and four have achieved the key skills practitioner award. New staff are thoroughly inducted. Several employees have been encouraged to undertake level 4 management training. All tutors are appropriately qualified or are completing assessor training.

10. Some of the training arrangements are poorly managed. Two learners have had five different assessors within 12 months, and four-month periods without anyone from HTS contacting them. Appointments have frequently been cancelled and some employers have had difficulty in contacting an appropriate person in HTS. Care tutors have a substantial workload. They are responsible for tutoring up to 65 learners a month, spread across a wide geographical area. This is in addition to initially assessing learners and providing training for work-based assessors. Care tutors do not give enough attention to designing individual learning programmes and setting appropriate targets for learners. Systems for identifying ineffective tutors are not always effective. Achievement rates for key skills qualifications have remained poor since the last inspection. The best achievement rate on the care programmes over the past four years is 21 per cent. There are too few specialist key skills tutors. Despite the appointment of a key skills manager a year ago, some learners and employers remain unclear about key skills requirements. Tutors teaching key skills are observed in the workplace and HTS has developed some good teaching materials. The company has tried unsuccessfully to run key skills workshops. Learners who are eligible for exemption from some key skills training, on the basis of their previous qualifications, are not being given the appropriate accreditation. Starting two months ago, all new learners take a nationally recognised initial assessment test. The company's management information system is inadequate.

This weakness was identified at the last inspection and in the most recent self-assessment report. Four different databases are used to record information about different types of activities. The system provides the information required for contractual purposes, but does not readily enable staff to track learners' progress or monitor equality of opportunity. The company does not set targets for retention and achievement rates. Monitoring of learners' progress is weak. Most are only given targets to be achieved by the end of their contracted programme.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

11. HTS has a detailed equal opportunities policy. It is clearly written and covers all current legislation. The policy contains well-chosen examples to explain what is meant by direct and indirect discrimination. The policy is reviewed annually and steps are taken to ensure that staff are aware of it. Staff receive effective training to raise their awareness of equal opportunities issues, and help them understand the relevant legislation. The company routinely includes questions about equal opportunities in the questionnaires issued to staff and learners, and at staff appraisal interviews. Learners' awareness of equal opportunities issues is satisfactory. Tutors discuss the company's equal opportunities policy fully with learners at their induction. Assignments on equal opportunities form an important part of the NVQs in care. There is good equal opportunities practice in some workplaces. This is useful in increasing the awareness of the learners who work there. There is access to the training rooms at HTS for wheelchair users, and there are appropriate toilet facilities. The company has sound procedures covering appeals and complaints. All learners receive clear, written information about these at their induction. HTS is a member of a national organisation which keeps it well-informed of current developments in equal opportunities practice.

12. Promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities are inadequate. HTS makes insufficient use of the data it has. For example, 17 per cent of its learners work in areas of London where a large proportion of the population is from minority ethnic groups. The company's data show that a low proportion of its learners are from these groups but little action has been taken in response to this finding. HTS does not analyse achievement rates by gender or ethnic background. It is unable to identify whether action is needed to improve results for specific groups. Monitoring of equal opportunities in the learners' workplaces is ineffective. HTS requires employers to have an equal opportunities policy. It has no procedures to assess the suitability of these policies or to monitor the extent to which they are implemented. HTS identified this weakness in their self-assessment report.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

13. The company has a detailed set of quality assurance procedures which it reviews and updates regularly. The quality assurance policy is very brief and does not adequately cover all aspects of training. The company uses an established annual cycle of activities to support its quality assurance arrangements. Plans are in place to modify these to ensure that all aspects of the training process are covered. Most activities and procedures are monitored informally. The company has a quality assurance committee which meets regularly. However, the items discussed rarely include training-related issues. The internal verification procedures are satisfactory. Internal verifiers meet regularly and action is taken on any concerns raised. The external verifiers' reports are mostly positive. However, there is insufficient standardisation of assessments that take place in the workplace.

