

INSPECTION REPORT

Zodiac Training Limited

29 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 **learn**direct 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

Zodiac Training Limited is a private limited company with eight training centres across the Northeast and Yorkshire. It employs 106 staff and provides work-based learning for young people in business administration, management and professional, information and communications technology, retailing, customer service and transportation, hospitality, sport, leisure and travel. The Life Skills programme is also provided. There is currently a total of 1,046 young people on work-based learning programmes.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Training for young people on business, administration, management and professional, and information and communications technology is satisfactory, but it is unsatisfactory in the other three areas of learning. The leadership and management of Zodiac Training Limited are satisfactory.

GRADES

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

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

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

Retailing, customer service & transportation	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Foundation programmes	4
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- comprehensive business and development planning
- strong emphasis on equal opportunities
- good portfolio evidence
- good support for learners' development
- frequent monitoring visits for learners in the workplace

KEY WEAKNESSES

- high staff turnover
- insufficient planning of on-the-job training
- poor achievement and retention rates for most learners
- slow progress for most learners
- inadequate equal opportunities monitoring

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better access to some training centres
- better accreditation of previous learning
- better recording of progress and achievement in individual learning plans
- better take-up of off-the-job training activities
- wider range of assessment methods

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of 21 inspectors spent a total of 105 days at Zodiac Training Limited (Zodiac) during April 2002. They interviewed 251 learners, conducted 143 interviews with staff, visited 163 workplaces, and interviewed 122 workplace supervisors. Inspectors observed and graded 41 training and assessment sessions. They examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios of evidence, learners' records, awarding bodies' reports, company plans, policies and procedures. 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
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	9
Information & communications technology	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	5	9	0	0	0	14
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	3	4	2	0	0	0	9
Foundation programmes	0	0	0	5	2	1	0	8
Total	0	4	10	24	2	1	0	41

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Zodiac provides work-based learning for young people in eight training centres across the Northeast and Yorkshire. Its head office is in Gateshead. Most learners are recruited in the Northeast and Yorkshire. Zodiac also has learners in Norfolk. Zodiac has 106 staff, and 1,046 learners who are either employed by a wide range of companies, or are in work placements. There are 285 learners in business administration, of whom 124 are advanced modern apprentices, 126 are foundation modern apprentices and 35 are working towards a national vocational qualifications (NVQ). In information and communications technology (ICT) there are 26 learners in total, 13 advanced modern apprentices, 10 foundation modern apprentices and 3 learners working towards an NVQ. There are 465 learners in retailing, customer service and transportation, 170 advanced modern apprentices, 227 foundation modern apprentices and 68 learners working towards an NVQ. There are 170 young people in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, 10 advanced modern apprentices, 135 foundation modern apprentices and 25 learners working towards an NVQ. There are 100 learners on the Life Skills programme. Work-based learning for young people is funded through contracts with seven local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs).

Work-based learning for young people

3. Work-based learning for young people is satisfactory in business administration, management and professional, and ICT, but is unsatisfactory in retailing, customer service and transportation, and hospitality. Portfolio evidence produced by learners is of a good standard. Learners are effectively supported in their respective training programmes. They receive good assessment and monitoring visits on a regular basis. On-the-job training is not well planned. Learners make slow progress towards their training objectives. The monitoring of employers' equal opportunities is inadequate.

4. Achievement rates are unsatisfactory for modern apprentices in business administration, professional and management, ICT, retailing, customer service and transportation, hospitality, sport, leisure and travel and Life Skills. Retention rates are unsatisfactory in business administration, professional and management, ICT, and retailing, customer service and transportation. Retention rates are satisfactory in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel and Life Skills. Resources are good in all areas of learning, except in Life Skills.

