

INSPECTION REPORT

Somerset County Training

19 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

Somerset County Training is part of Somerset County Council. It is a major provider of training in the county and has offices in Wellington, Frome, Taunton, Bridgwater, Yeovil and Street. It offers work-based learning for young people in construction, engineering, business administration, information technology, care and early years and foundation. There are 689 learners working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships.

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the quality of work-based learning in construction, engineering, business administration and care and early years is unsatisfactory. The quality of the information technology training is satisfactory and Life Skills provision is good. The leadership and management of Somerset County Training are very weak, as is quality assurance. The arrangements for equality of opportunity are unsatisfactory.

GRADES

Leadership and management	5
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	4
Quality assurance	5

Construction	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Business administration, management & professional	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

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

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

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- extensive support for learners
- good opportunities for staff development

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- slow progress towards achievement of qualifications
- poor availability of management information data
- poor understanding of learners' performance
- lack of awareness of equal opportunities by learners and employers
- inadequate initial assessment
- poor quality assurance of training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more involvement of employers in the NVQ process
- better use of the progress review process
- more frequent staff appraisals
- more attention to equal opportunities in progress reviews
- better use of feedback from employers and learners
- formalise system for checking work placements

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of 16 inspectors spent a total of 63 days at Somerset County Training (SCT) during March 2002. They interviewed 208 learners, carried out 56 interviews with employers and supervisors and 87 interviews with SCT's staff. They visited 68 work placements. Inspectors observed and graded 11 learning sessions. They examined a range of documents including portfolios of evidence, policies and procedures, awarding body reports, minutes of meetings, internal verifier files and other management papers. Inspectors studied SCT's self-assessment report which was produced in November 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	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
Information & communications technology	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Health, social care & public services	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	5
Foundation programmes	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	0	1	5	5	0	0	0	11

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. SCT is part of Somerset County Council and was formed in 1990. It is a self-financing organisation and does not receive any direct funding from the county council. SCT has a remit from the county council to offer training to all applicants and as a result has many less able learners. At present, 26 per cent of learners are endorsed with special learning or social needs. A considerable number of learners are unsure about their choice of career. SCT is the largest provider of work-based learning in Somerset and currently has 689 learners across the county. Learners are linked to one of SCT's five area offices in Wellington, Frome, Taunton, Bridgwater or Yeovil. Most of the off-the-job training is given by SCT except for engineering and construction, which are subcontracted to eight local colleges. SCT has 63 staff of whom 47 are full time and 16 are part time. Funding of work-based learning is through Somerset Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

3. Three-quarters of all businesses in Somerset have less than five employees, which is slightly higher than for the country as whole. SCT deals with approximately 500 small employers. Agriculture and manufacturing are important to the Somerset economy. The unemployment rate in Somerset in October 2001 was 1.7 per cent, compared with 2.9 per cent nationally. The 1991 census shows that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in Somerset is less than 1 per cent, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 55 per cent in Somerset, compared with 47.9 per cent nationally.

Work-based learning for young people

4. Retention and achievement rates are poor in construction, business administration, engineering and care and early years. Of the learners who started training between 1996 and 2001, 58 per cent have left early without achieving the targets on their individual learning plan. SCT encourages learners to seek employment which sometimes increases the number of early leavers. There are some signs of improvement in retention rates for engineering and care and early years in more recent years. Retention rates are better in information technology (IT) and Life Skills but they are very small training programmes. Progress towards achieving qualifications is slow in most areas of learning. The standard of practical work and training in the workplace is good.

5. The subcontracted off-the-job training is poor for most plumbers, who make up 74 per cent of construction learners. Initial assessment is not used as a basis for planning the training, especially in engineering and business administration. Key skills are being introduced late in business administration and in most areas of construction. They are not an integral part of the vocational training for business administration or IT, although attempts are being made to do this in other areas, particularly in engineering and care and early years.

6. Many of the progress reviews are weak with little use of targets to improve progress. Employers are insufficiently involved and many employers do not understand the content of the NVQs or the modern apprenticeship framework. Procedures for internal verification are weak, particularly in business administration and IT.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 5

7. SCT's senior management team consists of the newly appointed head of curriculum, the managers of the area offices in Frome, Yeovil and Bridgwater and the manager of the Taunton office who also acts as deputy to the part-time director. The director for SCT is based with the county council at county hall and allocates approximately one and a half days each week to SCT. There are 63 staff, of whom 47 are full time and 16 are part time. Forty-one are directly involved in the training. SCT has an equal opportunities policy and quality assurance procedures. It produced its second self-assessment report for inspection against the 'Common Inspection Framework'.

