

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
MAY 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
JANUARY 2002

West Oxfordshire Training Services



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- ◆ work-based training for all people over 16
- ◆ provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- ◆ the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- ◆ adult and community learning
- ◆ 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.

Grading

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

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

SUMMARY

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

West Oxfordshire Training Services provides outstanding training in foundation for work. This is mainly centred on environmental projects. Learners can gain a wide range of occupational accreditation. There is good provision in business administration. Training is satisfactory in health, care and public services, learners receive effective training and support even when they are working shifts or are based in rural areas. At the time of the original inspection, training in management and professional studies, and in retailing and customer service was less than satisfactory. The organisation no longer offers management and professional training. Weaknesses in the customer service area included some poor assessment practice, inappropriate qualifications, learners' poor understanding of the national vocational qualification (NVQ) process and inadequate training. The organisation has reduced the number of subcontractors involved in training and assessment from seven to only one. The quality of training in retailing and customer service is now outstanding. The inappropriate qualifications are no longer offered, assessment practices are good and learners have an excellent understanding of the NVQ process. Equal opportunities and the support given to learners are satisfactory. The organisation attracts learners by providing free transport. Effective additional support is given to those learners who need it. Equal opportunities data are not used constructively. Initial assessment is fragmented and the outcomes of assessment are not always reflected in learners' individual learning plans. At the time of the original inspection, management of training and quality assurance were less than satisfactory. The work of subcontractors and employers was poorly managed and inadequately monitored. Some management information was unreliable. There were no systematic and comprehensive quality assurance arrangements. The reinspection shows that management of training is now good and quality assurance is satisfactory. The work of subcontractors is well managed and well monitored. The management information is reliable, but is not used to improve performance. The quality assurance arrangements are now comprehensive but there is insufficient systematic monitoring of all quality assurance procedures.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Management & professional	4
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	4
Health, care & public services	3
Foundation for work	1

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	5

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Retailing and customer service	1

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements and support from employers in many areas of work
- ◆ wide range of occupational accreditation in the foundation for work programme
- ◆ effective transport arrangements to enable people to train
- ◆ effective management of training provided by subcontractors
- ◆ particularly good staff development and training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate initial assessment
- ◆ insufficient use of data to improve performance
- ◆ lack of systematic monitoring of all quality assurance procedures

INTRODUCTION

1. West Oxfordshire Training Services (WOTS) was established in 1984 as a division of West Oxfordshire District Council. In November 1998, the district council made a decision to make WOTS into a charitable organisation limited by guarantee. At the end of December 1999, it was decided not to go ahead with the restructuring and WOTS remains as a division within the district council. WOTS aims to provide quality guidance, assessment and training services for the benefit of the local community.

2. WOTS is based in Witney, Oxfordshire and has administration offices, training rooms, a meeting room and workshop facilities in the town centre. At the time of the original inspection, WOTS contracted with the Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has replaced Heart of England TEC. WOTS provides programmes for young people and adults from all over Oxfordshire. Currently, there are 88 young learners and two adult learners. There are 10 members of staff involved in the LSC-funded programmes. WOTS also acts as a subcontractor to the Oxfordshire Unit of Delivery for New Deal. At present, however, there are no New Deal clients. At the time of the original inspection, the 140 learners were spread across the programmes listed in the table below:

Occupational area	Youth programmes			Adult programmes		Total
	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other	Work-based learning	Basic employability	
Management & professional	15			6		21
Business administration	18	12	9	2		41
Retailing & customer service	17	4	22			43
Health, care & public services	3	2	15	1		21
Foundation for work			1		13	14
Totals	53	18	47	9	13	140

3. In May 2000, Oxfordshire had a population of 607,200 with West Oxfordshire making up 98,000 of the total. According to the 1991 census, people from minority ethnic groups make up 3.3 per cent of the population of Oxfordshire, compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent. Approximately 75 per cent of this number live in Oxford City while the average concentration in the other four local authorities was 0.4 per cent. In May 2000, the unemployment rate in Oxfordshire was low at 2 per cent, and West Oxfordshire, at 0.8 per cent, had one of the lowest rates in the country. In May 2000, the unemployment rate for England was 3.8 per cent. By the time of the reinspection, unemployment had fallen to 0.9 per cent in Oxfordshire and 0.5 per cent in West Oxfordshire, compared with the national

unemployment rate of 2.9 per cent. West Oxfordshire has no single large employer but has 54 employers employing more than 50 people and covering a variety of skill areas. The opening of the M40 Oxford to Birmingham link has brought about the development of large distribution and warehousing complexes in the northeast and the south of the county. These offer employment to semi-skilled operatives, and WOTS has developed relevant training programmes to meet both employees' and employers' needs. Public transport links are fragmented and difficult. Many of the unfilled training vacancies are because of transport difficulties, particularly for the youth programmes. A high proportion of 16 year olds stay on at school and participation in government-funded training is below the national average. In September 1999, the proportion of school leavers in the Heart of England TEC area gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 47.3 per cent, very close to the national average for England of 47.9 per cent. In September 2001, the proportion for West Oxfordshire Local Education Authority was 58 per cent, while the national proportion remained at 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. WOTS produced a self-assessment report in February 2000. Staff were fully involved in the self-assessment process and in the production of the report and the resulting action plan. Not all subcontractors were involved. The report identified a large number of strengths and some weaknesses. Inspectors judged many of the strengths to be no more than normal practice. They identified additional strengths and a substantial number of additional weaknesses. One grade was higher than that in the self-assessment report, two grades remained the same and six grades were lower. The self-assessment process for the reinspection involved all staff in the production of a new self-assessment report. Two grades awarded by inspectors were higher than those given in the self-assessment report and one grade was the same.