Life Skills

5. Life Skills training by Zodiac is not satisfactory. Learners do receive good personal support. Training resources are inadequate, there are not enough staff and insufficient materials and activities. Achievement rates are poor, and they decreased during 1999-2001. Retention rates are satisfactory and have increased during the period 1999-2001.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

6. Zodiac is a private company owned by two directors, which currently employs 106 people. One director carries out the role of managing director and one carries out the role of operations director. The operations director is responsible for the operational team and the operations manager oversees everyday activities. Eight training centre managers report to the operations manager. The managing director is responsible for the departmental heads of quality assurance, marketing, personnel and finance. All departments have their own support staff who report directly to their line managers. Zodiac has an equal opportunities policy which is reviewed annually. The last review was in May 2001. There are procedures to ensure that equality of opportunity is applied to training and staff activities. Zodiac has held the Investors in People award since 1997 and was recredited in October 2001. This is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. The quality assurance system is based on the requirements of the 'Common Inspection Framework'. Self-assessment has been carried out annually since 1998. The latest self-assessment report was produced in January 2002.

STRENGTHS

- good internal communications
- effective management information system
- good staff development
- comprehensive business and development planning
- strong emphasis on equality of opportunity
- effective action to remove barriers to learning
- extensive internal audit process
- effective internal verification processes

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient planning of on-the-job training
- high staff turnover
- insufficient employer involvement
- inadequate equal opportunities monitoring
- inconsistent application of quality assurance systems in some training centres

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more use of standard agenda for staff meetings
- more detailed target-setting at progression meetings
- more formal evaluation of external training programmes
- clearer equal opportunities policy
- better access to some training centres
- better system for independent observation and evaluation of training
- better document design
- better reproduction of some documents

7. Zodiac has an effective internal communication system. All staff use e-mail as their main method of communication. The directors have an open management style and staff can suggest programme changes to senior managers. All meetings have agendas and are minuted with clear action points. Directors hold monthly executive meetings to monitor finance and performance. They also meet senior managers monthly. Senior managers hold monthly meetings with their staff and all training centre managers hold monthly meetings with training centre staff. The quality assurance procedures specify a comprehensive standard agenda for staff meetings, but this agenda is not always used.

8. Communication between training centres is good. Staff meet other training centre staff at internal verifiers' meetings and at assessors' standardisation meetings. There are monthly progression meetings between training centre managers and staff. Records of learners' progress and short-term targets at these meetings are not specific. Zodiac produces bi-monthly newsletters for staff and learners. The learners' newsletter celebrates the success of groups and individuals and advertises additional learning opportunities. The staff newsletter covers health issues, staff absence and internal vacancies. The information on the notice boards in the training centres is useful and relevant.

9. External links are good and include training providers, the careers service, schools and colleges and the local LSC. Zodiac has a good range of initiatives with local schools and a pre-modern apprenticeship programme to encourage pupils into work-based learning. It also has good links with agencies which deal with homelessness and drug and alcohol misuse. Zodiac is involved in benchmarking and best practice sharing for its initial assessment and equality of opportunity policies. It also has links with employers. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report.

10. Zodiac has an effective management information system. This was identified in the self-assessment report. It holds a wide range of information allowing managers to monitor learners' progress and staff performance. The system is new and information from previous data systems has been integrated with the new data from regional training centres. The management information system produces reports analysing why some learners leave their programmes early, equal opportunities information on the number of

learners from minority ethnic groups and the number of learners with disabilities. The reports can be analysed by periods, months or years and trends can be identified easily. The system also records assessors' visits to learners, learners' progress review dates, key skills completion and unit completion dates for NVQs. Directors and senior managers use the system to analyse performance against objectives, to identify trends and use the data as a basis for future business planning and objective setting.

11. Staff development is good. There are 160 training activities planned for 106 staff in 2002. Staff are involved in a range of training. All staff are trained to at least key skills at level 3, to help them understand learners' issues with key skills training. Fifteen staff are currently taking the post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE). Other training includes management NVQs, health and safety, information technology (IT) and training and development qualifications. Most training and development needs are identified through the staff appraisal system and Zodiac supports training financially and by giving learners time to study. Staff receive an annual formal appraisal and a formal six-monthly progress review. New staff are reviewed at one-month and three-month periods. Personal and professional development needs are clearly linked to the business plan and to Zodiac's needs. Some staff have changed job roles as a result of having identified their ambitions and long-term goals at appraisal. Training and development are part of staff terms and conditions of employment. Training is well co-ordinated. Internal training courses are formally evaluated, by asking for feedback from delegates and analysing it. External training is not evaluated formally except at appraisal. There is no evidence to show whether best value was gained from external training programmes. A comprehensive personnel management information system is being installed which will hold personal development information for all employees. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