STRENGTHS

- good opportunities for staff development
- extensive help for disadvantaged learners
- effective and timely action for problems with equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- poor availability of management information data
- poor understanding of learners' performance
- inconsistent management practices between offices
- lack of monitoring of equal opportunities data
- lack of awareness of equal opportunities by learners and employers
- inadequate initial assessment
- poor quality assurance of training
- no routine quality assurance of subcontractors

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- increase frequency of staff appraisal
- more explicit approach to equal opportunities in staff induction
- more attention to equal opportunities in progress reviews
- better attention to equal opportunities in promotional literature
- better use of feedback from employers and learners
- formalise system for checking work placements

8. Staff development at SCT is good. Staff can ask for training at any time and requests are carefully considered. Personal development is also well supported. Some training is undertaken in areas which are not directly related to an individual's job, but which will increase their confidence and overall effectiveness. For example, one member of staff in administration asked for training in accounting which is not part of the current job. One part-time member of staff who is employed to teach key skills has a background in early

years and is being trained to become an assessor. Staff can also attend training courses which are operated by the county council, particularly in IT.

9. The current management information system does not readily produce performance monitoring information. There are no systems in place to collect and analyse management information data by start date and occupational area. The only information available is the amount of learners on training programmes within a LSC contract year. As information on retention and achievement rates is not routinely collected, SCT had difficulty producing data for the inspection. There is no person in the organisation with expertise in management information systems. No information is collected on early leavers, although one area office is starting to do this.

10. SCT has a poor understanding of the learners' performance and this was not identified in the self-assessment report. The organisation has little understanding of retention and achievement rates or the importance of monitoring them. There is no discussion of learners' performance at management meetings, other than SCT's performance against the LSC contract. The current business plan only focuses on the current year. It does not mention the number of learners in each occupational area, but is specific about monetary income targets. The business plan does not include clear statements about the organisation's strategic objectives. Current activities are not being thoroughly self-assessed, improved or changed. The allocation of financial resources is monitored each month but there is no discussion of how this impacts on the development of the occupational areas.

11. There are inconsistencies in practices between the area offices. Individually they are good but there is little sharing of good practice. Although there are regular meetings of the senior management team, the current management structure does not encourage consistency. Area managers line manage all their own staff, who then use the systems and procedures for that office. As a result, different evaluation forms are being used for learners, training officers are using different monitoring sheets and there are different approaches to the use of initial assessment and marking. This will be partially resolved through the use of a new initial assessment procedure, but it is not fully implemented as yet.

12. Curriculum managers do not line manage staff and there have been inconsistencies in the teaching of the curriculum across the county. This will be partially resolved by the recent appointment of a head of curriculum who will line manage curriculum managers and be responsible for the design and teaching of the whole curriculum. In an effort to increase consistency, all area managers were given corporate roles, functioning across the whole organisation. However, they are not fully established and have had little impact on the operation of the organisation. Apart from the director for SCT, who allocates one and a half days each week to SCT, there is no single person with overall responsibility for the learners' performance. The deputy manager only has responsibility for business and contracts and learners' performance in the Taunton office.

13. Although there is an established staff appraisal procedure, the frequency has fallen

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behind the target of an annual appraisal for each member of staff. Staff turnover at SCT in 2001-02 is high at 27 per cent, compared with 15 per cent for the county council as a whole. This was identified in the self-assessment report. As some of the staff highlighted poor support from their manager as a reason for leaving, at their exit interview, regular appraisal is even more significant.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 4**

14. SCT is clearly committed to supporting any learner irrespective of gender, race, disability or difficulty. Extensive help is offered to individuals who are disadvantaged. In this rural area the travel can present a barrier to starting a training programme and SCT provides taxis from remote places across the county. Two learners in construction cannot attend college due to personal circumstances. The trainer works closely with their employers to ensure comprehensive and supportive on-the-job training to help their planned progression to an NVQ. Work is taken to another learner who does not attend training because she cannot use lifts or stairs. Recorded complaints and incidents of discrimination show that SCT take effective and timely action. Learners are clearly informed of their right to complain and are given a copy of the grievance procedure. They know who to see and are confident they will be listened to.

15. SCT uses the county council's equal opportunities policy which has recently been revised to take account of their needs. A member of SCT's staff attends the county council meetings. There is no one responsible for developing and monitoring equal opportunities. There is no monitoring of retention and achievement rates in relation to gender, ethnicity or disability. However, SCT is just starting to monitor recruitment according to ethnicity in relation to the population. There is no checking of the employers' equal opportunities policies and no monitoring of their implementation of equal opportunities. Staff are trained in equal opportunities, but it is not clear enough for new staff at induction.

16. Most learners have only a superficial knowledge of equal opportunities. Information is given during induction but it is not reinforced throughout the training. There is insufficient attention paid to equal opportunities in progress reviews. Most learners have no knowledge of the appeals procedure. Employers are unaware of SCT's equal opportunities policy and many are unaware of their responsibilities for learners in relation to equal opportunities.

17. Initial assessment includes tests for basic skills and key skills. However, the results of the basic skills test are not made clear to learners and the information is not used as a basis for the individual learning plan. This sometimes results in inappropriate training. Some learners are not offered an initial assessment. For example, electrical installation learners are only offered an initial assessment if their application form is not filled in properly.