5. The original inspection was carried out by a team of six inspectors who spent a total of 17 days at WOTS in May 2000. They interviewed 49 learners, eight staff, 14 supervisors/employers and 12 staff from subcontractors. They visited 17 work placements. They observed eight training sessions, two assessments and eight progress reviews. They examined learners' individual learning plans, review records and files. They also looked at a wide range of paperwork, including contracts, external reports, records of meetings, staff personnel records, policies and procedures.

6. For the reinspection, two inspectors spent six days with WOTS in January 2002. They interviewed five learners, looked at five portfolios of evidence, interviewed three employers and one subcontractor and carried out seven interviews with staff from WOTS. They examined learners' personal files, details of arrangements with subcontractors, awarding body reports, local LSC documents and WOTS's policies and procedures.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Management & professional

Grade 4

7. The training in this occupational area is carried out by a subcontractor, based in WOTS' training centre. The programme is designed for trainees who want to work in language training with speakers of English as a second or other language. Trainees also work towards a customer service qualification and this aspect of their training is covered in the retailing and customer service section of this report. There are 21 trainees: 15 modern apprentices and six on work-based training for adults programmes. The programme lasts for eight weeks. Most trainees learn about it by word of mouth. They are recruited nationally and those from distant locations take up temporary accommodation in the locality. All trainees undertake a training and development national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 3, a customer service NVQ at levels 2 and 3, a teaching English for speakers of other languages (TESOL) certificate and an English-for-business qualification. The 15 modern apprentices following the customer service framework also undertake four units of the administration NVQ at level 2 and key skills. All the modern apprenticeship trainees are employed by the subcontractor for the duration of their programme. The work-based learning for adults trainees are not employed. The work activities of all trainees involve the teaching of English language to members of the public, mostly locally based, foreign au pairs. In the last contract year, 93 per cent of trainees achieved the English for business qualification, 99 per cent achieved the TESOL certificate and 96 per cent achieved one or both of the NVQ outcomes. There is a very high retention level. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weakness identified in the self-assessment report. However, some strengths were no more than normal practice. A further strength and a number of significant additional weaknesses were identified. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

POOR PRACTICE

All trainees are given an identical evidence record for every unit in which the evidence is already listed and the performance criteria, range and knowledge boxes are already ticked. The trainees are responsible for ensuring that their portfolio contains the evidence listed and that it is numbered as indicated on the evidence record.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly motivated trainees
- ◆ high levels of achievement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inappropriate qualifications
- ◆ trainees' poor understanding of the NVQ process
- ◆ poor portfolio evidence
- ◆ poor training model presented to trainees
- ◆ failure to use individual training plans as working documents

8. The trainees recruited to this intensive programme have a minimum academic level of two A levels or their equivalent. Their suitability is confirmed by an interview and an initial test of English grammar and phonology. Trainees are intelligent, articulate and highly motivated but many of them, particularly the adult

POOR PRACTICE

During an assessment, the trainer provided feedback on her observation of a training practice session delivered by the trainee. No mention was made of the NVQ and the trainee was given no guidance on how and where this evidence could be used to demonstrate competence against particular unit(s). When questioned by the inspector, the trainee did not connect the assessment with his NVQ programme and understood only that he should keep the assessment record in his portfolio.

trainees, lack confidence. All the trainees spoken to by inspectors during the inspection expressed their enthusiasm for the programme, confirmed their increased levels of confidence and had no doubt that they would find suitable employment as a result. There are two groups of trainees on the programme. One group has been on the programme for two weeks and the second group is in the last week. Many trainees in the second group have already secured jobs and others have interviews arranged. There are seven full-time members of the subcontractor's staff working solely on this programme. This high ratio of staff to trainees has a positive impact on the training and ensures that all trainees have a high degree of personal support.

9. The main focus of the programme, for trainees and trainers, is the achievement of the TESOL and business English certificates. The customer service NVQ, together with key skills and the administration units, is an essential component of the modern apprenticeship framework. The length of the programme, its content and the way in which it is structured, make it impossible to generate sufficient work-based evidence of the required breadth, depth and quality. The NVQ in training and development at level 3 is also completed in the eight weeks, which does not give trainees enough time and opportunity to develop training across the broad range required by the NVQ standards.

10. The intensive nature of the course and trainers' lack of experience of the NVQ process means that trainees develop little understanding of their NVQ programme. Trainees are given an information pack at the start of their course, which includes an outline of the NVQ structure and processes involved but there is no further reference to the book during their programme. The trainees do not have copies of the standards or the candidate pack. None of the trainees interviewed could explain the relationship between units, elements, performance criteria and range statements. Trainers miss opportunities to increase their trainees' understanding of the NVQ process.

11. Demonstration of competence relies heavily on essays and witness statements from the tutors. The essays are not directed at the NVQ standards and contain no reference to any of the performance criteria or range statements. They are not sufficient or relevant as evidence of competence for the criteria against which they are claimed. They demonstrate only the background knowledge which trainees have acquired. In many instances, essays and witness statements are the only evidence produced. Most of the witness statements in each portfolio are identical except for the trainee's name. They are not dated. The name or status of the provider does not support the signature and they are not directed at the NVQ standards. The failure to involve trainees in the NVQ process is resulting in lost opportunities for them to produce good, relevant evidence portfolios for themselves. The portfolios are not internally verified or externally verified until after the trainees have completed and left the programme. This means that there is no opportunity for trainees to add evidence to their portfolios, if it is required.