12. Zodiac's business plan involves contributions from all staff. They value the opportunity to influence the business plan through meetings and the suggestion scheme. Directors formulate the business plan and circulate a draft to managers for consultation. The final version is circulated to all training centres, in line with quality assurance procedures and staff have to sign to confirm that they have received it. The business plan is well presented and shows a full review of performance against the previous year's plan. The plan outlines performance, resources and marketing, as well as the business objectives for the forthcoming year, with measurable targets. Zodiac monitors its performance against the business plan. Staff's performance targets and objectives are set in line with the key targets and objectives on the business plan. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. The business plan and the company's development plan are clearly communicated to all staff. The development plan is updated quarterly to ensure that targets and objectives are met. Training centres devise their own action plans for their areas of responsibility. The action plan is discussed regularly with staff and monitored at monthly staff meetings.

13. Zodiac provides a range of off-the-job training for learners, but there is insufficient planning of on-the-job training. The off-the-job training opportunities include IT and key skills sessions which are not well attended by learners. There are no on-the-job training

plans for learners and employers to refer to, or to ensure that learning complies with the NVQ requirements. On-the-job training is discussed at the formal review and monitoring sessions between training advisers, employers, supervisors and learners, but there is no formal document setting out short- and long-term requirements. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

14. Zodiac had a high staff turnover of 54 per cent in 2000-01. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Twenty-nine per cent of new staff left their jobs in the first three months of their employment. Forty-four per cent of staff who left early were not suited to their roles. Zodiac has now introduced a two-stage interview with an occupational specialist and an internal verifier. Learners and employers were dissatisfied with the number of different training advisers they had been allocated. Learners made slow progress and achievement rates were poor. The development in new training centres has been slow. Zodiac has revised its recruitment and induction procedures and now gives additional support to new staff through work shadowing and regular appraisal at the start of their employment. All vacancies are advertised internally, in the press and on the Internet.

15. Employers are not sufficiently involved in training. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Some employers would like to be more involved with learners' training and would like more information on learners' training programmes and qualifications. Not all employers are involved in the progress review and monitoring process. Some are reluctant to give learners time to do off-the-job training. Employers found Zodiac's high staff turnover demotivating and did not always understand the roles of visiting Zodiac staff. A recent survey has shown increasing satisfaction among employers.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

16. Zodiac has an equal opportunities policy which includes a statement on equal opportunities and procedures for dealing with grievances, complaints and harassment. The managing director is responsible for introducing and maintaining this policy. The quality assurance systems manager reviews and develops the equal opportunities policy and practice. All staff are contractually bound to meet the requirements of the equal opportunities policy. Learners are informed of Zodiac's equal opportunities policy and procedures during their induction. They are asked about their employer's equal opportunities policy at their progress review. Assessors also ask learners about equal opportunities during workplace visits.

17. Managers who have attended equal opportunities training are keen to extend this training to their staff. All employees were sent a questionnaire to assess their understanding of equal opportunities and diversity. Zodiac is developing company-wide equal opportunities training based on analysis of these responses. Training centres use an equal opportunities and diversity standard to assess current practices and to train staff. Equal opportunities is a standard agenda item at management and staff meetings. At staff meetings, staff and managers report on the progress of projects to widen equal opportunities and to recognise and value diversity. The self-assessment report noted that there were twice as many women as men in training, but Zodiac has reduced this gender gap since January. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups has doubled to just under 3 per cent in the same period. Zodiac is sponsoring the quality assurance manager's postgraduate studies and is using information from her studies as the basis to review its policy and practices.

