

INSPECTION REPORT

United Utilities

25 June 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
- **learndirect** 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

United Utilities plc is a multi-utility organisation providing mains electricity supply, fresh water supply and disposal of wastewater services to industry and dwellings across the northwest of England. It offers training for advanced modern apprentices in electricity distribution and transmission engineering, motor vehicle and engineering plant maintenance. All learners have employed status and are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs).

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Engineering training is satisfactory. Craft training is good and learners develop a wide range of skills. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Equal opportunities are promoted satisfactorily and learners have a good understanding of the issues involved. Quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory and self-assessment procedures are inadequate.

GRADES

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

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- well-designed training programmes
- good business planning for recruitment of learners
- good retention rates
- good support for learners
- well-resourced training facilities
- good understanding of equal opportunity issues amongst learners

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KEY WEAKNESSES

- lack of coherent management of the training programme
- slow progression by some learners
- inadequate self-assessment and development planning
- inadequate internal verification
- insufficient quality assurance of training
- unsatisfactory process for review of learners' progress
- failure to provide key skills training from the outset of programmes
- insufficient use of equal opportunities data in decision-making

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- extend intranet to cover modern apprenticeship training
- more sharing of good practice
- better communications with subcontractors

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 24 days at United Utilities plc (United Utilities) during June 2002. Inspectors visited and interviewed 21 of the 51 learners at their place of work. Three electrical engineering learners were interviewed at the Chorley training centre. Inspectors also interviewed 13 members of staff at United Utilities. They visited one local college of further education and a private training provider; meeting training staff, reviewing the training facilities and the learners' records. Training staff escorted inspectors to the premises of eight training providers where they interviewed management staff and mentors. Inspectors looked at 20 individual learning plans, 22 portfolios of learners, management documents, terms of reference for steering, working and training groups, minutes of meetings, policy documents, the business plan, and information on the company's intranet.

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. United Utilities plc was formed in 1996 following the acquisition of the privatised North West Water Group plc and Norweb plc. It is active in over 40 countries and serves over 32 million people around the world. The company is the first multi-utility organisation in the United Kingdom providing mains electricity and fresh water supplies to industry and dwellings in the northwest of England including Manchester, Liverpool, Crewe, Warrington, Carlisle, Blackpool, Blackburn and Bolton. It also undertakes treatment and disposal of waste water and has a large transport fleet of light and heavy vehicles. The water business provides drinking water through reservoirs and other natural sources to commerce and homes. The waste water system cleans and returns soiled water to rivers and the sea in a safe and environmentally harmless way. The electricity business receives power from generating stations on the national grid and distributes it through a network of substations, overhead power lines and underground cables to bring electricity to factories, offices, shops and dwellings throughout the northwest of England.

3. In October 2000, the company embarked on a massive reorganisation programme and service delivery was one of five businesses created. The service delivery business brings together the management and operation of water and electricity assets. All engineering advanced modern apprentices work in the service delivery business which employs approximately 4,400 people in total. The human resources department is responsible for the recruitment of learners and for monitoring their progress. The service delivery business is highly regulated and provides substantial staff training programmes funded from its own resources, including those leading to national and higher national certificates (HNCs).

4. Modern apprenticeship training comes under the asset operations and maintenance directorate within the service delivery business. The directorate provides a comprehensive range of electrical and mechanical services to the business. Learners are on advanced modern apprenticeships and work towards NVQs in electricity distribution and transmission engineering, heavy vehicle maintenance and repair or engineering maintenance at levels 2 and 3. Most learners pursue further education courses. Learners are encouraged to gain qualifications and make progress within the company. At the time of inspection 35 learners were being funded by the Cheshire and Warrington Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and a further 17 were allowed additional company time to complete their studies. Twenty-five learners are training to be electrical cable jointers and linesmen, 23 are working with field service engineers and three are motor mechanics.