18. There is not enough attention paid to equal opportunities in promotional literature. The general leaflet states that SCT is an equal opportunities employer but leaflets for vocational areas do not attempt to attract minority groups either in the text or by the use of positive images.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 5

19. SCT is accredited with an internationally recognised quality assurance standard. The quality assurance system is available to all staff through the staff handbook. The quality assurance administrator is responsible for all administrative actions and paperwork for the process. There is a well-established internal audit system which involves staff at all levels and across all functions. Any non-compliance is resolved promptly with appropriate corrective action. However, the system does not monitor the quality of work-based learning or inform staff on improving performance. It only focuses on compliance with the local LSC contractual requirements.

20. There is no effective system for evaluating performance data. The compilation of progression, achievement and retention data is poor. SCT is unable to give reliable and consistent information on learners' progress, achievement and retention rates. There is also poor evaluation of feedback from learners and employers. Other than an exit survey, which is inconsistently used, there is no system for gathering and evaluating learner and employer feedback and data during the training programmes.

21. There is no monitoring of subcontractors which results in a variety of approaches being used across the curriculum areas. Quality assurance of subcontractors is limited to monitoring contract compliance. There is no system for observing training sessions or assessing the standard of resources offered by subcontractors. There is no formal system for checking the suitability of work placements other than the local LSC requirement to monitor the health and safety arrangements.

22. SCT offers qualifications from three awarding bodies. External verifier reports indicate that overall the assessment and verification processes are being carried out satisfactorily. Nevertheless, in two occupational areas, the external verifier reports have commented on inconsistent internal verification procedures. Some learners and employers do not understand the assessment and verification processes.

23. A project group, which is made up of the business and contracts manager, the quality assurance administrator and the new head of curriculum, compiled the self-assessment report. Significant weaknesses in four of the occupational areas which account for 660 of the 689 learners were not identified. The significant weaknesses in leadership and management were also not recognised.

Poor Practice

Corporate responsibilities have been identified for senior managers. No manager has clear corporate responsibility for implementing, improving and monitoring learners' performance across the whole organisation, although aspects of this will be part of the role of the new head of curriculum.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	99	4

24. There are 99 learners in construction. Seventy-three are in plumbing, 12 in electrical installation, nine in wood occupations, two in painting and decorating, and three in other construction trades. Forty-seven are advanced modern apprentices, 28 are foundation modern apprentices and 24 are on NVQ programmes. Learners are recruited directly from employers or by referral from the careers service. Training is organised from three area offices in Taunton, Bridgwater and Yeovil. Training officers who are based in the area offices visit the colleges and employers to carry out progress reviews with learners every 13 weeks. All learners have an induction, during which they undergo initial assessment for basic and key skills. Additional learning and support needs are identified during this process. All of the off-the-job training is subcontracted to four local colleges where learners attend on day release. Key skills are mainly taught during the off-the-job training. Learners are placed with, or employed by, a variety of small to medium-sized companies in Somerset.

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										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	20		37		28		11									
Retained*	0		0		0		0	0									
Successfully completed	0		0		0		0	0									
Still in learning	13		17		9		8	73									

*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

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Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	35		2													
Retained*	0		0	0													
Successfully completed	0		0	0													
Still in learning	27		1	50													

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	18		30		24		8									
Retained*	0		0	0	1	4	1	12									
Successfully completed	0		0	0	1	4	1	12									
Still in learning	11		8	27	5	21	0	0									

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

STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- good support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention rates
- slow progress towards qualifications
- insufficient use of work-based evidence for assessment
- poor off-the-job training for most plumbing learners
- weak progress reviews
- inappropriate programmes for some learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more awareness of the NVQ process by employers

25. Most learners have work placements which offer a range of work experience and most employers are responsive to learners' training needs. Learners are often moved to a different work placement to enable them to cover all units of the NVQ. Health and safety awareness and compliance is good in all work placements.

26. Training officers give good support to learners. Their relationship with learners, employers and staff at the colleges is good and is now being used more effectively to promote progress. Training officers identify and record progress against the assessment criteria at each progress review and encourage learners to use evidence from the work place for college assessments. Training officers from across the county have recently started to meet on a formal basis and are beginning to share good practice.

27. Retention rates for advanced modern apprentices and those on NVQ programmes are poor. For advanced modern apprentices, only 34 of the 76 starting the training programme between 1998 and 2001 have remained. In 2001-02, seven of the 20 who started left in the first year. On NVQ programmes between 1998 and 2001, 47 of the 62 learners who started have already left. For 2001-02, seven of the 18 starting the programme left in the first year. The number of learners on foundation modern apprenticeship programmes is only significant for 2001-02. Eight of the 35 who started on this programme have left early.

28. Most of the learners in plumbing are making slow progress towards achieving their NVQ, particularly those attending one of the subcontracted colleges for off-the-job training. One learner achieved the level 2 NVQ in 18 months but was not permitted to progress to level 3 until the remainder of the class caught up. This learner filled the time practising work he had previously been assessed on. No foundation or advanced modern apprentices have yet achieved their framework. Only two of the 62 learners who started on NVQ programmes between 1998 and 2001 have achieved their qualification.

29. Very little workplace evidence is used for assessment purposes. Most learners repeat the activities they have already carried out in the workplace, during practical training and assessment at college. Learners see little relevance in carrying out simulated work for assessment when they have previously achieved competence in the workplace. This does not apply to the small number of learners on the electrical installation programme where all assessment is carried out in the workplace.