18. Managers and advisers work hard to remove barriers to learning. According to Zodiac's development plan, training centres must identify under-represented groups in their area. Staff then contact local schools, colleges and communities to encourage participation from under-represented groups and to establish learners' needs. Zodiac has identified ways to bring disaffected individuals into training programmes. In two instances, Zodiac paid for experts who diagnosed learners as having medical conditions which affected their learning abilities. The information was used to help these learners to overcome some of their barriers to learning and to achieve their potential.

19. Zodiac does not adequately monitor employers' equal opportunities policies and practices. Close attention is paid to health and safety issues, but advisers do not always ensure that employers have appropriate equal opportunities policies. Training advisers ask learners about equal opportunities during visits. There is insufficient evidence that advisers monitor employers' compliance with equal opportunities legislation and good practice. For example, one employer displayed offensive material in the workplace. The training adviser had not reported this.

20. Zodiac's equal opportunities policy covers sexual and racial harassment, but not other forms of bullying and harassment in the workplace. The procedures are not worded clearly enough to show that learners and employees are included. Only half of

Zodiac's training centres are accessible to people with restricted mobility.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

21. Zodiac has developed and introduced an extensive internal audit system which monitors compliance with its policies and procedures. It obtains feedback from learners, employers, staff and training centres. Learners' and employers' files and records are checked to ensure that all required activities have been carried out and are recorded. Action-planning is good. Action plans are monitored regularly and checked by the auditor. All training centres are audited and regular customer satisfaction surveys are carried out. Fifteen per cent of learners and 50 per cent of employers are surveyed every six months. Monitoring of employers is satisfactory. Zodiac's management team uses the responses as a basis for continual improvement and development.

22. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and realistic. All employees contribute to the report and are interested in it. Zodiac has started to deal with several of the key weaknesses. It is too soon to say if these changes have resulted in improvements. This is the first time that self-assessment has taken place against the 'Common Inspection Framework'. Some of the self-assessment report is descriptive rather than judgmental. Zodiac's development plan adequately reflects the self-assessment process.

23. There is good planning and management of internal verification, as well as co-ordination and management of external verifier visits. Specific staff manage the verification systems and processes. Internal verifiers' visits are planned to monitor learners' and assessors' performance. Good records are kept on monitoring forms. The front pages of the forms are copied and kept in learners' files. The assessor keeps the back page, which has assessor's feedback on it. There are good communications and support systems between the quality assurance department and training centre staff. Some signatures on some internal verification forms are illegible. Some assessors' feedback forms are not filled in. The forms that are filled in are comprehensive. Some action plans do not emphasise improving assessors' performance sufficiently. Zodiac has employed retention support officers to improve its retention rates.

24. Zodiac has developed many new quality assurance procedures, several as a result of feedback from the audit process. New staff, including managers, administrators and training advisers do not yet understand the quality assurance system fully. This has resulted in the inconsistent application of the quality assurance systems in two of the training centres. Zodiac identified slow progress, and poor retention and achievement rates in its self-assessment report. Some of these weaknesses have been remedied, but it is too soon to judge the effect in all training centres. Action points are followed up, but they are not prioritised, so managers cannot identify which are most urgent.

25. Currently, internal verifiers observe and evaluate on- and off-the-job training sessions. There is no independent observation of training. Monitoring forms are used for a range of functions including training, induction, monitoring, learners' progress reviews, assessment and internal verification. The format is not always appropriate. Learners' progress review forms do not emphasise sufficiently standards, achievement and learners'

progress towards their qualifications. Some photocopied documents are poorly reproduced.

Good Practice

Zodiac has a suggestion scheme called 'Bright Ideas'. It is actively promoted and is displayed on all noticeboards. Staff submit their suggestions and a full analysis shows the progress of the suggestion and whether it will be introduced. A total of 106 suggestions has been received to date and 24 per cent of these have been introduced. Staff value the opportunity to influence continuous improvement through this system.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	285	3

26. Zodiac offers modern apprenticeships in business administration and management in all eight of its training centres. There are 124 advanced modern apprentices, 126 foundation modern apprentices and 35 learners working towards NVOs. Zodiac offers NVOs at level 1 to 4 in business administration and level 3 and 4 in management. Most learners are employed. Employers range from small independent companies to national organisations. Learners are referred by the local careers services, marketing initiatives and personal recommendations by current and previous learners. Learners can join training programmes at any time. Before enrolment, all learners are interviewed and take an initial assessment. Zodiac gives learners an induction programme. Work-based induction is given in the workplace by the employer or the work-placement provider. Most off-the-job training is given in the workplace. Learners are visited in the workplace every two weeks. Progress reviews are carried out every eight weeks. Learners with additional learning and social needs are reviewed every four weeks. All assessments are carried out in the workplace. There are 22 assessors and eight internal verifiers.