12. Trainees on this programme are training to be trainers. However, they are

being exposed to poor and badly used resources. In two of the three training sessions observed, trainers did not have detailed lesson plans. In two of the sessions, trainers used badly hand-written overhead projector slides and slides of poorly photocopied extracts from publications. Text was not enlarged and was therefore difficult to read. The projector glass was dirty and the projector was out of focus. The trainees have no opportunity to try out and use a wide variety of methods of training. Trainees are offered additional training in information technology for their key skills but they are not encouraged to produce word-processed projector slides or handouts. One trainee observed teaching a lesson had produced poor hand-written resources, made mistakes on the flip chart and continually walked in front of the overhead projector. Another trainee had made a cassette recording but, because he had not realised that he should have used a proper microphone, the recording was difficult to hear and, for his class of foreign students, even more difficult to understand.

13. Individual training plans are identical and contain only a list of the qualifications the trainee is undertaking. The trainees do not remember them. They are not used during reviews and are not updated with relevant information. One trainee suffers from dyslexia and correspondence in her file shows that certain support activities have been arranged for her. Yet these activities are not recorded on her individual training plan. Trainees receive only one progress review during their eight-week programme. The reviews concentrate on the progress the trainee is making in relation to the course work schedule that all trainees receive at the beginning of the programme. They also tackle trainees' personal problems, the most common of which is the delayed issue of housing benefit cheques. The space on the review form referring to progress in the NVQ is completed in the same way for all trainees, simply stating that they are working towards all units.

Business administration

Grade 2

14. There are 41 trainees. All trainees are based in the workplace and most are employed. Trainees attend off-the-job training sessions. WOTS is responsible for some of the training and assessing but most is subcontracted to other training providers. Two of these subcontractors assess their trainees in the workplace. Three subcontractors are colleges which provide off-the-job training at the college, with the majority of assessment carried out by their own assessors. The local college provides the majority of the training. Two trainees choose to attend a college nearer to their home. Training co-ordinators from WOTS visit trainees in the workplace every 12 weeks. Information on achievement and retention rates was imprecise and fragmentary because the organisation was unable to provide accurate, comprehensive statistics. Retention and achievement rates for accountancy trainees are high but rates for modern apprentices in accountancy are lower. Thirty per cent of trainees leave with no qualification. The national traineeship programme is new. At present the retention rate is 63 per cent. Last year 76 per cent of adult trainees achieved the outcomes recorded in their individual training plans. Inspectors agree with many of the weaknesses identified

in the self-assessment report, but many of the strengths are no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

Business administration	Youth programmes			Adult programmes		Total
	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other	Work-based learning	Basic employability	
Accounting levels 2 to 4	10					10
Business administration NVQ levels 1 to 3	7	11	7	2		27
Information technology levels 1 to 3	1	1	2			4
Totals	18	12	9	2	0	41

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality work placements
- ◆ good additional training opportunities
- ◆ good assessment in business administration
- ◆ good support for trainees in developing key skills
- ◆ accountancy trainees' consistently high achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective reviews
- ◆ employers' lack of knowledge of NVQs
- ◆ weaknesses in the conduct of assessment and verification

15. There is varied, relevant and effective work-based experience for most trainees. Employers provide coaching, guidance and encouragement. Two trainees with restricted mobility are working effectively in their placements and have gained in confidence with the support of their employers. Trainees often have their own workstation and most are given time to develop their portfolios. Some employers offer additional training courses to enable trainees to broaden their skills. WOTS also offers courses designed to meet particular needs identified by employers and trainees, such as communications and specific information technology skills. Trainees attending college for off-the-job training have access to all the normal college facilities, including learning support workshops. Trainees and assessors use these additional courses and workshops as evidence towards the NVQ.

16. Business administration trainees make good use of action planning their portfolios. Assessment methods are suitably varied and most assessors make effective links between on- and off-the-job training. College trainees have assessment logs for recording the outcomes of observations carried out by their

training co-ordinators. Evidence is gathered efficiently from off-the-job training, work-based assessment and key skills assessment and, in a few instances, use is made of trainees' prior learning. Trainees fully understand the NVQ process and know how to identify evidence in their everyday work.

17. A key skills assessor visits trainees, who are on the local college programme, in their workplaces to help them to map key skills against occupational activities. A project has been designed to enable a trainee with a limited job role to identify the application of number key skills. Key skills have recently been integrated with occupational competencies in the assessment of work-based trainees. WOTS offers regular key skills workshops for those trainees who need extra support and is encouraging its assessors to gain the key skills practitioner award. Accountancy trainees have consistently high levels of achievement and many achieve NVQ level 4.

18. The reviews conducted by the training co-ordinators are concerned mainly with pastoral matters. They rarely involve setting and reviewing targets for achievement. Employers are not always involved in the reviews. Co-ordinators may see them separately or ask them to sign the review sheet. There is informal liaison between employers and assessors but it is left mainly to the trainees to negotiate with employers for appropriate opportunities to gather evidence for their NVQ.

19. Employers are not fully aware of the NVQ process and weak links between the subcontractor, WOTS and the employer result in missed opportunities for work-based assessment. Information technology trainees are given a list of tasks which are already linked to the performance criteria, range and knowledge statements. These trainees make little use of witness testimony statements from the workplace. The training co-ordinators are not always qualified in their occupational sector, which limits the opportunity for work-based assessment and leads to an over-reliance on simulated evidence. Trainees do not appear to have been particularly disadvantaged by these weak links, as informal systems have been developed to support them. There is, however, a lack of efficiency in collecting work-based evidence.