30. Off-the-job training for most plumbers is poor. Many learners use fixings and fittings which have already been heavily used which makes it difficult to produce good work.

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Learners are often expected to carry out work for background knowledge with minimal help from tutors and spend long periods without supervision during their college day. Some learners have difficulty in relating the theory to tasks in the workplace and there is a lack of co-ordination between the on- and off-the-job training. Key skills in plumbing are added on to the end of the NVQ and have little relevance to plumbing. In wood occupations, there are some good attempts to make key skills an integral part of the vocational training. Internal verification is satisfactory.

31. There are no demanding targets for progress and unit achievement during progress reviews. There is also insufficient guidance on how to gather evidence or which skills should be practised in preparation for assessment. Employers only comment on personal effectiveness and attendance and they are not given a copy of the progress review document. Some employers are not aware of the activities undertaken at college and this prevents them organising work which relates to the college programme. Procedures for carrying out progress reviews are often poor. Training officers use different forms depending on which area office they are attached to. Learners are not given a copy of the review document and have little recall of its content. Individual learning plans are not given to learners or referred to during progress reviews. Learners have little understanding of the structure of their programme and the requirements of the framework.

32. Recent changes to construction NVQs identify that the workplace must be the primary source of evidence. However, some learners are working for employers where work activities do not match the requirements of the NVQ. For example, one learner on a wood occupations programme is employed by a roofing contractor. This unsatisfactory arrangement is recognised by SCT. Five learners are studying electrical installation for their background knowledge, but this is not relevant to their NVQ programme. Many employers do not have a clear understanding of the NVQ process.

Good Practice

SCT is helping the maintenance manager of one employer to carry out assessor qualifications which will enable more regular assessment in the workplace.

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	125	4

33. SCT offers training in mechanical and manufacturing engineering across the whole of Somerset. Learners are linked to training centres in Taunton, Bridgwater, Yeovil, and Frome. There are 45 advanced modern apprentices, 28 foundation modern apprentices and 52 learners on NVQ programmes. Learners undertake NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in engineering, manufacturing and production, technical services, welding and machining. Eighty per cent of learners are employed. Recruitment is carried out through the careers service, recommendation from existing or previous learners or directly from employers. Employers range from small individually run companies to medium-sized organisations working on one or two sites. SCT subcontracts all off-the-job training to six local further education colleges which learners attend on day release. Assessments and progress reviews take place regularly in the workplace. Key skills are taught by SCT's staff and are based on assignments and workplace evidence.

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										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	2		31		30		42									
Retained*	0		0		1		4										
Successfully completed	0		0		1		4										
Still in learning	1		24		3		17										

*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

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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	21		6		7		6								
Retained*	0		0		0	0	0	0								
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0	0	0								
Still in learning	19		5		2	29	2	33								

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	41		24		26		30								
Retained*	0		1	4	9	35	4	13								
Successfully completed	0		1	4	9	35	4	13								
Still in learning	30		14	58	5	19	3	10								

*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 work placements
- effective review and assessment practices
- good portfolios of evidence

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement rates
- slow progress towards achievement of qualifications
- poor use of initial assessment results

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better awareness of programmes by learners
- better recognition of unit achievement

34. The wide range of work placements offers good on-the-job training. The range of work varies from the manufacture of large steel stairwells to light industrial units making precision parts for the aerospace industry. Most employers are very supportive and offer additional help to encourage learners to succeed. Employers adapt work schedules to allow learners to gain experience which matches the employers' needs and those of the qualification. Many employers offer tasks, and in some cases large project work, for learners to work on. Learners are significantly motivated as they undertake work which is fundamental to the employer's business. For example, one learner is making a pilot component with a potential order of 20 million units. Two others are preparing three-dimensional illustrations as a base for a multimedia marketing tool. They are both with the same employer and are working towards an NVQ at level 3 in engineering services.

35. Progress review and assessment visits are carried out at least every 12 weeks, although they are often more frequent. The staff are occupationally competent, are qualified assessors, and offer good advice and support to learners. Short-term targets are negotiated and clearly set out with timetables. The paperwork is well structured and most assessors offer comprehensive help to learners. Questioning of learners is good and clearly checks understanding. Learners are encouraged to identify opportunities for evidence gathering and to arrange assessor visits to ensure the evidence is captured. Key skills are an integral part of the NVQ programme and are taught in the workplace. Initial evidence for key skills is identified from previous learning and then from further work-based tasks. The learners carry out this activity with their assessor on a regular basis and are encouraged to identify evidence for the key skills. When work-based evidence is not available, SCT organises special assignments with clear identification of the key skills being covered.

36. Portfolios of evidence are good. They are well structured and include photographs produced with digital cameras, witness statements and assessment results. Learners often produce material on computer, including the photographs. The inclusion of actual products to demonstrate the work undertaken is particularly impressive. Learners take pride in their portfolios. Internal verification is satisfactory.