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							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	45		155		188		100		66							
Retained*	1		13		48	26	33	33	20	30						
Successfully completed	0		5		42	22	32	32	19	29						
Still in learning	38		62		21	11	3	3	0	0						

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	92		119		60		17		6							
Retained*	2		31	26	21	35	11	65	1	17						
Successfully completed	1		15	13	18	30	1	6	0	0						
Still in learning	74		44	37	6	10	2	12	0	0						

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1997-98									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	37		21		3		3									
Retained*	0		5	24	0	0	0	0								
Successfully completed	0		2	10	0	0	0	0								
Still in learning	31		4	19	0	0	0	0								

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

STRENGTHS

- wide range of workplace opportunities
- frequent monitoring visits for learners in the workplace
- good variety of assessment methods
- good portfolio evidence

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement and retention rates
- some slow progress

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better promotion of off-the-job training
- clearer distinction between observation and monitoring visits

27. Most learners are employed in a variety of excellent public and private sector organisations where staff are good role models for administration and management learners. Varied work activities allow learners to generate evidence to cover all the NVQ requirements and the key skills element of the apprenticeship framework. Employers support their employees in their job roles and with their qualifications. Many learners are promoted to more responsible jobs. Employers appreciate the contribution learners make to the organisations. In shops and restaurants, some managers and trainee managers do not cover all aspects of their NVQ evidence in their everyday activities. In this case, advisers and employers liaise to provide opportunities for these learners to perform the additional tasks required.

28. Training advisers visit learners at their workplace at least once every two weeks, and often weekly. These visits last at least one and a half hours. Sometimes advisers stay for three hours to carry out observations, give advice and training. Advisers help learners with a minimum of disruption to the business. Internal verifiers also visit the workplace frequently to support assessors and advisers. Training advisers fill in the monitoring form and action plan for learners. The monitoring form is also used to record observation assessments. It is not easy to identify which evidence is to be used for NVQ achievement.

29. Assessors use innovative assessment methods to suit learners' individual needs. As well as observations, good use is made of professional discussions. A pilot programme to introduce electronic portfolios of evidence has recently started at all training centres. Learners and assessors find electronic portfolios convenient. Assessors work with learners to identify a wide variety of assessment methods. Assessors and learners make good use of observation evidence during visits. Some learners have produced product evidence, witness statements and case histories. The self-assessment report identified this strength.

30. Learners' portfolios of evidence are well organised and referenced and contain good work. The evidence, particularly at level 3, clearly demonstrates that learners are performing at or above the required level. Some learners have developed key skills projects with support from their employers. These projects are an integral part of training leading to the NVQ and their evidence is good and is valuable to the organisation. The portfolios of the business management learners contain a comprehensive range of good evidence.

31. Between 1997 and 2001, an average of 24 per cent of advanced modern

apprentices achieved their full apprenticeship frameworks. Over the same period, 21 per cent of foundation modern apprentices achieved their apprenticeship frameworks and 7 per cent of NVQ learners achieved their qualifications. Fifty-nine per cent of advanced modern apprentices left their training programmes early. Similarly, 41 per cent of foundation modern apprentices and 39 per cent of NVQ learners left their training programmes early. In 2001-02, 47 per cent of management learners, who left their training before achieving, continued to work for the same employer. Significantly, 80 per cent of these learners who left early, left training in the first five months of starting their management programme. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

32. Learners at three sites are making slow progress. This represents 34 per cent of all learners. Learners who started their programme up to 11 months ago have not had any units assessed. Some learners, who are due to finish the programme in three months, have yet to complete a full unit. This is partly because of staff turnover and changes. Some learners have had four different advisers since they started nine months ago. Learners are not encouraged to be responsible for their own NVQs. Some learners are not aware of the target completion dates for units and do not identify or reference their own evidence.

