

INSPECTION REPORT

PGL Travel Limited

18 March 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Inadequate provision

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

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

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

SUMMARY

The provider

PGL Travel Limited offers residential activity holidays and courses for young people. In addition, it operates as a private training organisation which offers training for PGL Travel Limited's staff only. There are 15 residential activity centres throughout the UK and 11 across France and Spain. Its head office is in Ross-On-Wye. PGL Travel Limited offers work-based learning in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel.

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Training in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel is satisfactory, as is the leadership, management and quality assurance of the company. Equality of opportunity is unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- extensive support for learners
- good initial training
- good communication
- extensive evaluation of training programmes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor management of the winter leave of absence
- inadequate arrangements to ensure equal opportunities
- poor assessment and verification practices

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more thorough accreditation of prior learning
- more review of policies and procedures
- more opportunity for learners to give anonymous feedback
- better sharing of good practice
- more critical identification of weaknesses in the self-assessment process

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 22 days at PGL Travel Limited (PGL) in March 2002. Inspectors visited seven residential activity centres and interviewed 32 learners and 36 staff. Progress reviews were observed and three training sessions were observed and graded. A range of documents was examined including 46 portfolios of evidence, 30 individual learning plans, progress review documents, assessment records, external verifier reports, minutes of meetings, plans, policies and procedures. The most recent self-assessment report was published in December 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Total	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. PGL Voyages was originally established in 1957, to offer summer canoeing holidays for families. As the schools' market grew, PGL gradually expanded its business to offer adventure and skiing holidays, educational tours for schools, information technology (IT) and field study courses. PGL now operates 26 residential activity centres across Ross-On-Wye, Shrewsbury, Devon, Surrey, Scotland, South Wales, France, Spain and the Isle of Wight. The company offers work-based learning in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel. The training covers a winter residential training programme, which is seven weeks for foundation modern apprentices and 14 weeks for advanced modern apprentices. Learners continue their training during the season at one or more of the residential activity centres. At the end of the season, learners attend a training and review week. Advanced modern apprentices then have a period of authorised absence before returning for the next season to finish their training. PGL employs 140 permanent staff across the head office in Ross-On-Wye and the European office in France. It has a chairman, a managing director, seven directors, an operations manager and a vocational training manager. The training department employs 19 permanent staff, of whom 14 are directly responsible for the modern apprenticeship programmes and 34 qualified work-based assessors across all residential activity centres. In addition, PGL employs over 2,200 seasonal staff.

3. PGL currently employs 98 modern apprentices. There are 63 foundation modern apprentices and 35 advanced modern apprentices. Most learners do not originate from the Herefordshire area. PGL operates nationally and attracts learners from all over the country. Herefordshire and Worcestershire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds the training. In October 2001, the unemployment rate in Herefordshire was 1.9 per cent compared with the national average of 2.9 per cent. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers in the region achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 54 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. At the time of the 1991 census, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the region was less than 1 per cent, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally.

Work-based learning for young people

4. PGL offers training in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel. In hospitality there are 13 learners, of whom one is advanced and 12 are foundation modern apprentices. In sport and recreation there are 85 learners. Of these, 34 are advanced and 51 are foundation modern apprentices.

5. Achievement rates are poor on all training programmes. On the foundation modern apprenticeship programme, four learners are still in training from November 1999, and 26 from November 2000. Similarly on the advanced modern apprenticeship, eight learners are still in training from November 1999. Retention rates show a steady improvement. Foundation modern apprenticeship programmes show an increase from 50 per cent in 1999-2000 to 100 per cent 2001-2002. Similarly on the advanced modern apprenticeship programmes, retention rates have increased from 58 per cent in 1999-2000 to 100 per cent in 2001-2002.

6. The quality of training is satisfactory. There is a well-structured winter training programme and training sessions are well planned and well taught. Learners are given extensive support from on-site trainers and assessors and this is in addition to a regular schedule of visits by vocational training staff. Regular reviews of progress are carried out and includes good short-term target-setting. Learners can take a wide range of appropriate qualifications. However, there is slow achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks. On-the-job training during the season is insufficiently focused on the apprenticeship framework and assessment and internal verification practices are poor.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

7. PGL operates from a head office in Ross-on-Wye and is led by its chairman and managed by a recently appointed managing director. The vocational training manager manages a team of three head office-based managers and five peripatetic assessors. The vocational training manager, all three managers and two of the assessors have very recently been appointed into their current roles. The vocational training manager and an administration manager report to the training manager, who has overall responsibility for the work-based learning programme. All learners work at one of PGL's UK or overseas activity centres on temporary seasonal contracts. There are 34 qualified work-based assessors and 78 in training. One of the head office-based managers and one of the trainers are internal verifiers for the sport and recreation programme. Three of the trainers are currently training to be internal verifiers. PGL subcontracts its internal verification for catering to a specialist hospitality company. A service level agreement and flowchart showing responsibilities has recently been drawn up and signed. PGL was accredited with the Investor in People standard in November 2001. This is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. The company's first self-assessment report was produced in December 2001, in preparation for inspection.