5. Modern apprentices are recruited throughout the northwest of England where unemployment among young people dropped slightly from 7.5 per cent in July 2000, to 7.3 per cent in July 2001, but remains higher than the national average. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers in the Northwest who achieved five or more general

certificates of secondary education (GCSE) at grade C or above was 46.2 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Within the company's catchment area, however, this proportion ranges from 27.1 per cent, to 57.7 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

6. Retention rates for advanced modern apprentices are good. The number of government-funded learners has fallen considerably in the last three years, although the company continues to offer non-government funded programmes leading to national and higher national certificates. Learners benefit from well-designed training programmes and good training workshop facilities. They are well supported by mentors and managers who aim to ensure training is good. Some mentors and managers, however, do not fully understand the NVQ requirements. Many learners produce portfolios of a high standard and recognise that these will be useful to them in the future as a source of reference. Key skills training and assessment have not been carried out from the outset of programmes and some learners make slow progress towards achieving key skills certification and completion of their modern apprenticeship framework. There is much good training practice on all programmes, but this is not always shared by staff. Most learners achieve qualifications over and above those they need in order to meet all the requirements of their modern apprenticeship framework.

7. Recruitment of learners is planned well to meet business needs. Staff receive extensive training on equal opportunities. They help to further learners' understanding of equal opportunities issues and emphasise the importance of health and safety. The management of training lacks coherence. The roles of staff are not defined clearly. Quality assurance arrangements relating to training have not proved effective. Internal verification procedures are inadequate. A great deal of data are collected. Data are not used, however, in decision-making or in identifying ways of improving provision. The self-assessment process is not an integral part of provision and development planning is inadequate to meet the needs of learners.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

8. Following widespread restructuring in the organisation, the modern apprenticeship programme has been subject to considerable staff changes. Modern apprentices are based within three departments of the asset operations and maintenance directorate. This is one of five directorates within the service delivery business of the company. The modern apprenticeship programme is valued highly within the organisation but it is only a very small part of the training activity which the company provides. Job roles and responsibilities within the training development and performance management team of the human resources department are being redefined, in order that compliance with policies and procedures related to the training programmes, can be internally audited and monitored. Strategic management of the training programmes is to become the responsibility of three inter-departmental working groups. The steering group has held one meeting in February 2002, and this was followed by a meeting of the working group in March 2002. The training group has yet to meet. The company has a well-established equal opportunities policy and procedures, which are regularly reviewed. The organisation's comprehensive quality assurance arrangements do not relate to the training programme. The company holds the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

STRENGTHS

- effective integration of learners with employees in work teams
- extensive training programme and progression opportunities for staff
- good planning of recruitment to meet the company's business needs
- clear understanding of equal opportunities issues among learners

WEAKNESSES

- lack of coherent management of the training programme
- little use of equal opportunities data in decision-making
- inadequate quality assurance arrangements relating to training
- insufficient collection of feedback to assist continuous improvement of provision
- inadequate internal verification
- inadequate self-assessment and development planning

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- extension of the intranet to cover modern apprenticeship training

9. The recruitment of modern apprentices is well planned. Recruitment takes place annually in accordance with a well-established business planning process. Managers have to make a business case for each modern apprentice they wish to recruit and this has to reflect projected staffing requirements for the next three or four years. Modern

apprentices are offered a fixed-term training contract. The company does its best to find appropriate permanent employment for modern apprentices when an appropriate position becomes available. The company invests heavily in its modern apprenticeship scheme and every effort is made to recruit the highest calibre of applicant in order to ensure that the longer-term staffing needs of the company are met well.

10. Learners are integrated well with employees in work teams and in the company as a whole. All learners are included in monthly team briefings and they have access to the extensive company intranet. Learners are fully included in the company's general training programmes, such as those on health and safety updating and a two-day 'U-Can' culture change training programme. The company has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures. These apply to learners as well as all other employees. They cover all key aspects of business and training, including the promotion of equal opportunities. There are grievance and disciplinary procedures. Most learners are highly motivated and keen to further the success of the company and the community they serve.