33. A wide selection of off-the-job training events are available to learners. These include telephone techniques, application of number, IT, including word processing, spreadsheets and databases. These events are not promoted effectively by staff and take-up is poor. Many learners who are interested in the events have to wait a long time before there are sufficient numbers of learners to make the courses viable.

Good Practice

After the quarterly review, one employer wanted to link NVQ and key skills activities with its own three-monthly objectives. Examples of this included specific research projects, job shadowing, sales statistics analysis and collating training packs. The employer drew up a formal review of record of achievement, with NVQ and key skills activities in red. These were summarised and typed onto an A4 sheet which was laminated for learners to keep and tick off the tasks that they had completed. This ensured that learners met the employer's targets and objectives as well as the NVQ and key skills targets.

Information & communications technology

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	26	3

34. Zodiac offers ICT training to 26 learners in all of its eight centres. There are 13 advanced modern apprentices, 10 foundation modern apprentices and three learners working towards an NVQ at level 2. All advanced modern apprentices, foundation modern apprentices and NVQ learners are employed. Learners are inducted into the programme and receive an initial assessment for IT skills. Learners are visited at least every two weeks. They use a wide range of word processing, database and spreadsheet programmes. Many also use internal computer networks and programmes specified by their employers. Most learners have access to the Internet at work. Learners use a range of hardware and software. All learners receive key skills training. Some learners can gain appropriate pre-apprenticeship qualifications. There are 15 assessors and five internal verifiers in this area of learning.

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	2		14		23		18		7		5					
Retained*	0		0		3		8		1	14	0	0				
Successfully completed	0		0		1		4		0	0	0	0				
Still in learning	1		6		5		1		0	0	0	0				

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	5		9		17		3		5		2					
Retained*	0		3		3	18	2	67	1	20	0	0				
Successfully completed	0		1		0	0	2	67	0	0	0	0				
Still in learning	5		3		2	12	0	0	0	0	0	0				

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		2		2		1									
Retained*	0		1	50	2	100	1	100								
Successfully completed	0		0	0	1	50	0	0								
Still in learning	1		1	50	1	50	0	0								

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

STRENGTHS

- effective key skills training in IT
- good use of electronic portfolios of evidence
- good work placements
- good opportunities for additional learning
- frequent supportive contact between learners and training advisers
- good evidence in portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better resources for graphic production
- better key skills training materials

35. Key skills training is effective. There are frequent planned opportunities for learners to attend practical computer training sessions. Learners are given comprehensive training notes and practical demonstrations. Training sessions include an effective mix of group coaching, individual training and group problem-solving. Off-the-job key skills training is supported by effective individual workplace training. Key skills trainers also visit learners in the workplace to gather key skills evidence. Good, practical projects relate workplace practices to key skills. For example, one learner produced an on-line

catalogue which included the prices, specifications and servicing requirements of electrical switchgear, and another learner developed a detailed risk assessment analysis of health and safety at work. New learners are encouraged to take a mock key skills test. Although the content of key skills training materials is satisfactory, the design is poor.

36. There is good development and use of electronic portfolios. Zodiac is a member of the electronic portfolio pilot scheme for the awarding body. Five learners on the ICT programme are taking part in this pilot. They gather workplace evidence which is scanned and transmitted to a web server at the awarding body's headquarters. The NVQ evidence is matched with NVQ competence requirements. Learners' responses to questions that test their knowledge and understanding are recorded. This evidence is checked electronically by the awarding body's external verifier and Zodiac's internal verifier. Learners have access to their portfolios, even at home, using a password. They can see their achievements on screen. Learners enjoy this method of compiling their portfolios.