20. Portfolios are internally verified once the trainee has completed the NVQ. Issues, therefore, are not identified early enough in the programme. It may be too late for the trainee to add any additional evidence if this is required. Not all subcontractors have an internal verification sampling plan and there has been little observation of assessments by the verifier. WOTS relies on its subcontractors to forward copies of internal and external verifiers' reports and not all of these were available at inspection. In information technology, no individual units are signed off by the assessor, which leaves trainees unsure about which units they have completed. Assessors from the subcontractors meet with WOTS staff three times a year to discuss issues. Although there is evidence of some tracking documentation in subcontractors' files, subcontractors do not have central systems for tracking trainees' progress.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 1

21. WOTS offers warehousing and customer service NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Four learners are following warehousing NVQs and six are following customer service NVQs. There are two foundation and eight advanced modern apprentices. Induction is carried out on an individual basis in the workplace, although a monthly, off-the-job, half-day workshop has recently been developed. This will take place at the training centre. The learners' basic skills are assessed when they start a training programme. Training is provided at the training centre and by employers in the workplace. Assessment is provided by a WOTS assessor and an assessor employed by the one subcontractor used in this occupational area. Assessors visit learners either weekly or monthly. A WOTS training consultant carries out progress reviews at least once every 12 weeks.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor assessment in customer service for some trainees
- ◆ poor understanding of the NVQ programme on the part of some trainees
- ◆ failure to meet NVQ criteria on eight-week customer service programme

22. After the original inspection, WOTS produced an action plan to rectify the weaknesses. The plan set out who was responsible for each action, a timescale for achieving the required action, and success indicators. At the reinspection, inspectors found that WOTS had made excellent progress in rectifying the weaknesses identified at the original inspection. Two of the weaknesses were related to work performed by the subcontractors used at the time of the original inspection and have been resolved by dispensing with their services. The training is now given by WOTS and one, well-chosen, subcontractor. The other weakness has been turned into a strength. Inspectors also identified additional strengths and found no significant weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ very good retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices
- ◆ particularly good support for learners
- ◆ excellent understanding of training programmes by learners
- ◆ high standard of portfolios
- ◆ effective action-planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

23. Achievement and retention rates on the advanced modern apprenticeship programme are very good. They range between 75 per cent and 96 per cent over

the past three years. In the current year, retention and achievement rates are very good, at 70 per cent, and other learners are expected to complete the requirement of the qualification framework shortly, which will increase the success rate further. The numbers of foundation modern apprentices are too small to make a judgment on trends for retention and achievement. Only 15 learners have started this training since 1998.

24. Employers consider that learners' competence in the workplace is significantly improved by their participation in the programmes offered by WOTS. Some employers are using the NVQ programmes as part of a planned strategy to retrain learners and to enable them to gain promotion within their company. Many employers offer learners off-the-job training to help them to develop the knowledge required to achieve their NVQs. They are equally active in attempting to ensure that learners receive the on-the-job training necessary to achieve their qualifications. In some cases, senior managers provide on-the-job training. Many learners are encouraged by employers to develop their portfolios during working hours. One learner has been given a key to the premises so that she can use computers outside normal working hours. The frequency of assessors' contacts with learners is very good. Assessors visit learners at least every month and, very often, fortnightly, particularly when they are nearing the end of their training. Assessors work closely with employers to ensure that assessment is effectively integrated with on- and off-the-job training.

25. All learners have a thorough understanding of their training programmes. Key skills requirements are identified at the beginning of the programme and evidence is collected at the same time as evidence for the NVQ. Learners are fully aware of the requirement to sit a key skills examination, and all learners are given dates for both mock and actual examinations at the start of their programmes. All WOTS learners who sat the key skills examinations in November 2001 were successful. Learners cross-reference their evidence to the requirements of the NVQ and gain an excellent understanding of the range and performance criteria in the NVQ. Learners are encouraged to identify additional evidence to fulfil NVQ requirements rather than collect irrelevant and superfluous evidence. Portfolios are regularly internally verified, usually three times during the programme. Learners have a good understanding of the nature and purpose of internal verification.

26. Learners take considerable pride in their portfolios and use the opportunities provided by employers to develop a good range of portfolio evidence. Some learners have shown considerable imagination in producing their evidence. For example, a sequence of photographs is used to illustrate competence in a particular activity. Portfolios are well organised and contain sufficient information to enable the learner to progress quickly and efficiently. The evidence seen by inspectors was relevant and sufficient to meet awarding body requirements. It was consistently well presented. Portfolios have a very good range of evidence including observations by assessors, witness testimonies, projects and set questions.

POOR PRACTICE

One subcontractor offers a level 2 customer service NVQ and uses this qualification, together with a specific unit at level 3, to enable learners to achieve a full level 3 customer service qualification. This is very poor practice, which does not meet the requirements of the awarding body.

27. Assessors agree realistic but demanding targets with their learners to ensure that they make good progress. The individual learning plan is consulted at every assessment and progress review. Learners' progress is closely monitored against the targets set. Assessors will extend expected completion dates for units if learners are falling behind due to workplace commitments, but this will only happen in exceptional circumstances. Almost all learners achieve their qualifications within the originally agreed timescale. WOTS has recently developed a log of ongoing assessment activity and an action/assessment plan, both of which are completed on assessment visits. They clearly identify work to be produced before the next visit and, almost without exception, this work is completed by the learners, as they know exactly what is expected of them.

