

INSPECTION REPORT

Birmingham Electrical Training Ltd

22 April 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 Jobcentre Plus programmes. 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 **learnirect** provision
- adult and community learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of her majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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 Jobcentre Plus programmes 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

Birmingham Electrical Training Ltd is a private limited company. It has a training centre in central Birmingham where it offers work-based learning in construction. The company offers specialist training in the installation and commissioning of electrical and electrotechnical systems and equipment. There are 297 learners, of whom 198 are advanced modern apprentices. Ninety-nine learners are following other national vocational qualification (NVQ) training programmes.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Training in construction is satisfactory. The leadership and management at Birmingham Electrical Training Ltd are unsatisfactory. Arrangements for equal opportunities are unsatisfactory and those for quality assurance are very weak.

GRADES

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

Construction	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- good standard of on- and off-the-job training
- excellent support for learners and employers by training officers
- effective working relationships with employers and subcontractors
- good internal communications

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- slow progress by some learners

BIRMINGHAM ELECTRICAL TRAINING LTD

- inadequate quality assurance process
- poor internal verification practice
- insufficient use of performance indicators and standards
- poor monitoring of development and action plans

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more challenging targets for framework completion

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days in April 2002 at Birmingham Electrical Training Ltd (BET). They carried out 21 interviews with managers and staff and interviewed the chairman of the board of directors. Inspectors interviewed 73 learners and 17 employers and workplace supervisors. Inspectors visited 24 construction sites where learners were placed, and made five visits to subcontractors. They examined 16 individual learning plans, seven learners' portfolios of evidence and other examples of completed work. Inspectors observed and graded three learning sessions. The inspection covered all learners on government-funded programmes. Inspectors studied the most recent self-assessment report, which was produced in January 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
Total	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. BET was originally formed in 1990 through a collaboration between the Birmingham Electrical Contractors Training Group (BECTG) and local further education colleges. The original company was set up to manage the BECTG's training activities. The present company was established when two directors bought the company from BECTG in September 2001. There are currently 10 members of staff and 297 learners. In addition to the government-funded training, BET currently offers commercial training for local industry and for individuals. The training is funded by Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC). BET recruits most of its learners from Walsall, Birmingham and surrounding areas in the West Midlands.

3. Manufacturing, distribution, finance and public service are the largest sectors of employment in the area. The construction sector currently employs 4.7 per cent of the workforce and accounts for 9.7 per cent of the businesses in the area. Companies in the construction sector are generally small and medium-sized. In October 2001, unemployment in the area covered by Birmingham and Solihull LSC was 4.9 per cent, compared with the average for England of 2.9 per cent. In 2001, the percentage of school leavers in the area achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 44 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In the Birmingham and Solihull LSC area, 18.3 per cent of the population is from minority ethnic groups, compared with the average for England of 6.2 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

4. Construction learners benefit from particularly good on- and off-the-job training. Learners and their employers receive excellent support from BET's training officers. Assessment is good and progress is well monitored. However, retention rates are poor and some learners make slow progress. Achievement rates are variable, linked to fluctuating retention rates.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

5. BET has a clear management structure. In September 2001, two of the board members bought the company. The board of directors consists of the chairman and the managing director, who also acts as company secretary. The training manager reports to the board of directors and is responsible for three staff, the office manager, the training co-ordinator and the senior training officer. Office staff report to the office manager and training staff report to the senior training officer. The company has a range of policies and procedures, including policies on equal opportunities and on quality assurance. BET prepared its third self-assessment report in January 2002.

STRENGTHS

- good internal communications
- effective working relationships with employers and subcontractors

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity in the workplace
- inadequate quality assurance process
- insufficient use of performance indicators and standards
- poor monitoring of development and action plans
- poor internal verification practice
- insufficiently critical self-assessment report

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more challenging strategic targets
- better publicity materials to attract under-represented groups
- better analysis of employers' and learners' questionnaire

6. BET has good internal communications. Managers are approachable and prepared to consider suggestions. This situation is appreciated by staff. The managing director and the training manager regularly work alongside the staff. Good informal communications are backed up by formal meetings. Senior managers meet the board of directors monthly. Members of the board are well briefed about the company and they monitor operational activities and planning strategy. Training and administrative staff attend weekly staff meetings which ensure co-ordination between training and administrative activities. All staff are well briefed about company strategy. External communications are satisfactory and the company is beginning to develop partnerships and share good practice with other training providers.

7. BET has excellent links with employers and subcontractors. All employers interviewed spoke highly of BET. Employers are well informed about learners' progress.