37. While learners are gaining competence in the workplace, achievement of the NVQ training programme and completion of the modern apprenticeship framework are poor. Only 19 of the 266 starters in the past four years have achieved their qualification. Retention rates are also poor. Only 125 learners out of 266 who started, remain in training. However, retention rates have improved. Currently, 72 per cent of the

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learners who started in 2000-01 remain on the programme. Reasons for learners leaving early are not thoroughly analysed but much of the poor retention rates are attributed to the large number of learners who have little chance of achieving their qualification or the ambition to achieve. In addition, some learners have been subject to redundancies.

38. Learners are progressing slowly towards the achievement of the goals on their individual learning plans. Part of this delay has been due to changes in staff at SCT and in the local colleges. While short-term goals are clear, long-term goals and target-setting are insufficient to push learners towards faster achievement. Many learners are unclear about what they have to do to achieve their qualification.

39. Initial assessment is carried out to identify any additional training or social needs. Although the initial assessment has some benefits, it fails to take full account of previous experience or qualifications. Some learners have achieved certificates which cover some elements of their training programme, but they have been asked to repeat them. The training period does not take account of previously held skills or knowledge. Additional support is organised when necessary after the initial assessment process.

40. Many learners are unclear about their training programme and where they are in the process. Learners' files, portfolios and other documents do not always identify this to learners and employers. Learners do not receive any recognition for individual units achieved.

Good Practice

One company has a number of shift supervisors who are trained to enable assessment of learners outside normal working hours.

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	216	4

41. SCT offers modern apprenticeships and NVQ training in administration and accountancy from four sites in Taunton, Bridgwater, Yeovil and Frome. There are 64 advanced modern apprentices, 132 foundation modern apprentices and 20 learners on NVQ training. All are learners in administration apart from seven advanced modern apprentices in accountancy. Learners are recruited throughout the year either through the careers service, referrals from employers or through SCT's own marketing activities. All learners have an induction. SCT's staff interview learners to establish the type of administration workplace they prefer. Learners are encouraged to be selective and attend more than one interview before deciding. All learners on the advanced modern apprenticeship programme are employed. Many foundation modern apprentices start the programme on a training allowance but many subsequently convert to employed status while they are still on the training programme. Most of the off-the-job training is given by SCT except for the learners in Frome who attend a local further education college. Key skills training is carried out during the off-the-job training, although this has been introduced recently. There is no assessment of key skills in the workplace.

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										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	23		40		34		28									
Retained*	0		1		2	6	7	25									
Successfully completed	0		1		2	6	7	25									
Still in learning	21		31		9	26	3	11									

*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

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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	93		56		65		2									
Retained*	0		0	0	13	20	0	0									
Successfully completed	0		0	0	13	20	0	0									
Still in learning	80		38	68	14	22	0	0									

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	3		18		37		60									
Retained*	0		1	6	16	43	20	33									
Successfully completed	0		1	6	16	43	20	33									
Still in learning	3		11	61	6	16	0	0									

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

STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- wide range of additional qualifications
- good participation in off-the-job training by learners

WEAKNESSES

- poor initial assessment practice
- poor integration of key skills with vocational training
- slow progress towards the achievement of qualifications
- lack of planning for internal verification
- poor retention and achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of the progress review process
- better use of individual learning plans
- further development of assessment practices

42. SCT have a good employer network which offers quality training to young people in administration and accountancy. Many employers work closely with SCT's staff to offer the breadth of experience needed for the NVQ. One national employer offers job rotation across departments for the collection of evidence, and some supervisors help learners to identify appropriate evidence for the NVQ. Attendance at off-the-job training is strongly supported and most employers offer additional in-house training to learners.

43. In addition to the requirements of the apprenticeship framework, learners are encouraged to undertake additional qualifications such as computer literacy and information technology, word processing at level 3 and key skills at a higher level than specified in the framework. Many learners take up these opportunities and gain additional qualifications which enhance their job prospects. Accreditation of individual units is available to learners.

44. Most of the off-the-job training takes place in SCT's own training centres. SCT has recently introduced a modular training programme where learners undertake five modules each lasting 10 weeks, covering the NVQ and key skills. Learners value these sessions and participate well. The small numbers enable a high level of support and individual guidance. Detailed weekly action-planning is effective in motivating learners, by giving them challenging targets.

45. Initial assessment practice is inconsistent. Many learners who have been training for some time have not undertaken any formal initial assessment. Learners who have gained employment before entering the training programme do not undertake any form of initial assessment. When initial assessment does take place it is not used to develop the training programme. The accreditation of prior learning is not routine. It has been used to exempt learners from key skills testing but there is also an example where one learner with advanced supplementary (AS) level qualifications and good GCSE grades was put on a foundation modern apprenticeship.

46. Key skills have been introduced late for many learners. In some cases work on key skills for last summer's entrants has only started recently. Not enough use is made of NVQ evidence. It is not cross-referenced to key skills and there is no assessment of key skills in the workplace. While learners are aware that they have to achieve key skills as part of their apprenticeship, they view them as separate and have little awareness of how they can become an integral part of their NVQ training.