11. Improvements have been made to the process for reviewing the performance of staff. This process is proving effective as a means of identifying progression routes for staff and their individual training needs. Most staff in the asset operations and maintenance division have been through the review process. The company funds enable individual members of staff training to carry out their current job well, or further their career in the company. Modern apprentices are included in the annual performance review cycle, which includes a mid-year review of their work. Learners are set targets to achieve at specific stages of their training. If, during their reviews, learners are able to show that they have met these targets, they may receive an increase in their salary. Many learners progress to further training on completion of their modern apprenticeship. Six learners from the 1997 intake, and four from the 1998 intake, have progressed to HNC courses.

12. The overall management of the modern apprenticeship programme lacks coherence. It is not clear who has overall responsibility for managing the training programme, or where accountability for all aspects of training provision lies. The company does not manage subcontracted provision well. It does not have formal links with subcontractors and does not monitor the quality of their provision. The teaching and assessment of key skills are not integral to the modern apprenticeship programmes. No member of staff has been given responsibility for key skills provision. The overall responsibility for learners lies with the managers of the department in which on-the-job training takes place. Some managers, however, are unclear about their role in this respect and some are more effective than others in meeting learners' needs. A programme of training for managers and mentors has lapsed over the past couple of years, though its reintroduction is planned. Over the past few months, some reviews of learners' progress have not been carried out well. Many learners have not received a progress review for several months. Managers and mentors have not taken part in reviews regularly. There is inadequate monitoring of learners' progress reviews. Recently, however, the human resources department has intervened to address

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weaknesses in the review process. A member of the human resources team has organised regular progress reviews for learners who are making slow progress. During their reviews, these learners are set targets and carry out action-planning to improve their performance.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

13. Responsibility for the promotion of equal opportunities lies with the head of human resources. There is an equal opportunities policy which, with other company policies and procedures, is reviewed regularly. The policy is closely linked with the complaints procedure. There are effective procedures for promoting mutual respect between people in the workplace. The equal opportunities policy and procedures are available to staff in hard copy and also through the company's intranet which is easily accessible in different places within the organisation. All new learners and staff are given leaflets about the equal opportunities policy and the policy on promoting mutual respect in the workplace. Learners fully understand issues relating to equal opportunities.

14. The company maintains comprehensive information on the age, gender, disabilities and ethnic origin of staff in a variety of databases held centrally or in operating divisions of the organisation. The organisation carries out regular validation of its equal opportunities data. Good data are available on the respective proportions of staff who are male, female, disabled, and from minority ethnic groups, and this is broken down in terms of age and salary grade. Learners' employment records are held on employee databases within the service delivery division of the organisation. All learners currently employed by the company are men and none is from an ethnic minority group. In recent years, however, some learners have been female and from minority ethnic groups. Appropriate records are maintained of the numbers of responses from potential learners to advertisements. The selection process includes aptitude testing, dexterity testing and interviews. Detailed records are kept of both successful and unsuccessful applicants' performance in tests and interviews. The organisation holds significant amounts of data on learners and applicants. Managers, however, are unable to explain why the numbers of applicants who are women or from minority ethnic groups, have fallen to the extremely low levels of recent years.

15. A recent review of how the company upholds and promotes equality of opportunity through its selection process, identified the need for more use to be made of equal opportunities data when planning ways of refining the recruitment process. For example, there has been comparison of the overall profile of unsuccessful candidates with that of successful candidates, with the aim of checking whether there has been any incidence of bias during the interview and testing stages of selection. Advertisements for learners have been placed in the minority ethnic press occasionally, but no information on the quality and quantity of responses to these has been collected. When recruiting learners, the company tries to place them with an operational arm of the company that is within reasonable commuting distance of their homes. There has been no analysis of any possible effect this practice may have on the gender and ethnicity profile of learners.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