Any problems are dealt with quickly and efficiently. Links with employers are used to find jobs and suitable experience for learners. BET is building partnerships with local colleges to share good practice. The colleges are developing their quality assurance systems to supplement BET's existing systems. BET shares good working practice with employers. Although these partnerships are at an early stage, all indications are that they will benefit all learners. The management of the subcontractors is informal but both parties are working to develop an acceptable formal system.

8. The management of training is satisfactory. Learners attend college for two- or four-week blocks of off-the-job training. When learners attend college they are visited, usually twice weekly, by BET's training officers who spend a considerable amount of time with them. Some employers cannot provide the range of work necessary to cover all NVQ units. In these cases, BET tries to arrange secondments for the learners to other employers who have the necessary work. A few employers provide an outstanding learning environment and support for their learners. One employer in particular maintains a close relationship with BET's staff, allowing them to observe the latest industrial techniques, and visiting learners during off-the-job training. The learners and the BET's managers meet the services manager of this employer quarterly to discuss any training-related issues. Learners at this employer often complete their programme early and drop-out rates are extremely low. However, BET has not passed this good practice on to other employers.

9. BET installed a management information system five weeks before the inspection. Data are being entered onto the new database and staff are still being trained. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new system. BET is developing some good models to cost its courses and training provision, overheads, and to price commercial work. As BET develops its management information system, it is making links between retention and achievement rates, costs, and value for money. These links do not appear in its current costing models. Budgeting and cost control is effective and appropriate for the company at this stage of its development.

10. There are good staff development opportunities available, particularly those which will be of benefit to learners. BET's current priority is to develop staff's key skills practitioner qualifications to ensure that training officers understand key skills training issues. Staff development is satisfactory. Comprehensive staff development records are kept. Individual training needs are identified through the staff appraisal system. Because the systems and the staff are new, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of appraisal arrangement.

11. The board and management team have set a clear strategy for BET. This is determined at board level and the management team sets the operational targets. The strategy includes a target to improve framework achievement rates to 15 per cent. This is an unacceptably low target and reinforces the acceptance in BET that one in two learners will leave the programme early. Company strategy is set out in the business plan which contains a mission statement and strategic objectives with deadlines, criteria for success and resources that are needed. The plan does not give sufficient detail

about how to achieve the objectives. For example, staff time is recorded under resources, but this does not specify how much time will be allocated in staff's busy schedules, or how many staff will be involved. There are no operational plans, other than the self-assessment action plan.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

12. BET has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy. The policy is part of the agreements between BET and its employers and subcontractors. It promotes and ensures equality of opportunity and fair treatment for learners.

13. All BET's staff have good equal opportunities and disability awareness training. Training is carried out by an independent training organisation. There is a detailed staff development plan which includes equal opportunities training. BET's staff understand equal opportunities issues.

14. BET's equal opportunities policy has not been effective in widening participation by under-represented groups. Only 9.8 per cent of BET's learners are from minority ethnic groups and there are no women learners. BET collects equal opportunities information at recruitment. It uses the data to set recruitment targets, monitor learners' progress against targets and to identify under-represented groups. BET's staff are trying to widen participation. For example, they make presentations at promotional events at all-girl schools, to African-Caribbean groups and to the black and minority learning network. They carry out mock interviews with pupils from a range of schools.

15. About three months after induction, BET uses learners' surveys to judge the effectiveness of induction. The surveys show that learners do not remember equal opportunities training. Learners have insufficient understanding of discrimination and harassment, but remembered and understood other aspects of their induction, such as health and safety, which is re-emphasised regularly. Equal opportunities is given insufficient priority at induction and is not re-emphasised during training. Amendments to training have been proposed for the next inductions, but not yet introduced.

16. BET does not check that employers have an equal opportunities policy. Supervisors and BET's staff do not discuss equal opportunities sufficiently at learners' progress reviews. Training officers usually ask learners if they have any equal opportunities issues and then tick a box, but do not record any resulting discussions.

17. Equal opportunities is a standard agenda item at meetings, but there is little discussion of equal opportunities issues or the widening of participation. The publicity material, particularly BET's marketing stand, shows images of learners from under-represented groups, but written publicity material does little to promote the industry to under-represented groups of learners. There is insufficient information on how to support or guide these learners when they apply.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

18. The learners' experiences at BET are broadly satisfactory, but there is no formal coherent and thorough process for the quality assurance of training in BET. This weakness contradicts a strength identified in the self-assessment report. The policy statement on quality assurance is not adequately detailed. There is no clear and dedicated framework of procedures in place for quality assurance and no specific quality assurance or occupational review meetings. There is no formal review of quality assurance by senior management. Quality assurance is not a standard item in weekly staff meetings. There are insufficient internal audits of essential areas of training and learner support to ensure consistency and good practice. There is inadequate sharing of good practice within the organisation.