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47. The rate of progress for many learners is slow. Three advanced modern apprentices from the 1998 starters and 14 foundation modern apprentices from the 1999 starters have still to complete their framework. The late introduction of key skills and staff changes have slowed learners' progress.

48. There is no strategy which sets out the training centre's approach to internal verification. While there is evidence of internal verification taking place, it is being carried out at the assessor's request and not planned and managed by the internal verifier. There is no plan which ensures that the appropriate internal verification takes place for assessors and learners. In addition, there is no monitoring system to record ongoing NVQ achievement and provide internal verifiers and the co-ordinator with data on learners' progress. Over the past 12 months, the external verifier reports have been critical of the lack of an internal verification strategy, but appropriate action has not been taken.

49. The administration programme has poor retention and achievement rates in modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes. If all remaining advanced modern apprentices in training achieve the framework this will increase the overall performance for the two years to only 32 per cent. No foundation modern apprentices from 1998-99 and only 20 per cent from 1999-2000 have achieved the framework. If all remaining foundation modern apprentices for these two years achieve the framework this will only increase the achievement rates to 40 per cent. There has been no framework achievement yet for 2000-01 foundation modern apprentices. In NVQ training, the best achievement rate which can be expected if all remaining learners achieve their qualification is only 43 per cent.

50. Progress reviews are undertaken every 12 weeks, but there is little evidence that activities in the workplace are acknowledged. Reviews focus on NVQ unit achievement and portfolio development with little or no comment on how skills are being developed in the workplace. Individual learning plans are prepared at the beginning of the training programme and detail the learners' training aims and the qualifications they will gain. However, they are not routinely updated to reflect the learners' progress and achievement. Examples of unit accreditation certificates, word processing certificates and certificated training through the employer are in learners' files but are not identified on the individual learning plan.

51. While there is some good assessment practice, it is not spread across all training centres. Cross-referencing of evidence is not used enough and learners are generating more evidence than is needed in many cases. There continues to be an over reliance on portfolio evidence with little use made of professional discussion for level 3 learners. A series of quality assurance meetings and quarterly internal verifier meetings have been introduced to encourage the sharing of good practice.

Information & communications technology

Grade 3

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

52. SCT offers training in IT leading to NVOs in installing and supporting IT systems, and was introduced in September 2000. There are 19 learners of whom 16 are foundation modern apprentices and three are advanced modern apprentices. An initial assessment of learners' skills in IT determines the most suitable level. Basic skills tests are used to decide the appropriate level of key skills and to identify any support needs. Recruitment is carried out in a variety of ways including visits to schools, careers events, careers service referrals and directly from publicity materials. SCT's staff visit learners in their work placements to carry out assessments and progress reviews at regular intervals. Off-the-job training takes place at two sites in Taunton and Yeovil where the IT facilities are good. Training rooms are equipped with computers and up-to-date software. Learners can also use videos and digital cameras.

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														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts			3													
Retained*			0														
Successfully completed			0														
Still in learning			3														

*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														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	12		9													
Retained*	0		0	0													
Successfully completed	0		0	0													
Still in learning	10		6	67													

*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 portfolios of evidence
- good range of assessment methods
- good work placements
- good additional support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- lack of established procedures for internal verification
- slow progress towards NVQ unit achievement
- poor integration of key skills with vocational training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- confirm staff competence by formal qualifications
- increase the range of electronic components for use before work placement
- more involvement in the NVQ process by employers

53. The standard of learners' work is high. Portfolio evidence demonstrates a good level of understanding and occupational competence. Evidence gathering techniques make good use of IT and include video footage and digital and scanned images. Feedback on written assessments and reviews are scanned and stored with other evidence and most learners have at least part of their portfolio stored electronically. Evidence is cross-referenced to a number of NVQ units and portfolios are neat and well organised.

54. A range of methods is used during assessments. Observations, witness statements, questions and answers and practical tests are used to assess learners. Assessors and learners then use a variety of methods to record the assessments, which includes the use of video, digital camera images and scanned images of work-based evidence and assessment material.

55. Work placements are good and are carefully chosen to meet the learners' requirements. All of the placements have been chosen because their main area of business focuses directly on installing and supporting IT systems. Learners benefit from the practical training opportunities these firms offer and the wealth of work-related

evidence that they gain.

56. Learner support in the workplace is good. Learners who have personal and social problems receive extra pastoral support. Extra help is given with accommodation, confidence building and other problems. SCT is currently monitoring one learner who left the training programme temporarily due to problems with the placement. The learner will be reinstated as soon as another suitable placement is found. Additional support is offered for those who have problems with any part of the training programme, including key skills.

57. Procedures for internally verifying learners' work are not fully formulated as yet. The internal verifier is able to verify the learners' work but there is no formal recording system. SCT's staff are beginning to have regular meetings to establish the monitoring and recording systems. Only one of the three staff who are qualified to assess and internally verify is a full-time member of staff.

58. Foundation and advanced modern apprentices started in either 2000 or 2001 and only one has completed the foundation modern apprenticeship framework. All of the learners have achieved several elements in different units, but progress is slow towards the full NVQ. None has completed a full unit towards their NVQ as yet. Two learners have left the programme without completing the NVQ framework in order to enter IT-related employment.