Health, care & public services

Grade 3

28. WOTS is approved to deliver NVQs in care and early years care and education at NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 and housekeeping at NVQ level 1. There are 21 trainees. The childcare programme will not continue after the one remaining trainee has completed the programme. WOTS also has privately funded trainees who follow the same programmes as the 21 government-funded trainees. All trainees are employed. There are 16 placements spread across a wide geographical area. They include a hospital, residential care for the elderly and people with learning difficulties, respite care for children and a nursery. If trainees are unemployed when they apply, WOTS identifies possible employers and submits potential trainees to them for an interview. It also ensures that placements offer trainees the opportunity to complete their NVQs at the appropriate level. The training co-ordinator visits the placement to explain to the employer and trainee the requirements of the programme. All assessment and most training takes place in the workplace. Most trainees have a work-based assessor. Where no work-based assessor is available WOTS provides an assessor. All assessors are qualified or working towards the assessor qualifications. WOTS offers monthly workshops on portfolio-building at the training centre and where travel to the centre is a problem, workshops are held in the workplace. Three staff co-ordinate the care, childcare and housekeeping programmes, all of whom are qualified assessors and internal verifiers. The training co-ordinator, trainee and employer meet formally every 10 to 12 weeks to review progress towards achievement of the qualification. The trainee and employer both retain a copy of the review record. Most trainees are visited in their workplace by the training co-ordinator every six to 10 weeks. Housekeeping trainees are visited every four weeks. The organisation was unable to provide accurate statistics on retention and achievement. The number of trainees recruited over the last three years has been low. The retention rate for youth trainees on the other training programme rose from 41 per cent in 1997-98 to 62 per cent in 1999-2000. The self-assessment report identified some strengths that were no more than normal practice. Two of the weaknesses identified were more appropriate to management of training. Inspectors identified further strengths and weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment

report.

Health, care & public services	Youth programmes			Adult programmes		Total
	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other	Work-based learning	Basic employability	
Housekeeping NVQ at level 1			3			3
Early years care and education NVQ at level 2				1		1
Care NVQ at levels 3 and 3	3	2	12			17
Totals	3	2	15	1	0	21

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support for trainees in building their portfolios
- ◆ flexibility of the training programme
- ◆ good written and verbal feedback on trainees' portfolio work

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak review process
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate resources for developing theoretical knowledge

29. Trainees find the monthly portfolio-building workshops useful. They receive individual attention and say that the guidance helps them to understand the NVQ and to progress quicker. Trainees' portfolios are appropriately presented and organised, and of a satisfactory standard.

30. The opportunity to start the programme at any time during the year enables trainees to take advantage of employment opportunities as they arise. WOTS staff provide strong personal support. Trainees are visited according to need even where, in the case of care and housekeeping programmes, the trainees are spread out geographically and work varied shift patterns. Frequent visits ensure that trainees do not feel isolated. Trainees and work-based assessors are confident that training co-ordinators can easily be reached by telephone to give advice and support, where needed. Trainees are encouraged to attend additional courses leading to qualifications in food hygiene, first aid and manual handling. National trainees and modern apprentices have the opportunity to attend key skills workshops at the centre and the organisation provides transport for trainees where distance is a problem.

31. The assessment centre co-ordinator provides good written and verbal feedback to assessors and trainees on the quality of NVQ portfolios. Internal verification standards are discussed twice yearly at formal meetings and verbal feedback from

internal verifiers is comprehensive. Appropriate action is taken, where necessary, to ensure that assessment is sound and that care standards are maintained. However, there is no sampling plan or monitoring of the activities of work-based assessors and internal verifiers.

32. Individual training plans are not used as working documents. The formal 12 weekly reviews do not refer to the training plan. Reviews give insufficient attention to work-based learning issues and fail to ensure that employers are providing appropriate experiences for trainees. The review does not lead to a development plan for the trainee involving realistic achievement targets. Two trainees with recognised literacy and numeracy learning needs were not being helped in any effective way.

33. On- and off-the-job training is not planned and co-ordinated effectively and there is too much focus on assessment at the expense of work-based learning. Some employers do not recognise their responsibilities to the trainees and fail to provide appropriate opportunities for learning. Trainees learn practical skills through work experience and informal discussion with their colleagues rather than as part of a planned process. There are not enough planned opportunities to link work-based experiences to other forms of learning. Most trainees do not receive enough off-the-job training. They are not allocated time during working hours to devote to NVQ work in spite of this being part of the written agreement with employers.

34. Practical resources to support the development of theory are inadequate both at the training centre and at most employers' premises. Trainees are not routinely exposed to relevant, up-to-date reading matter or brought into contact with developing professional practice. There are few planned opportunities to consider NVQ theory requirements with appropriately qualified professionals. Trainees are not encouraged to develop the ability to work effectively on their own. Some trainees are provided with open-learning material but they are not given the support necessary to enable them to benefit from this. There are inadequate resources for trainees with learning difficulties and those who lack confidence.

Foundation for work

Grade 1

35. Foundation for work has been a key part of provision at WOTS since 1984. Programmes enable trainees to develop both occupational and personal skills at their own pace and are centred around project work and contracts with local councils to provide services. Some trainees are based in occupational areas and receive additional support. The number of trainees dropped in 1999-2000 owing to changes in contracts but it has increased this year. There is one youth trainee on the other work-based programme for young people and 13 adults on basic employability training. Most of the adult trainees are long-term unemployed. One is in a supported placement, working towards business administration NVQ level 1. The one youth trainee and the other adult trainees are working on projects which

include countryside work, work for local councils in parks and playgrounds and laying canal footpaths. All trainees work towards a qualification as well as receiving extra support to meet needs identified. In the three-year period up to March 1999, 73 per cent of adults achieved the outcomes specified in their individual training plans and 49 per cent gained employment. Achievements on the youth programme over the same period were not so good: 60 per cent of trainees left with no qualifications. Youth trainees' achievements, however, were affected adversely by the failure of a specific youth project in Oxford which the TEC had asked WOTS to run. The project was closed early due to problems outside the control of WOTS. The numbers of trainees since that period have been too low to make statistical data meaningful. The self-assessment report identified many strengths that were judged to be no more than normal practice and some weaknesses with which inspectors did not agree. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of occupational accreditation
- ◆ trainees' high level of achievement
- ◆ good teamwork and strong mutual support on the part of trainees
- ◆ good, in-depth reviews
- ◆ highly effective training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal job-search programme
- ◆ inadequate recording of the additional support given to trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

The project team leader uses a tape-recorder during the review sessions so that he does not need to take notes. He writes up the review and discusses his recording with the trainee the next day. The trainee then signs the review sheet. Both the project team leader and the trainee say that they prefer this method because it lets them talk in a more relaxed atmosphere than if notes were being taken.