19. There is insufficient use of performance indicators and standards, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Essential areas, which include learner support and guidance, health and safety and equal opportunities, do not have quality standards and performance indicators. There are some targets for retention and achievement but several staff are not aware of them. There is no systematic review of these targets over time to identify any trends. There is no formal monitoring and updating of action and development plans. Some plans do not have clear and measurable targets or intermediate reviews. Monitoring arrangements are too broad to be meaningful and lack a clear strategy and criteria to permit successful evaluation. Quality assurance measures have failed to adequately evaluate and remedy significant issues concerning learner retention and achievement.

20. There is poor internal verification practice. Internal verification is pre-planned with appropriate sample sizes and coverage. There is a timetable of internal verification. However, in several cases recently, poor verification practice had taken place, with an internal verifier verifying his own assessments. Assessors observed during internal verification receive insufficient written feedback. Minutes of internal verification meetings are unsatisfactory, with many completed in a cursory manner. There are no standardisation meetings or exercises undertaken to develop assessors and improve consistency. BET does not produce a self-assessment of its internal verification practices against the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) NVQ code of practice.

21. The self-assessment process is not thorough and lacks critical evaluation, especially of leadership and management and of quality assurance. In these two areas, inspectors found significant weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Some weaknesses are not clear in meaning and there is insufficient evidence to support some judgements. There is no adequate reference to learner retention and achievement in the self-assessment report. Poor retention was a key weakness identified by inspectors in the construction area. Staff were involved in the self-assessment process, although some staff claimed little ownership of it. Learners, employers and subcontractors are not involved in the BET self-assessment process.

22. There is satisfactory use of questionnaire surveys to gather the views of learners after

induction, during their training, and those who leave before completing their training. Postal questionnaires seek employers' views. All questionnaires ask appropriate questions on training and support. The questionnaires are not analysed in-depth and many learners fail to complete the questionnaires fully. However, there is some valuable information gained from the surveys on areas of concern expressed by learners and employers. Because of one survey, employers received an informative letter from BET explaining the NVQ scheme.

Good Practice

Applicants identified as having forms of dyslexia have their initial assessments on a Saturday. This meets individual needs better by allowing more time and alleviating anxiety about group assessments.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	297	3

23. BET offers training for 297 young people in the electrical installation sector of the construction industry on electrotechnical programmes. One hundred and ninety-eight are advanced modern apprentices and 99 are training in NVQs. All modern apprentices work towards an NVQ at level 3 in installing and commissioning electrical systems and equipment, examination-based vocational qualifications in knowledge of electrical installation engineering and a practical skill test. Key skills are taught and certified separately. Modern apprentices registered before January 2000 do not have to complete the NVQ at level 2 in installing electrotechnical systems. All learners on other NVQ training programmes work towards NVQs at level 3. Forty-nine learners also plan to achieve NVQs at level 2. Prospective learners are referred from careers offices and schools, or are recommended by employers and friends. All applicants have an initial assessment and interview. All learners are employed. Successful applicants, without employment, are matched with available vacancies. Unsuccessful applicants are given feedback on areas of weakness, and an opportunity to re-apply. Learners work on a variety of sites during their training, ranging from domestic premises and light industrial sites, to large manufacturers. Employers provide on-the-job training throughout the programme. During their first two years, learners attend one of three further education colleges on block release, of two or three-week sessions. In their third year, learners complete their examination-based vocational qualification and continue to work towards the NVQ at level 3, taking the practical skill test in the fourth year. All NVQ assessment and verification is carried out in the workplace by BET staff. Other qualifications are taught, assessed and verified in the colleges.

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	100		56		60		64		55		20				
Retained*	0		0		30		0		23		12					
Successfully completed	0		0		7		2		12		10					
Still in learning	90		40		23		32		11		2					

*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	2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	43		42		51		60		92		88				
Retained*	0		0		0		18		20		25					
Successfully completed	0		0		0		2		14		19					
Still in learning	21		27		23		16		6		6					

*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 standard of on- and off-the-job training
- good assessment and progress monitoring
- good range of construction sites
- thorough learners' progress reviews
- excellent support for learners and employers by training officers

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- slow progress by some learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better understanding of NVQs by employers
- better awareness of off-the-job training by workplace supervisors

24. The training is good and is carried out by qualified staff in good, well-resourced accommodation. A wide range of training is covered. Learners respect their tutors and the learners' work shows a good level of skill. Learners appreciate the skills they are developing and their employers confirm the good levels of background knowledge and practical standards they achieve while doing their off-the-job training. Learners receive good on-site training. They work with skilled craftspeople and carry out a wide variety of tasks, often beyond the standard required for their NVQ.