59. Key skills are not an integral part of the workplace activities. Learners are achieving NVQ units without cross-referencing the workplace evidence to the elements of the key skills. They are unaware of the opportunities for matching key skills to their work based evidence. On a forthcoming open day, a learner will spend the day demonstrating how to assemble and disassemble a personal computer to prospective learners, parents and employers. No discussion has yet taken place about how this presentation could be used as evidence for key skills. Visits to the learners' work placements are not used to help them to work on their key skills, as staff concentrate on the NVQ units.

60. One member of staff carries out most of the training and assessment and is clearly competent. However, this competence is not recognised through formal IT qualifications. Learners do not have a sufficient range of electronic components to practise on before starting more complicated work in their work placement. Employers are not sufficiently involved in the NVQ process which is hindering achievement for some learners.

Good Practice

One learner has his entire evidence stored electronically. The IT assessor is currently considering an offer from a placement provider to assist with software for digital video compression in order to help with further development of the digital portfolio.

Health, social care & public services

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	220	4

61. Training in care, early years and oral health is organised from four sites in Bridgwater, Frome, Taunton and Yeovil. There are 220 learners, of whom 39 are advanced modern apprentices in early years and 26 in care. On the foundation modern apprenticeship programme, there are 67 learners in early years and 38 in care. On NVQ programmes, there are 13 learners in early years, 23 in care and 14 in level 3 oral health training. Learners are recruited through referrals by the careers service, local schools and more recently for early years, through liaison with the early years partnership. All learners are interviewed before starting their training and attend a two-day induction programme. Learners who are not employed are placed with a range of employers for four days each week. There are 65 work placements including public and private nurseries, schools, residential and nursing homes for older people, social service establishments and dentists. There are 71 employed learners in early years, 83 in care and four in oral health. Off-the-job training is one day each week, initially in two eight-week blocks. Key skills are mainly taught as part of the off-the-job training.

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	6		29		45		78		24		33				
Retained*	0		0		6	13	9	12	0	0	8	24				
Successfully completed	0		0		6	13	9	12	0	0	8	24				
Still in learning	5		17		10	22	17	22	11	46	5	15				

*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		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	67		85		23		10									
Retained*	0		0	0	2	9	0	0									
Successfully completed	0		0	0	2	9	0	0									
Still in learning	55		45	53	5	22	0	0									

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97						
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	42		28		65		84		31		52					
Retained*	0		0	0	12	18	23	27	21	68	37	71					
Successfully completed	0		0	0	12	18	23	27	9	29	24	46					
Still in learning	36		7	25	5	8	1	1	1	3	0	0					

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

STRENGTHS

- good curriculum planning
- effective liaison with external agencies
- effective support for learners in care and early years
- good training resources

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement rates
- slow progress towards achievement of NVQs
- no system to monitor workplace practices
- poor awareness of NVQ by employers

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- greater involvement in progress reviews by employers
- better experience across all age ranges for early years learners
- more immediate feedback to early years learners after observations
- better monitoring of workplace practice

62. All training officers are invited to five cross-county curriculum meetings a year and it is mandatory to attend a minimum of two. At these meetings, training officers share findings from learner evaluations, good practice is discussed and joint planning of training is undertaken. The meetings are beginning to be effective in improving the training. A detailed first assignment which ensures that key skills are an integral part of the vocational training has been implemented through these meetings.

63. There is effective liaison with external agencies. The early years partnership has widened participation by funding the level 2 early years learners who are in employment, to proceed to level 3 training with SCT. A local care consortium offers additional support with quality assurance. SCT staff meet with other professionals in social services, health and the private sector to standardise practice and this close relationship has resulted in the consortium manager currently supporting the learners at SCT. Links with a large local dental hospital have been established to help develop practice in training for oral health. Assessors from the hospital and SCT invite each other to meetings to share good practice. The curriculum manager for care is a member of the industry group for care.

64. Through the effective support given by SCT, learners develop a good understanding of the NVQ framework and this is beginning to improve the rate of progress. Learners are clearly aware of the key skills and NVQ units they are undertaking and actively seek opportunities for assessment. One learner changed a planned unit for one where there were more opportunities to gather work-based evidence. There is effective personal support to encourage learners to attend off-the-job training sessions and well-recorded support for learners with additional learning needs. One early years learner has a review every six weeks with her training officer and employer to encourage her progress. There is not enough effective guidance for learners in oral health on how to produce evidence for the NVQ portfolio.

65. There are well-equipped training rooms in each of the training centres. There are computers in each of the rooms and learners make good use of them. A range of other resources, including textbooks and videos, is used for the training.

66. There is very poor achievement across all of the training programmes. Only 13 per cent of learners on the advanced modern apprenticeship achieved the framework during the years 1996 to 2000. Foundation modern apprenticeships did not start until

1998. Between then and 2000, only 6 per cent of learners have achieved the framework. On NVQ training, the achievement rate between 1996 to 2000 is 30 per cent. On the advanced modern apprenticeship, 15 per cent of those starting in 1996 and 46 per cent of those starting in 1997 are still in learning. Twenty-two per cent of the foundation modern apprentices who started in 1999 remain in learning, although they would be expected to have completed the framework. Although retention rates are poor, they have improved over the past three years. A priority plan is in place to increase retention and achievement rates, but it does not include any strategies or targets for improvement.