16. Self-assessment has not taken place on an annual cycle. Self-assessment reports were produced in 1998 and 2002, just before inspection. The most recent self-assessment process involved the setting up of a working group of key staff with responsibilities for aspects of the modern apprenticeship programme. This working group was formed in January 2002 and met weekly until the self-assessment report was produced in March 2002. There was little consultation with learners and staff over the production of the report. Inspectors did not agree with some of the judgements on, and strengths in, leadership and management which were cited in the self-assessment report. They considered that some strengths were no more than normal practice and that some aspects of provision identified as needing further improvement were, in fact, weaknesses. There has not been a regular cycle of development planning or effective monitoring of the training programme since 1998.

17. Although there are quality assurance policies and procedures that relate to the company's business, these do not cover the training programmes for learners adequately. There is no comprehensive set of quality assurance policies and procedures covering key aspects of training. There is little monitoring or evaluation of the quality of training. There is no system for the observation of training or assessment. Trainers and assessors seldom meet to identify and share good practice. At present, pockets of provision are monitored and reviewed, but there has been no analysis of their adequacy. The newly introduced steering group and the human resources team have been established to oversee the quality assurance of training.

18. Internal verification arrangements are inadequate. On electrical engineering programmes, 20 staff are assessors but there is only one internal verifier. One member of the electrical engineering team is working towards becoming an internal verifier. On other programmes, there are staff who are qualified as internal verifiers, but no internal verification has taken place for over a year. There is no systematic process for sampling assessments for the purpose of internal verification. There is also no planned programme of internal verification of assessment. Internal verifiers do not systematically monitor the assessment practices of their colleagues. Internal verifiers are not sufficiently involved in helping staff work towards obtaining assessor qualifications. There is insufficient sharing of good assessment practice by staff.

19. There is no coherent and effective system for collecting feedback from learners, mentors, managers and subcontractors, about the quality of provision. Feedback is not analysed in order to identify ways of improving training. Former methods of collecting feedback, through learner forums for example, have fallen into disuse. On some programmes, learners are asked to provide feedback through answers to questionnaires, but this is not common practice across the provision.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	51	3

20. United Utilities provides training in electricity distribution and transmission engineering, heavy vehicle maintenance and repair and engineering plant maintenance. All learners are employed by the company for the duration of their modern apprenticeship and follow advanced modern apprenticeship programmes which usually takes at least four years to complete. Learners are recruited annually through personal contacts, advertising in local newspapers and referrals from local careers centres. Applicants are required to have a minimum of five GCSEs at grade C or above. They are given psychometric tests in mechanical comprehension and then participate in group discussions and are given individual interviews. Successful applicants spend their first week of employment receiving an induction to the company and their training programme. Electrical apprentices are employed in the construction and maintenance of electricity distribution and transmission systems. Plant maintenance apprentices maintain the company's water supply and waste water systems. Vehicle maintenance apprentices maintain the company's commercial vehicles and car fleet. Training programmes include periods of on- and off-the-job training and learners work towards an appropriate NVQ at level 3. Electrical learners also attend a local college of further education to work towards a craft studies qualification in electrical and electronic engineering. Plant maintenance apprentices spend the first eight to 10 months of their programme at subcontractors' skills training centres working towards an NVQ in performing engineering operations at level 2. They then have periods of training in mechanical, electrical and instrumentation engineering, after which they attend a local college of further education for 12 months to work towards an appropriate qualification in engineering. Motor vehicle learners attend a local college of further education on a day-release basis to achieve qualifications required for completion of the modern apprenticeship framework. At the local college, learners can progress to work towards HNCs. Each learner has a mentor to support him or her through their training programme. At the time of the inspection, there were 25 learners on the electrical engineering programme, 23 on the plant maintenance programme, and three on the vehicle maintenance programme.