25. Assessment practices are good. Most assessments are planned in advance, but training officers do sometimes assess learners during unplanned visits, if it is appropriate. Learners understand what is to be assessed, how it is to be done and can refuse to be assessed at this stage. Good health and safety procedures form a large part of assessment arrangements. Learners fill in a short questionnaire to check their background knowledge of the unit they are being assessed on and are given feedback. If necessary, learners are tutored in any weak areas. Assessors use good question and answer sessions before, during and after observed assessments and then have a recap and feedback session. Documents are comprehensive and reflect the assessment accurately. Monitoring of learners' progress is good. Assessment decisions are recorded on a database so there is an accurate record of each candidate's progress for the performance objectives in each unit. Everyone involved in training knows about each learner's progress. Assessment decisions are sampled and assessors are observed. The process is planned, but BET plans to make verification more thorough.

26. Employers range from small independent electrical contractors to large organisations covering a wide geographical area. Typical contracts include electrical installations in retail developments, hospitals and industrial projects. Much of the work is on large sites, which gives learners a wide range of experience and assessment. Learners work with other trades, which develops their experience. Working on larger construction projects gives learners more opportunities to collect evidence covering all aspects required by their NVQ. Learners develop their competences in electrical installations to a good standard.

27. Learners have comprehensive, formal progress reviews every three months. They have to self-assess their progress in key skills and personal development. Health and safety is a large part of the progress review, and learners are given a written question paper on site safety. One answer sheet revealed potential safety issues and the learner was withdrawn from the site pending a site visit. Learners' NVQ progress is monitored against targets set at the previous review and against their individual learning plans. Monitoring is accurate and shows what needs to be completed. Targets are set for learners, but they do not focus on detailed unit evidence. Learners and training officers have a copy of the outcomes of the progress reviews, which they share with employers.

28. Learners are well supported throughout their programme. There are many examples of excellent individual support, both occupational and personal, given by the training officers. Learners are visited frequently in college, especially during the first year of training. The frequency of visits to the workplace is increased where potential problems have been identified. The training officers offer additional advice and guidance to learners and their parents during weekends and evenings. The training officers are recruited from industry and are well experienced and occupationally competent. Employers and learners respect their knowledge and value the good level of support given. Employers are regularly informed of learners' achievements and any barriers to progress. In response to employment needs, BET has arranged for learners to attend courses, which are additional to modern apprenticeship framework requirements. These include Portable Appliance Testing and 16th Edition Wiring Regulations.

29. The recruitment and selection process is open to all applicants. They are interviewed and take aptitude tests. To improve retention rates, since 2000-01, learners must be of key skills at level 2 standard as a minimum for entry. Early indications show that this has a positive effect. Learners are given help at college, if necessary, and by training officers, but there is little recorded detail. Induction is good for health and safety issues and the contractual requirements of the apprenticeship agreement. It is poor in the wider issues of equality of opportunity.

30. For the 1996-97 group of advanced modern apprentices, retention rates are 60 per cent and achievement rates are 55 per cent. Two of the original 20 are still in learning. In subsequent years, retention rates have remained low, at about 50 per cent and achievement levels will be correspondingly poor. Retention rates have started to improve since 2000-01. Only 10 per cent of the current learners left in their first year. For other NVQ training between 1995 and 2001, retention rates vary between 22 and 64 per cent. Achievement levels will correspond to these rates.

31. There are learners still on the programme from 1995, and from subsequent years, who are making slow progress and who have exceeded the four-year programme. BET continues to support these learners. However, the training officers' caseloads have grown, making assessment on demand more difficult. BET is recruiting new training officers.

32. Although employers are supportive of training, they have a poor understanding of NVQs. Those who do have the information rarely pass it on to the supervisors responsible for training learners. There is insufficient assessment and co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Most supervisors do not have copies of the NVQ standards or the content of the college training. Most employers and learners know that key skills are part of the modern apprenticeship framework, but few employers understand what is involved. Some learners are unsure if they have to sit the external assessments, or if they are exempt because of their previous qualifications.

Good Practice

A learner who had broken his ankle was taken to hospital. His training officer visited him in the evenings and arranged for work to be taken to him, which enabled him to continue his NVQ.

Poor Practice

One learner has achieved key skill qualifications, but has to repeat them. All learners are following the same off-the-job programme. Anticipated examination grades are recorded on application forms, but learners' actual grades are not always recorded at college.