STRENGTHS

- good communication
- extensive evaluation of training programmes
- regular and effective quality assurance of the workplace
- good staff review and target-setting

WEAKNESSES

- lack of recorded strategies for some aspects of the modern apprenticeship programme
- poor management of winter leave of absence
- insufficient use of data
- inadequate arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- review of policies and procedures
- more opportunity for learners to give anonymous feedback
- better sharing of good practice
- more critical identification of weaknesses in the self-assessment report

8. PGL has particularly effective arrangements for communication at head office and with the residential activity centres. This is identified in the self-assessment report.

There are regular departmental and inter-departmental meetings. Staff are well informed about what is happening within the company, and about board decisions and strategies through three-monthly communication meetings and letters from the chairman. There is good staff involvement in decision-making of the company and within their own departments. Residential activity centre managers and trainers meet at least every fortnight to discuss problems, identify solutions and review learners' progress. Trainers pass on training information to activity centre staff during their six-weekly visits.

9. All permanent staff are reviewed by their line manager each year and staff training and development needs are clearly identified through this process. Job roles are discussed and reviewed, and opportunities for change are explored. Staff are well motivated through individual targets, some being linked to the business plan, others are more specific to the individual's job role. Staff are clear about how their individual targets are supporting the company's strategic objectives.

10. The training department has recently set targets for modern apprenticeship achievement for the next two years. Some change has already been made to improve the structure of the training programmes and managers have proposals for future developments. There are however, no written strategies to show how the targets will be achieved and trainers are not aware of the targets. There is little mention of government-funded training programmes within the PGL business plan and no link to the recently set targets. There has been insufficient focus on the completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks.

11. PGL is currently networking their activity centres to increase access to the head office monitoring and management information system. Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment strength in the management information system. Managers and trainers do not make sufficient use of data in decision-making and at meetings. They are unable to locate data about the current status of government-funded learners, and the achievement and retention rates. Inaccurate data was used in the self-assessment report.

12. At the end of their first summer season, and with the agreement of the LSC, all of last year's learners were granted a leave of absence from their modern apprenticeship training for personal development. However, this leave of absence has been poorly managed. Learners left before agreeing the objectives or action plan for this period. PGL are receiving LSC funding for this leave of absence, but it has not held progress reviews with learners or carried out any assessment. Approximately 50 learners went on this leave of absence at the end of their first year. Sixteen have since been withdrawn from the training programme, the remainder have had gaps of between four and seven months before starting their second year of the apprenticeship. Communication with learners has been through letters and e-mail, but very few have responded. Only one learner has benefited from using the leave of absence as an opportunity for personal development. Although managers identified the leave of absence as a strength in the self-assessment report, they are aware of the problems and are reviewing the management of this part of the programme.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

13. Learners receive good equal opportunities awareness training as part of their induction. There is a half-day training session and the content varies for foundation and advanced modern apprentices. The programme consists of a number of sessions, all of which have detailed tutor notes. Sessions include a variety of activities to involve and engage learners. As a result of this training, learners develop a good understanding of key aspects of equal opportunities. There is a clear complaints procedure which learners can and do use if necessary. Few complaints are received, but those that are recorded are dealt with adequately. PGL is aware that its workforce does not adequately reflect the diversity of the current working population. It has taken some action to target under-represented groups through recruitment advertisements in specific publications, but there has been little success. There has been a recent initiative involving career talks in specific colleges, but it is too early to evaluate its success.

14. There is a detailed equal opportunities policy, which was developed by a working party in July 2000, but it has not been reviewed since its introduction. Key procedures to support the policy have not been developed. The company does not meet its stated aims in a number of significant areas within the policy. The policy is not prominently displayed at all activity centres and responsibilities have not been clearly defined. Overall responsibility is not held at a sufficiently senior level within the company. Inadequate time has been allocated to the person who currently has this responsibility, and there is no mention of equality of opportunity in the job description. Responsibility for equality of opportunity within work-based learning has not been defined. The equal opportunities working party, which was set up to monitor PGL's approach has met infrequently. There has been no meeting for the past nine months and there is no date planned for the next meeting. Data are gathered on gender, ethnicity and disability of applicants but limitations in the current information system means that this information is not analysed or used. Data are not used as a basis for decision-making or strategic planning. Links with external agencies are weak. PGL has undertaken a disability audit of some of its activity centres in response to legislation, but the results have yet to lead to any significant actions to improve access for people with mobility problems. The current approach to equal opportunities is reactive and there is no strategic management approach.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

15. PGL have well-established quality assurance and monitoring procedures for work-based learning. There is a detailed and comprehensive quality assurance policy. However, some of the procedures such as assessment and additional learner support have recently been written and PGL has not been able to evaluate and review the effectiveness of these policies as yet. The company has a schedule for their review and update throughout this year.