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The following table shows 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	5		4		14		18		22		9				
Retained*	0		0		14		16		21	95	9	100				
Successfully completed	0		0		1		3		13	59	0	100				
Still in learning	4		4		13		13		8	36	9	100				

*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 retention rates
- good support for learners
- success of many learners in achieving additional qualifications
- high standard of portfolios
- well-resourced training facilities
- well-designed training programmes

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient assessment by observation in plant and vehicle engineering workplaces
- unsatisfactory process for reviewing learners' progress
- slow progress by some learners
- failure to provide key skills training from the outset of programmes

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more frequent updating of individual learning plans
- more sharing of good practice
- clearer understanding of NVQ requirements by learners, mentors and managers
- better communications with subcontractors

21. The overall retention rate on training programmes is good. Of the 22 learners who

started training in 1997, one left early, and of the 18 who started training in the following year two left early. Although recruitment has declined over the last five years, learners who started during the last three years have all remained on their programme. The overall achievement rate in 1997-98 was satisfactory at 59 per cent. Seventeen learners, however, who began training in that year, are still working to complete their studies in time allowed them by the company, but no longer come within the scope of government funding.

22. Vocational training programmes provided by the company and its subcontractors are well structured. Plant maintenance learners receive good engineering foundation training in the first year of training and acquire the basic hand and machine operating skills needed in the workplace. They rotate around the different engineering process departments and develop a range of appropriate skills in a variety of contexts, before moving to their chosen specialism to complete their modern apprenticeship. Electrical engineering learners have periods of well-planned off-the-job training interspersed with periods of linked on-the-job work experience during which they practise and further develop their skills and knowledge in a real work environment. Vehicle engineering learners undertake good training in the company's workshops and attend college on a day-release basis as a mandatory component of their NVO programme. Their skills and knowledge are assessed frequently through regular practical and written tests. Training sessions are well structured. Lesson plans are detailed and aim to enable learners to develop skills and acquire knowledge in a logical sequence. There are, however, no formalised agreements and no systematic channels of communication between subcontractors and the training provider. Staff from the company seldom meet with the subcontractors to review learners' progress.

23. Electrical engineering learners' off-the-job training is provided at United Utilities training centre in Chorley. The centre is well resourced and learners benefit from extensive and excellent accommodation, including workshops, practical areas, classrooms and a lecture theatre. The workshops and practical areas are equipped to a very high standard with a wide range of appropriate electricity distribution systems and equipment linked to the National Grid. In the plant and motor vehicle workshops, learners are able to develop a wide range of skills. Subcontractors' accommodation is good, with extensive workshop facilities for practical training. Classrooms contain stimulating displays of relevant materials which are helpful to the learners. Suitably qualified and experienced staff provide off-the-job training. On-the-job training is carried out in the workplace where learners can work on an extensive range of plant and vehicles.

24. The standard of learners' portfolios on the electrical and plant maintenance programmes is high. Many portfolios contain a wide range of diverse evidence, including photographs. Learners word process much of the work in their portfolios and cross-reference evidence to the appropriate NVO units. The range of evidence in the portfolios of learners on motor vehicle programmes is narrow. Learners value their portfolios and many see them as a useful reference document for future use. Learners on all engineering programmes achieve various useful and additional qualifications.

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Plant maintenance learners work towards completion of the 10 mandatory units of an NVQ at level 3 and then work towards completion of an additional four units in either mechanical, electrical or instrumentation engineering, to extend their range of skills and understanding of the workplace. Electrical apprentices achieve additional qualifications in manual handling, while motor vehicle learners achieve qualifications in vehicle electrics and lift truck driving.