14. The company's quality assurance arrangements are ineffective. Retention and achievement rates have remained poor for the past four years. Inspectors agree with the self-assessment report that the lack of clearly defined performance targets is a weakness. The monitoring of learners' progress is poor. Many learners leave early or make slow progress, continuing on their programme well beyond the planned completion date. The company has not sufficiently established the reasons for low retention rates and slow progress. Some remedial actions have been introduced, but they are not a part of an overall strategy. The company has concentrated on meeting external quality assurance requirements and has not set its own standards. For example, a basic skills test has recently been introduced to meet the local LSC requirement for initial assessment. The test is inappropriate for most advanced modern apprentices. Quality assurance issues are discussed at team meetings but there is insufficient sharing of good practice. The company routinely sends questionnaires to a sample of learners and employers. The return rate is very low. In August 2001, the number of completed forms represented only 8 per cent of learners. The data from the questionnaires are analysed but the findings and planned improvements are not fed back.

15. The company's self-assessment procedures are well established. Learners see a final draft of the report and can contribute to it. Employers are not involved in the self-assessment process and the report is not externally validated. The self-assessment report produced for the inspection was insufficiently critical. Many of the aspects of provision identified by the company as strengths, were considered by inspectors to be normal practice. A number of significant weaknesses were not identified. The action plan was sufficiently detailed and sought to rectify the weaknesses identified by the company. Progress on the actions has been closely monitored since December 2001.

Good Practice

HTS wanted to ensure that disabled learners had good access to its premises. While refurbishing the building, the company arranged for a wheelchair user to test out their facilities. They improved access following recommendations made.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, social care & public services

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	366	4

16. There are 321 advanced modern apprentices working towards NVOs at level 3 in care or promoting independence and 45 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVOs at level 2 in care. All modern apprentices are also working towards key skills qualifications at an appropriate level. Advanced modern apprentices have up to 24 months to complete their award, and foundation modern apprentices have up to 12 months. HTS staff are responsible for enrolment, induction and workplace reviews. Some learners are referred to HTS by their employers. Others are recruited through the employment services or as a result of direct marketing. The majority of learners are employed in care homes in Kent, London and Sussex. Seven of the foundation modern apprentices are not employed but have work placements. They attend HTS's premises one day a week throughout their programme for off-the-job training. HTS are responsible for the teaching, assessment and verification of key skills. All learners are assigned a tutor who visits them in their workplace. All assessment takes place in the workplace. Approximately 50 per cent of learners are assessed by workplace supervisors. HTS tutors assess the remainder. All HTS staff have appropriate qualifications and vocational experience. HTS is responsible for all internal verification.

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	97		247		294		253		138		78					
Retained	0		27		46	16	122	48	50	36	8	10				
Successfully completed	0		1		17	6	34	13	29	21	4	5				
Still in learning	80		134		82	28	24	9	1	1	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	19		56		46		25									
Retained	0		5		19	41	11	44								
Successfully completed	0		2		7	15	1	4								
Still in learning	9		31		5	11	0	0								

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	1997-98		1996-97													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	138		187													
Retained	50		104	56												
Successfully completed	24		98	52												
Still in learning	0		0	0												

STRENGTHS

- good off-the-job training for non-employed learners
- effective learning in the workplace

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate planning of training
- slow progress of some learners
- inadequate initial assessment
- low achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better links between workplace coaching and assessment
- better integration of key skills with other aspects of training

17. Off-the-job training for non-employed learners is good. Foundation modern

apprentices following a pre-nursing programme, attend off-the-job training at HTS one day a week for a year. Attendance and timekeeping are good. The training consists of lessons, practical demonstrations and portfolio-building sessions. The lessons and practical demonstrations enable learners to develop the skills they need to perform basic care tasks. Trainers encourage learners to talk about their workplace tasks. They then devise appropriate lessons or demonstrations to illustrate best practice and the theory behind it. HTS has a good range of practical training aids. The training rooms are well equipped and provide a good learning environment. There is one tutor to six learners, enabling tutors to give learners a good deal of individual attention. Learners are attentive and interested. Employers value the training learners receive.