16. There are exceptionally frequent opportunities for managers, learners and trainers to evaluate the training programmes. In particular during the winter training period, where learners and trainers evaluate all aspects of their training through review meetings every fortnight. Swift and effective action is taken to deal with identified problems including improvements to the learning and residential environment, resources and structure of training sessions. Learners evaluate all training sessions. Trainers are observed by peers and managers and recommendations for improvement are suggested. One of the managers has used the feedback from a previous winter to pre-empt problems and resolve them before learners started in 2001. Feedback from learners and vocational programme co-ordinators is collected and analysed during the summer. Many of the recent changes, including the structure of the key skills training and introduction of study time, have resulted from last year's feedback. This year, the questionnaires have been sent to the learners much earlier in their training programme. As a result of this, a manager has made arrangements to discuss specific problems with learners on an individual basis. There are, however, few opportunities for learners to give feedback anonymously.

17. The learner's experiences at the activity centre are quality assured through the regular six-weekly trainer visits. The trainers monitor the effectiveness of support, systems, meetings, training, health and safety, the environment and facilities. Problems are identified, discussed with the activity centre manager and, when appropriate, passed to the training and operations departments. An action plan is agreed with the manager at the end of each visit, and is followed up at the next visit. Consistency is maintained through rotating trainers across the activity centres and monitoring by one of the managers.

18. While there are many opportunities for head office staff and trainers to share good practice, the system is less structured for activity centre staff. In particular for vocational programme co-ordinators, some of whom are very experienced, while others have started their role very recently. There are few, if any, opportunities for vocational programme co-ordinators to discuss their role, solve problems and share solutions and good practice.

19. The training manager produced the first draft of the self-assessment report, which was then reviewed and updated by managers and trainers. Self-assessment has successfully identified many of the company's strengths. However, the process was insufficiently thorough in locating appropriate weaknesses. Inspectors identified that several strengths in the self-assessment report were actually weaknesses, but the grades

PGL TRAVEL LIMITED

matched those given by the inspection team. The resulting development plan clearly identifies and prioritises actions and timescales for improvements.

Good Practice

During the winter training period one of the trainers made contact with a specialist holiday company for people with disabilities. The company needed volunteers to accompany their customers on holiday. Five of the advanced modern apprentices participated in this and benefited from working with people with disabilities. The learners' attitude towards people with disabilities changed in a positive way after this experience.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	98	3

20. PGL offers modern apprenticeship training at foundation and advanced levels in sport and recreation, outdoor education, food preparation and cooking. There are currently 35 advanced modern apprentices and 63 foundation modern apprentices. Recruitment is predominantly from young people who have completed one or more seasons with PGL. Successful candidates are employed by PGL on full-time seasonal contracts. All learners initially attend an intensive winter training programme, which is seven weeks for foundation modern apprentices and 14 weeks for advanced modern apprentices. After this time, learners are allocated to a residential activity centre for the operating season. Assessors visit learners each month to carry out assessments and progress reviews.

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												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	13		30		26											
Retained*	0		0	0	15	58											
Successfully completed	0		0	0	7	27											
Still in learning	13		14	47	8	31											

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	33		35		28											
Retained*	0		0	0	14	50											
Successfully completed	0		0	0	10	36											
Still in learning	33		26	74	4	14											

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

STRENGTHS

- good initial training
- extensive support for learners
- good variety of additional qualifications
- good short-term target-setting
- good retention rate in hospitality

WEAKNESSES

- slow framework achievement
- inadequately planned on-the-job training
- poor assessment and verification practices

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more thorough accreditation of prior learning

21. There is a well-structured winter training programme which all learners undertake before working in residential activity centres. The initial training includes a thorough induction to the apprenticeship framework and how it relates to the learners' job role. All learners take part in basic and key skills initial assessments. A one-to-one meeting takes place when additional support needs are identified and the individual learning plan is formulated. In addition, there is an introductory programme which leads to an externally accredited certificate. Equal opportunities are well covered and include role-play activities which learners find memorable. Training sessions are well planned with detailed session notes showing learning outcomes, timings, support material to be used and a range of activities. Trainers focus on the background knowledge element of the framework and on key skills training. In hospitality, practical kitchen sessions are included for food preparation and cooking. All training is clearly linked to the national vocational qualification (NVQ). Guest speakers are often used and visits to national catering exhibitions are also included.