36. All trainees work towards occupational accreditation. Business administration activities are covered in the business administration section of the report. Qualifications include specific trade licences such as those for forklift trucks and dumper trucks, NVQs at levels 1 and 2 in relevant occupational areas, prevocational awards, safety awareness certificates and the emergency first aid certificate. The work of the project teams is planned to enable trainees to gain qualifications in specific areas. The project team training is very practical, directly related to the work being carried out and linked to the qualification the trainees are working towards. Trainers provide strong support for trainees in building portfolios and revising for tests. All trainees have the opportunity to work on an individual basis with the training manager in the training centre which also ensures that any basic skills needs can be addressed.

37. The individual support and practical training lead to high levels of achievement. Trainees talk about the difference the programme has made to their lives, both personally and in terms of their ability to gain a qualification and get a job. Trainees grow in self-esteem. They work hard during the day and they feel a sense of worth. They achieve certificates that they take home with pride. One

GOOD PRACTICE

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trainee who had not worked for many years talked about how he is earning his benefit and the difference that has made to his life. Trainees work as a team and support from the staff encourages them to identify and develop team skills. Trainees feel able to share their strengths and weaknesses and support each other. When instructions have to be read, team members work with those who have literacy problems and encourage them to learn to recognise key words.

38. Trainees have regular in-depth reviews either with the project team leader or with the training manager. The reviews are very practical. They focus on progress in skills development, and in working towards the relevant qualification, and include feedback for the trainee on how the practical part of the work is being carried out. Development areas identified on the individual training plan are discussed. Issues relating to more personal areas are also covered. Actions are agreed at each review meeting and trainees recognise the importance of these and work hard to achieve them. The reviews are well written up.

39. Members of staff involved in this area of work are highly competent both occupationally and in the support areas of the work. They are also enthusiastic. The training manager regularly visits project sites and works with the trainees. She has recently achieved her fork-truck and dumper-truck licenses. Trainees speak highly of the staff and feel able to talk to them openly and share their concerns and problems. The positive attitudes of staff and effective methods of training help to ensure that work is purposeful as well as enabling trainees to progress and develop at their own pace.

40. Job search is undertaken on an individual basis. The training manager identifies suitable job vacancies and discusses them with individual trainees. None of this activity is recorded and there is no formal job-search programme to ensure that all trainees cover all the key areas. Recent development work with TEC has focused on these weaknesses. Trainees receive a lot of extra support but very little of this is on record. This means that there is no overall picture of the programme each trainee has followed and there is no data to analyse in order to determine the extent of extra support given and how effective it has been.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

41. WOTS has a written policy on equal opportunities which is circulated to staff, trainees and employers. The policy meets TEC contractual requirements but it is not comprehensive. It does not, for example, refer to relevant legislation such as the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. The organisation plans to widen the scope of the current policy and to develop more effective means of evaluating its effectiveness. Thirty per cent of staff have recently attended an external equal opportunities training course and they, in turn, are training other members of staff. In the year ending March 2000, 5 per cent of youth trainees and 10 per cent of

adult trainees starting training programmes at WOTS were from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with the 3.2 per cent of the local population who come from minority ethnic communities. Trainees with disabilities starting training programmes during the same period comprised 2 per cent of all youth trainees and 18 per cent of all adult trainees. The self-assessment report identified eight strengths and one weakness for this area of provision. Inspectors did not agree with all the strengths but awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good provision for the long-term unemployed
- ◆ effective transport arrangements to enable people to train
- ◆ strong links with referral agencies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ equal opportunities data not fully used
- ◆ complaints not formally recorded

42. Many adult trainees are long-term unemployed and require a lot of support to enable them to gain employment. Staff have a good knowledge of the local job market and the organisation is quick to respond to changing employment needs within the local community to enable its trainees to take advantage of job opportunities as they arise. Courses are developed and offered to those in need. For example, the organisation has recently re-developed an existing course to enable trainees to achieve a basic forklift truck licence within four weeks and to apply for well-paid jobs. In the care sector, trainees are offered an NVQ housekeeping course at level 1 to give them the opportunity to progress to training in care at higher levels.

43. WOTS has responded to the transport difficulties in rural Oxfordshire by providing minibuses to collect trainees from their homes. Minibuses provide reliable, free transport to and from the WOTS training centre and also to the sites of the various projects in which trainees are involved as part of their training. Without such support many trainees, particularly those in the foundation and care sectors, would not have been able to undertake training.

44. WOTS has strong links with referral agencies such as the Employment Service and probation service. The organisation accepts many trainees who are otherwise difficult to place, accommodating them in safe, supported placements or on appropriate projects. WOTS operates an open-door policy. It is rare for anyone to be turned away.

45. Equal opportunities issues are not always covered adequately during trainees' induction. Some trainees have little or no awareness of the organisations' equal opportunities policy or of the official grievance and complaints procedure. Most trainees, however, know who to approach if they are experiencing difficulties,

either in the workplace or at college. The organisation collects data on trainees' gender, ethnicity and disabilities. There is no systematic analysis of the data to provide information for managers or for planning purposes. Changes made recently to the structure of the organisation mean that individuals now have responsibility for aspects of the organisation's work, including the analysis and use of equal opportunities data. Complaints from trainees and employers are taken seriously and dealt with satisfactorily. Complaints are not recorded effectively, which means that it is difficult to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of any actions taken or look at trends.