18. All learners are acquiring appropriate new skills and knowledge. Tutors encourage learners to research subjects and to provide written answers to questions to show their understanding. Tutors mark assignments regularly and give constructive feedback. Most learners are visited regularly at work by their tutors, typically every two weeks. During these visits, learners agree challenging but achievable targets with their tutors. Visits fit in with the learners' shift patterns. Tutors often visit learners at work on Sundays, early in the morning or in the evening. Learners are encouraged to contact tutors by telephone at any time. Most learners have excellent relationships with their tutors. Most employers provide good learning and training opportunities in the workplace. Employers encourage learners to work towards additional qualifications, such as NVQs in supervisory management. Tutors try to integrate key skills work with other aspects of training. However, IT and application of number are less well integrated than other key skills. All learners are clear about their career aims and aspirations. Many are aiming to work for professional qualifications after achieving an NVQ. Tutors work as a team to support learners and there is effective informal communication between them. HTS sends a regular newsletter to all learners, which provides routine information and also celebrates the achievements of learners who have completed their apprenticeships. Pastoral support is good, and HTS provides additional learning support for those who need it.

19. The planning of training programmes is inadequate. The company ensures that all learners receive the training that workers in care homes require by law. This covers areas such as health and safety and manual handling. Most employers provide opportunities for learners to attend additional training courses, but these are linked to the business needs of the employer. HTS does not provide any off-the-job training for employed modern apprentices. On-the-job training is not planned in relation to the NVQ requirements. In many care homes there are a number of learners working towards the same NVQ. Tutors do not use this opportunity to provide group training in the workplace. Every learner is set the same assignments. These are not appropriate for all learners. Some find the language of the assignments difficult to understand. Others have insufficient knowledge to complete the assignments without considerable help. HTS does not provide learning resources such as textbooks, videos or distance learning materials to help learners with their studies.

20. Some learners do not receive sufficient support. Many are unable to achieve all the

competences required for the NVQ within the agreed timescales. Staff changes have left some learners without an assessor or tutor for several months. Not all learners receive copies of the NVQ standards or assignments promptly after enrolling on the programme. Some have to wait up to three months to begin work towards the qualification. Changing shift patterns and high staff workloads have left some learners waiting for workplace visits for several months. Some learners who have completed all their assignments and collected most of the evidence they need for the NVQ, have not been observed by an assessor in their workplace. As a result, they are unable to complete their portfolio for final certification. The training of new work-based assessors is slow. They are not given sufficient support or training to achieve the assessor award within an acceptable timescale. There is too little contact between tutors and workplace supervisors. Learners' progress reviews do not routinely include their managers or supervisors. The review system concentrates on setting targets related to NVQ requirements. There is little discussion of wider issues which may be affecting learners' progress. Workplace supervisors have insufficient knowledge of learners' progress. Workplace supervisors sometimes telephone HTS to request information or assistance. HTS often takes no action in response to these calls. Some foundation modern apprentices do not start work on key skills until all the NVQ work has been completed.

21. Learners are not given a comprehensive initial assessment of their skills at the start of their apprenticeships. All new learners are now given a basic skills test. This is inappropriate for some learners who have high GCSE grades and, in some cases, higher level qualifications. All learners' key skills are also assessed, but credit is not given to those who have already gained key skills qualifications. Some learners are repeating key skills work. Learners' job roles are not analysed to check whether the job provides opportunities to gather evidence of all the competences required to achieve an NVQ. Employers are not involved in the initial assessment processes. No agreement is made with employers which stipulates their contribution to the training and support of learners. Learners do not have detailed learning plans with agreed targets. Neither learners nor their employers have a clear understanding of the modern apprenticeship frameworks or how long they should take to complete.

22. Achievement rates are poor. Between 1997-98 and 1999-2000 fewer than 12 per cent of modern apprentices achieved all aspects of the relevant framework. Over 30 per cent of those who successfully completed their apprenticeship did so after their planned completion date. Of learners who started in 2000-01, over 30 per cent have already left the programme with no achievements.