25. Learners receive good support throughout their training programme. When learners begin their training, they are allocated a mentor who is usually an experienced supervisor or workshop controller who is responsible for all aspects of the practical training programme. All learners are directly supervised by craftspeople who are responsible for their vocational training and general progress. Some managers, mentors and learners have little understanding of the NVQ process and of the requirements relating to the gathering of evidence of the acquisition of competence. Most learners, however, begin accumulating evidence as they develop their skills. If they need to acquire particular specialist knowledge and skills, they receive further training from other craftspeople. Through this flexible approach to training, learners are able to acquire a wide range of knowledge and skills. Motor vehicle learners are moved to specialist companies to receive training in aspects of work that the training provider does not undertake. They are able to gather all the specialist evidence they need for their portfolios. Off-the-job training for plant learners is carefully arranged so that it can be undertaken at a skills centre close to the learners' home. All learners are given time during the working week to gather evidence to compile their portfolios. The training provider encourages learners to gain a driving licence and helps to pay for driving lessons and the driving training tests. Some learners living in rural areas are loaned company vans to get to work or college.

26. Learners are not given any initial assessment of their key skills and basic skills. Most learners attending colleges of further education gather evidence of their acquisition of key skills through their off-the-job training. Some learners who are not attending college, however, are not fully aware that they have to obtain key skills certification in order to meet all the requirements of their modern apprenticeship framework. The teaching and assessment of key skills are not integral to training programmes. United Utilities' staff are seldom able to advise learners on ways of gathering evidence of their acquisition of key skills in the workplace. The company has no process for identifying learners who may be exempt from taking the key skills tests because they hold appropriate qualifications.

27. Individual learning plans are drawn up at the start of the programme but they are not updated effectively to reflect learners' achievements and changes in learners' objectives. Many plans do not specify target dates for the completion of the NVQ and key skills units and for meeting the mandatory requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework. Details of learners' completion of units are not recorded in the plans. The only information added to plans after the start of the programme relates to the dates of learners' progress reviews. Some learners are making slow progress in collecting and presenting evidence of their competence. Of the 51 learners in training,

17 have been on their programme for longer than the four-year funded period and have yet to meet all the requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework. Some learners are approaching the end of the funded period and are faced with completing a disproportionate amount of work in the time left to them if they are to complete their modern apprenticeship successfully. The outbreak of foot and mouth disease made it difficult for some learners to get to work but that cannot be held wholly responsible for their slow progress. The company is now addressing the problem of some learners' slow progress. It has introduced a thorough system for monitoring and recording learners' progress. Electrical engineering learners, thought to be most at risk, are set targets and their progress towards achieving these is reviewed every month. Some learners on plant maintenance programmes make slow progress. Management has not taken any remedial action to ensure that more learners on plant maintenance programmes meet all the requirements of their modern apprenticeship framework. Many learners do not receive reviews of their progress every 13 weeks. Instead, their progress reviews take place at four-month or six-month intervals. Reviews carried out by line managers are usually brief and do not cover specific aspects of learners' work and training. During these reviews, learners are not set short-term targets which they have to achieve before their next review.

28. There are good procedures for the assessment of learners on electrical engineering programmes, but there is only one internal verifier. Assessors have not met as a team to ensure consistency in their working practices. Assessment decisions by unqualified assessors are not always counter-signed by a qualified assessor. There is some good assessment practice in each of the engineering disciplines. There are, however, no formal lines of communication between staff in different areas and there is no established process whereby they can discuss and share good practice. Learners on plant maintenance and motor vehicle programmes do not receive enough assessment through observation of their activities in the workplace. Assessors have just begun to carry out some assessment of plant maintenance learners in the workplace. Up to January 2002, however, many learners had not been assessed and there had not been any internal verification of assessments. There are no assessment records since September 2001 for learners on motor vehicle programmes.

Good Practice

Learners on plant maintenance programmes develop comprehensive portfolios of detailed technical evidence of their acquisition of competences. The evidence includes illustrated written accounts of diagnostic procedures and procedures for rectifying faults. As they progress through their training in the workplace, they build up their portfolio into a useful reference manual. Learners valued their portfolios and realised that they would prove useful as a workbook to which they could refer in the future when dealing with maintenance systems, and undertaking fault diagnosis.