Trainee support

Grade 3

46. Prospective trainees are referred by the careers service and Employment Service. They also apply directly to WOTS following recommendations from schools and colleges or from previous trainees. The organisation also markets its services directly to employers. All prospective trainees are interviewed by a WOTS training co-ordinator to determine their aptitude for a career in their chosen area. The co-ordinator may also carry out an initial assessment to establish the trainee's ability in communication and numeracy. Each trainee receives an individual induction, carried out either at WOTS or in the workplace. Subcontractors usually conduct their own induction, which involves an introduction to the training and to the handbooks provided for their trainees. Employers may also provide an induction to the workplace. Each trainee is assigned to a training co-ordinator who is responsible for reviewing their progress. Inspectors did not agree with all the strengths identified in the self-assessment report and they identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective additional support
- ◆ imaginative key skills initial assessment pilot
- ◆ regular key skills workshops

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate arrangements for initial assessment
- ◆ failure to use the outcomes of initial assessment in constructing individual training plans
- ◆ failure to record learning support needs

47. Training co-ordinators visit their trainees in the workplace every eight to 12 weeks. The review focuses on the trainee's progress and a record of the review is given to both the trainee and the employer. On occasions when a barrier to progress is identified, the training co-ordinator works with the trainee and the employer to find a solution to the problem. Solutions have included: a lap-top

computer loaned to a trainee who found it difficult to gain access to a computer in the workplace; a uniform supplied to a care trainee at the start of her programme; the arrangement of accommodation for a trainee; and advice on benefits. Trainees have access to their training co-ordinators, outside scheduled review meetings, by telephone or e-mail. There are many examples of support for trainees with particular learning needs, such as dyslexia. Trainees who attend college have access to all the college's learning resources, including learning support facilities and the services of a personal counsellor.

48. WOTS has been experimenting with several initial assessment tests. They are currently piloting a key skills initial assessment test with 10 trainees. If it is considered effective it will replace many of the existing tests. Regular key skills workshops are provided, on an open-access basis, for trainees who have difficulty in achieving their key skills. Trainees bring their NVQ portfolios to the workshop to work with the tutor in identifying links between key skills and occupational activities. Numbers attending the workshops are low at the moment but trainees who take advantage of them are able to integrate evidence of occupational competencies with the evidence required for key skills units and to progress more quickly to the completion of their key skills units.

49. The initial interview is the main vehicle for determining the suitability of trainees' intended programmes and likely support needs. Basic skills initial assessment tests are used only where the training co-ordinator considers them appropriate. There is some accreditation of prior learning, though there are no agreed procedures for this and details are not formally recorded. The results of any basic skills tests are rarely recorded on the trainees' individual training plan and do not lead to a structured programme of learning support. Where subcontractors carry out their own initial assessment, this is not monitored or reviewed by WOTS. In the case of one subcontractor, all individual training plans are identical. Although the organisation provides a great deal of effective additional support, the support is usually identified informally by the training co-ordinator, assessor or employer and is provided on an individual basis for each trainee. There is little formal recording of additional support needs.

Management of training

Grade 2

50. In the 18 months leading up to the original inspection, WOTS had been preparing for privatisation, but this did not happen and the organisation is still part of the district council. A new management structure has been introduced. There are 10 staff at the training centre. There is a programme manager who is responsible to the chief executive of the district council, three training managers, two training co-ordinators, one project team leader and one project worker. At the time of the reinspection, a new person was expected to take up a vacant position for a training co-ordinator in February 2002. There is a small administrative support team. The programme manager holds formal monthly meetings and a weekly team briefing. There are policies and procedures to guide day-to-day operations. Most staff possess appropriate occupational experience and qualifications. Trainers are all qualified assessors and internal verifiers, or are working towards assessors' qualifications. Staff have job descriptions that reflect the new structure of the organisation. There is an annual staff appraisal system. At the time of the original inspection, WOTS used subcontractors to provide most of the training and assessment for which it was responsible. These included local colleges, training providers and private companies. The number of subcontractors has now been reduced and 70 per cent of the training is given by WOTS. WOTS achieved the Investors in People Standard and the ISO 9002 quality standard in 1999. The self-assessment report for this area of work in the original inspection included many strengths which were no more than normal practice or which could not be validated. Inspectors agreed with both the weaknesses identified. The self-assessment report failed to give adequate consideration to some of the wider functions of management of training, including its impact on learners' experience. Several significant weaknesses were not identified in the report and inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment produced for the reinspection was detailed, and the judgements it contained were critically evaluated and supported by evidence.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ inadequate agreements with subcontractors
- ◆ poor management of subcontractors and employers
- ◆ weak programme management
- ◆ unreliable management information

51. After the original inspection, WOTS produced a comprehensive action plan to deal with the weaknesses in this area. At the reinspection, inspectors found that WOTS had made very good progress towards rectifying the weaknesses identified at the original inspection and that some of the weaknesses had been turned into strengths.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and detailed agreements with subcontractors
- ◆ effective management of training given by subcontractors
- ◆ open and consultative management style
- ◆ good internal communications
- ◆ very good staff development and training
- ◆ effective business planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient use of data to improve performance

52. At the time of the original inspection, contracts and agreements with subcontractors and employers were inadequate. Since the original inspection, WOTS has improved the contracts and agreements. They are now very detailed and clearly outline the responsibilities of WOTS and the responsibilities of its subcontractors. There are clear requirements for initial assessment to be completed within the first month of training, for progress reviews to take place regularly and for all learners to have access to work-based assessment. The agreements stipulate that WOTS's staff will monitor training and that subcontractors must allow WOTS's staff access to premises and learners' portfolios.