37. Zodiac has excellent working relations with major national, regional and local companies which use ICT. Examples include a national Internet and telephone service provider, an airport terminal, a call centre, a regional magistrates court and an electronics company. Employers and supervisors support learners to gain confidence in operating complex IT systems. They appoint them as helpdesk advisers to resolve many everyday IT problems. Employers offer learners effective job rotation to enable them to gather the evidence they need for their qualifications. Employers also allow learners time to study at work. Most employers offer full-time paid employment to foundation modern apprentices on work placement. They encourage foundation modern apprentices who gain employment to progress to advanced modern apprenticeships.

38. Zodiac has a good training programme of planned additional learning for modern apprentices. This is offered in partnership with a local college and enables learners to achieve administration qualifications which contain IT. Learners can also complete a European computer user qualification. Employers allow learners to take part in corporate training, including safe working practices, telephone techniques and dealing with aggression at work. Zodiac treats the modern apprentices that it employs as staff. They are encouraged to take additional relevant qualifications, for example, website design software and programming languages. Some learners are involved in the production of Zodiac's newsletter. Graphic production resources are restricted, with a small monitor and basic software.

39. Learners are visited frequently by training advisers, how frequently depends upon the individual's needs. Training advisers judge the best time to visit to ensure that the observation of learners' work can be completed most effectively and recorded to provide evidence for their qualifications. Learners know which evidence they need for their qualifications. Training advisers set effective and demanding short-term targets. Employers take part in learners' progress reviews which are carried out every eight weeks. Learners can e-mail or telephone their training advisers and appreciate their

training advisers' pastoral and professional support. At each visit, advisers check that learners are not being bullied or harassed at work.

40. The NVQ and key skills portfolios of evidence are particularly well prepared and clearly referenced. The portfolios contain a wide range of appropriate evidence, such as work plans and projects, computer error logs, testimony from colleagues and specific work products relating to learners' job activities. Key skills evidence from the workplace is also included in portfolios. Learners take pride in their work and training advisers and internal verifiers set high standards.

41. Retention and achievement rates are poor. Many learners left their training programmes early with poor achievements or none at all. Recent initiatives to rectify the situation include improvements to recruitment and work placement selection procedures. At all training centres, a staff member has been appointed to improve learners' retention and achievement rates.

42. Between 1996 and 2002, of the 69 learners working towards advanced modern apprenticeships, 46 left early without achieving the targets in their individual learning plan. In the same period, of the 69 learners working towards an advanced modern apprenticeship, only five learners achieved their full qualification. Thirteen are still in learning. However, the retention rate has improved from 30 per cent in 1999-2000, to 50 per cent in 2001-02. Since 1996, of those learners working towards advanced modern apprenticeships who did not complete the targets on their individual learning plan, 11 have achieved an NVQ at level 2, and three have achieved an NVQ at level 3.

43. The overall retention rate for foundation modern apprentices is slightly better, but is still poor. More recently, retention rates have improved. Of the 41 learners who started their framework between 1996 and 2002, 28 left early without achieving the targets on their individual learning plan. Only three foundation modern apprentices have ever achieved a full framework. This is an achievement rate of 7 per cent. Ten learners are still working towards their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Of the foundation modern apprentices who have not completed the framework, only one achieved an NVQ at level 2 during the training programme. Only advanced or foundation modern apprentices who achieved their framework have achieved any key skills qualifications during their training programme.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	465	4

44. Zodiac provides work-based learning in retailing operations, distribution and warehousing, customer service and call handling. With the exception of distribution and warehousing, which is offered at Durham, Blyth and Gateshead, only all training programmes are available at all Zodiac's training centres. There are 465 learners on these training programmes, 103 in retailing operations, 25 in distribution and warehousing, 305 in customer service, and 32 in call handling. There are 170 advanced modern apprentices, 227 foundation modern apprentices, and 68 learners working towards NVQs. Zodiac offers NVQs at level 1 to 3 in distribution and warehousing, level 2 in call handling, and level 2 and 3 in retailing operations and customer service. Ninety-eight per cent of learners are employed full time. Zodiac works with a wide range of employers, from small local businesses to large national organisations. Training is provided mainly in the workplace and is supplemented with off-the-job training sessions at Zodiac's training centres. Learners can join training programmes at any time of year. All receive an initial assessment and induction. Learners are recruited through referrals from the careers service, approaches from employers, and marketing initiatives. Learners are visited at least every two weeks by training advisers. Progress reviews are carried out at least once every eight weeks. Key skills training and assessment for modern apprentices are integrated with vocational training and assessment. There are 33 assessors and 12 internal verifiers.