67. Most employers have a poor understanding of the modern apprenticeship framework and the content of the NVQs. Employers do not understand how their training links to the NVQ and the key skills and their relationship to the work environment. There is insufficient involvement of employers in progress reviews.

68. In early years, some of the learners do not have the opportunity to experience work with the full age range of 0-8 years. Some of the training officers are not aware of how this additional experience and evidence could be achieved. Some early years learners are not given immediate feedback on their assessment and the time lapse of up to three weeks between assessment and feedback is inappropriate. There is no system to monitor the quality of practice in the work placement. In one residential home it was clear that the home was not treating residents with respect and this did not prove to be a good role model for the learner.

Good Practice

Each year employers nominate learners for a special award. The learners have excelled in some way but not necessarily in their NVQ or in their workplace. Short-listed applicants attend an assessment day involving teamworking, communication exercises, a practical activity and a presentation of their work or particular achievement. The winner receives a plaque at an award ceremony.

Poor Practice

One learner carried out a substantial amount of work towards two units of the NVQ. The learner was informed that the work for one unit was unnecessary and that the second unit could not be achieved in that type of workplace and would have to be abandoned.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	10	2

69. The Life Skills training programme operates from the SCT training centre in Frome. Learners are aged between 16 and 18 years and all are referred by the local careers service. For 2001-02, 55 learners have already started on the programme and 44 have successfully completed it. Of these, 38 have gone into employment or further training. There are currently 10 learners on the full-time programme. Learners attend for a minimum of 16 hours each week and receive a training allowance provided that their attendance is regular. The balance between on- and off-the job training is at the discretion of the course co-ordinator and is based on individual needs. Learners are assessed on entry and an individual learning plan is devised. The main areas of learning include health and safety, assertiveness training, jobsearch skills, confidence building, healthy living, self-awareness, and manual handling. Key skills are an integral part of the training programme. The training was offered by SCT for the first time in April 2001 after taking over the contract from another training provider. The staff transferred to SCT to ensure the continuity of the training. Current learners are made up of those who started with the other training provider and those who started with SCT. No retention and achievement table has been produced due to the individual nature of the training programmes being followed by learners.

STRENGTHS

- good progression rates into employment and work-based learning
- good achievement of external qualifications
- effective use of internal certification to motivate learners
- challenging individual learning plans
- full integration of key skills into learning programmes

WEAKNESSES

- some inconsistent practices in teaching
- insufficient detail in assessment feedback

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more encouragement to undertake training in literacy and numeracy
- better resources

70. SCT accepts all applications for training. A significant proportion of learners on the Life Skills programme have personal and emotional problems in addition to some learning difficulties. The retention and progression rates are good. For the current year, the retention rate is 80 per cent and the progression rate into employment or work-based learning is 86 per cent of those who complete the programme. Individual learning plans reflect the starting point for each learner.

71. SCT actively encourages learners to achieve external qualifications, such as key skills mainly at level 1, basic IT, basic food hygiene, first aid and play qualifications. Some learners work towards units of NVQs and are also encouraged to take the vocational access certificate. Internal certificates are produced for successful outcomes and they motivate learners, particularly those with low self-esteem.

72. Individual learning plans have targets which are demanding but achievable. They are produced after a comprehensive initial assessment of learners' potential and are implemented after induction. Training is well planned and meets the individual needs identified on the learning plans. There are regular progress reviews every four weeks and all relevant parties are present. Learning plans are updated after the reviews. Careers guidance is given throughout the training programme, as is exit counselling. The working relationship between Life Skills staff and the careers service is excellent.

73. Key skills are an integral part of the training programmes. Every opportunity is taken to help the learner gain their key skills qualification and there is a real attempt to co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training.

74. There is some inconsistent practice in the programme. Monitoring of some learners on work placement is informal and employers are not involved in all progress reviews. Most of the employers are aware of the programme's objectives, and their role within it, but this does not include all employers. Evidence in some portfolios is not signed by assessors or dated.

75. Learners are given insufficiently detailed assessment feedback. In general, the only work which is marked in the learners' portfolios is the work which is externally assessed for awarding bodies. Some written feedback is insufficient to enable learners to improve.

76. Learners can choose the content of their individual learning plans, as only certain aspects such as health and safety are compulsory. The programme content is guided by the staff member interviewing the learners, which is good practice considering the

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nature of this client group. Most learners tend to choose aspects of the programme which most appeals to them, but some do not include literacy and numeracy skills when they have real difficulties in these areas.

77. Some resources at the training centre are inadequate. There is insufficient space and nowhere for learners to go during their break times. The current IT facilities do not allow the use of the Internet.

Good Practice

Learners can gain external qualifications and internal certification and this is appreciated by the learners who have rarely succeeded at school. There is a genuine pride in the certificates which are prominently displayed in the portfolios and then transferred to the national records of achievement.