22. Learners are given extensive support from a wide range of sources during their training including peers, on-site trainers and head office peripatetic trainers and assessors. During the winter, tutors live on-site with the learners which ensures a close working relationship. Learners can ask for support from trainers or attend the scheduled

drop-in sessions. Once learners are placed in a residential activity centre, the vocational programme co-ordinator gives day-to-day support and manages the programme of on-site vocational work. Monitoring of progress is carried out by converting achievement of units and elements into a percentage of the whole qualification. This is a good motivational tool for the learners. Learners are also given a comprehensive list of contact numbers of staff for help, assistance or support.

23. Learners can undertake a wide range of appropriate industry qualifications at various levels. These include health and safety, first aid in the workplace, basic food hygiene, child protection, and PGL's specific awards for activity leaders. High proportions of learners also gain one or more national governing body awards in sailing, canoeing, archery, air rifles, fencing, orienteering, mountain biking and quad bikes, often exceeding the requirement of the apprenticeship framework. The awards and qualifications are appropriate to the job role and offer additional technical knowledge and skills which add value to their roles. Learners specialise in specific occupational contexts such as canoeing, sailing or activity leadership and this enhances their career development. All learners work towards the key skills in problem-solving even though it is not currently required for the framework. This has been identified as a key feature of the learners' job role and supports their training. However, the accreditation of this learning is not considered in the NVQ.

24. Regular reviews of progress are carried out and include good short-term target-setting. There are regular visits by head office training staff who carry out observed assessments, progress reviews and monitor individual learning plans. New, realistic and achievable targets are established and agreed with the learner. Head office assessors work closely with the vocational programme co-ordinators and activity centre managers to ensure that the targets are regularly reviewed and progress is monitored between visits. In the year 2000-01, PGL retained 71 per cent of its hospitality learners and in the current year, PGL has retained all of its learners. These retention rates are good in an industry which usually experiences high levels of staff turnover. Retention rates show a steady improvement across the occupational area.

25. There is slow achievement of modern apprentice frameworks. From the 1999 starters who might reasonably be expected to have completed, there are four foundation modern apprentices still in training and 26 from 2000. Similarly, there are eight advanced modern apprentices learners still in training from 1999. Prior to November 2001, all applicants followed the modern apprenticeship programme, but many learners were only interested in national governing body awards. With this in mind, the training team introduced changes in 2001 and created two training pathways, one for modern apprenticeships and the other for national governing body awards. However, it is too early to judge the effect of this initiative on achievement rates.

26. Limited expertise in key skills in the training department, poor integration of key skills with the vocational training and a lack of assessment in the workplace have had an adverse effect on the completion of the framework. This situation has now been resolved with the appointment of a learning skills manager in September 2001. Key

skills are now an integral part of the vocational training and assessment, together with a much greater emphasis on preparing learners for the tests during the winter training. The first learners to sit the key skill tests in February 2001 achieved a 99 per cent pass rate.

27. Learners' previous experience and qualifications are not sufficiently taken into consideration. All learners on modern apprenticeship programmes have completed a minimum of one season with PGL and their skills and experience would make a valuable start to their qualification.

28. The planning of the on-the-job training is inadequate. Staff assume that most of the training has taken place during the winter before they arrive at the activity centre. Once learners are placed they are treated as an employee and the emphasis is on their employment. Consequently, there is no formal structure to the continuation of their apprenticeship training. The trainers' role tends to be based on assessment, and the training is reactive to the results of the assessment. There is no evidence of specific training sessions being organised on the NVQ or key skills, no refreshers for topics previously covered and little evidence of training to reinforce the background knowledge.

29. PGL has a brief internal verification policy which covers themselves and their subcontractor. It gives the sampling proportion for portfolio verification and states that each assessor will be observed at least once every season. The sampling process is currently inadequate to ensure appropriate or sufficient verification across all assessors. Observation checklists are not used effectively during the assessments and there is little questioning to ensure understanding. There is too much reliance on question sheets for the background knowledge. Work-based assessors who have received training but have not achieved their assessor qualification, are carrying out observations, but there are no specific procedures for the internal verification and supervision of trainee assessors. Internal verifiers do not routinely observe assessments and there is no formal process for sharing good assessment practice.

Good Practice

Learners' training programmes are flexible enough to meet individual needs. One advanced modern apprentice had already achieved the foundation modern apprenticeship and had worked for the company for many years. His training programme was organised to reflect this.

Poor Practice

During the inspection, staff were observed entering the food preparation area without wearing the appropriate protective clothing. Although food was not being prepared at the time it is not acceptable.