53. At the time of the original inspection, there was poor management of subcontractors and employers. WOTS has now established an effective monitoring system and the training provided by subcontractors is managed well. One of the training managers oversees the work of the subcontractors. She has monthly meetings with most subcontractors and monthly progress reports are produced. There is regular telephone contact and all contacts and correspondence are logged and kept in each subcontractor's file. External verifiers' reports and internal verification paperwork are also kept in the files.

54. WOTS has been through a period of uncertainty over its future. However, the open and consultative style of management has meant that staff have been informed about developments as they have happened, and have been involved in regular discussions. Members of staff have a good understanding of their role and the direction of the organisation. They support the new structure and have a positive attitude to their work with learners. Internal communications are good. There are regular team meetings where all information is shared and discussed. Managers meet regularly and pass on information to their teams. All staff are kept well informed and up to date with all developments affecting the organisation. Staff are highly motivated and well supported by WOTS. Trainers are provided with mobile telephones which are useful when visiting learners in rural locations, and when working unsocial hours. They are also provided with other up-to-date equipment including tape-recorders to tape progress review meetings with learners.

55. Staff development and training is very good. Recent activities include the opportunity to gain learning and development qualifications, lift truck driver training and key skills practitioner training. Some staff are taking NVQs at level 4 in management. One member of staff has been allocated one week each year to work in the care industry, to keep her professional registration updated. Staff can take up the good training opportunities offered by West Oxfordshire District Council. All external staff training is paid for by WOTS.

56. At the time of the original inspection, WOTS's business plan was delayed because of the organisational uncertainty, a new staff appraisal system was still to be introduced and programme management procedures were not developed fully. There is now effective business planning. The business plan is detailed and clearly identifies changes required of the company and the reasons for the changes. There is a detailed section covering aims, current position and future actions required. The staff appraisal system has been fully implemented and there is a broad range of management procedures.

57. At the time of the original inspection, WOTS collected and analysed management data and used them to influence some of its decisions. The organisation still collects the data, but the data are not used to help improve performance. Staff are not set targets for retention, achievements and completions for the learners for which they are responsible. They do not receive updates on relevant data and so cannot use them to monitor performance.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

58. Since the original inspection, WOTS has developed a quality assurance policy and a broad range of procedures covering all aspects of training. These are held in a quality assurance manual which is available to all staff. The quality assurance arrangements cover the work of subcontractors. One of the training managers is responsible for implementing and monitoring the quality assurance policy and procedures.

At the original inspection the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no systematic arrangements for quality assurance
- ◆ no formal analysis of feedback from trainers and those involved in training
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the quality of work provided by subcontractors
- ◆ no sharing of good practice

59. After the original inspection, WOTS produced a quality assurance policy, a range of procedures to be used with the policy and a detailed action plan to remedy the weaknesses identified at the inspection. WOTS has made satisfactory progress towards rectifying the weaknesses. There are now some effective systems for assuring the quality of training. The monitoring of subcontractors is now effective.

Good practice is shared through the visits of the assessors. Inspectors agreed with the grade given for quality assurance in the self-assessment report prepared for the reinspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good range of quality assurance procedures
- ◆ effective quality assurance of training
- ◆ fully inclusive self-assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of systematic monitoring of all quality assurance procedures
- ◆ insufficient feedback from employers

60. At the time of the original inspection, the procedures WOTS used to assure the quality of its training were not comprehensive. They were not appropriate to the circumstances and did not cover all the activities related to training. Since then, WOTS has developed a good quality assurance policy and a wide range of procedures to cover all aspects of training. The procedures all contain measurable targets. For example, initial assessment of learners must take place within one month of starting the training programme.

61. At the time of the original inspection, the activities of most subcontractors were reviewed once a year at a meeting, in which past and future programmes and achievements were discussed. There was little observation of these activities by WOTS's staff and there were no criteria against which the performance of subcontractors could be measured. Some subcontractors sent copies of some of their external verification reports to WOTS, others did not. They were not required to submit internal verification reports. WOTS had files on the subcontractors but these were not kept up to date and often contained little or no information on the processes of assessment and verification and few records of review meetings. In the file of one subcontractor, who ran a large NVQ programme, information on staff qualifications had not been updated and there was no evidence that any progress reviews had taken place. WOTS relied on the subcontractor to provide information and did not necessarily know if there were any issues affecting the quality of the service to learners. WOTS has now rectified these weaknesses. All subcontractors assessors are observed at least once a year and the contracts with subcontractors have clear criteria against which performance can be measured. All subcontractors' files are up to date and contain external verifiers' reports, internal verification records and up-to-date information and curriculum vitae for all staff. All contact between WOTS and subcontractors is logged in the subcontractors' file held by WOTS, and monthly progress reports for those learners in subcontracted training are produced.

62. There is a lack of systematic monitoring of all the new quality assurance procedures. The training manager does monitor learners' progress reviews, portfolios and the initial assessment process, but this monitoring is not planned to

ensure that all learners are monitored for all activities.

63. The self-assessment process has included contributions from all staff and teams. Teams have critically analysed their strengths and weaknesses and provided appropriate evidence to support judgements in most instances. The self-assessment report is a detailed document covering all aspects of WOTS's work. The grades awarded by inspectors at reinspection were higher in two areas and matched the self-assessment grade in one area.

64. At the time of the original inspection, feedback was collected from learners after they left their training programme. Any improvements made as a result of the feedback, therefore, did not benefit those learners. WOTS has rectified this weakness and feedback is now collected three times a year, although response rates are still low. There is insufficient feedback gathered from employers. WOTS distributes only one questionnaire each year to employers and the response rate is low.