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							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	54		214		303		190		117							
Retained*	0		21		52	17	40	21	13	11						
Successfully completed	0		7		35	12	25	13	8	7						
Still in learning	47		73		41	14	9	5	0	0						

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	146		347		164		121		51							
Retained*	0		59	17	36	22	19	16	4	8						
Successfully completed	0		17	5	27	16	10	8	0	100						
Still in learning	109		104	30	14	9	0	0	0	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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	73		35		16		11		8							
Retained*	1		9	26	5	31	5	45	0	100						
Successfully completed	0		6	17	5	31	2	18	0	100						
Still in learning	63		4	11	1	6	0	0	0	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 on-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement and retention rates
- slow progress towards achieving qualifications
- some weak assessment practice

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recognition of learners' previous learning and achievement
- better recording of progress and achievement on learners' individual learning plans
- better sharing of good practice in key skills training
- better recording of staff development
- better promotion of learning resources

45. Training advisers provide effective workplace training to develop learners' practical knowledge and skills. Many employers offer learners additional formal training as part of the development of their occupational skills and knowledge. This includes customer service, health and safety, food hygiene, first aid and computer skills. Supervisors and managers provide effective support and on-the-job training. This includes good pastoral support, building learners' confidence and meeting learners' additional needs. For example, one learner with literacy problems received additional training and support and eventually achieved the full apprenticeship framework. There is evidence of significant progression and career advancement in the workplace. Learners, workplace supervisors and training advisers have a good working relationship. Training advisers visit learners weekly or fortnightly to monitor their progress, to motivate them and to provide effective support. Zodiac offers structured off-the-job key skills training. In addition, training advisers take laptops into the workplace to develop learners' computer skills and to generate key skills evidence.

46. Learners' achievement and retention rates are poor. Between April 1998 and March 2002, 1,209 learners left their training programmes. Of these, only 11 per cent completed their individual learning plan. Of the 591 advanced modern apprentices, only 11 per cent completed their planned learning. Only 10 per cent of foundation modern apprentices achieved the full apprenticeship framework. Retention rates between April 1998 and March 2002 are poor. Of 1,674 learners who started training programmes, 61 per cent left early without achieving a qualification. In the most recent contract year, 75 per cent of learners left their programme in the first three months. Retention rates have improved during 2001-02. Eighty per cent of the 273 starters are still in training. Retention and achievement rates were identified as weaknesses in the self-assessment report.

47. Most learners make slow progress towards achieving their target qualifications. Learners and employers are not given sufficient information about the requirements of the qualification at the start of training. Most employers are supportive of their learners, but they do not know enough about the content of the training programmes. Many learners do not complete their apprenticeship framework by the agreed date. Some learners had not been assessed until three months after the start of their training programme. Some key skills assessment does not start until learners have been working

towards the NVQ for a long time. Insufficient evidence is collected to complete any single unit and consequently accreditation is not confirmed until all units are completed. In some training centres, as a result of frequent staff changes, progress reviews were not carried out within the contractual deadline. For example, a learner who started in January 2001 had a first review eight months later. Another learner's progress was not reviewed between January 2000 and July 2001. The reviews do not adequately record learners' progress. Most reviews are carried out between the assessor and the learner. Employers are not sufficiently involved in the review process, although they are invited to comment once the review is over. Action-planning during the progress review is vague, and does not provide clear and specific guidance to learners. Learners find the percentage achievement recording system confusing and they have an incorrect understanding of their progress. There is insufficient planning of training to meet identified development needs. Many learners receive no structured training from their assessor. Training needs identified at initial assessment are rarely incorporated into a structured training plan.

48. Some assessment practices are weak. Long-term assessment plans are agreed at the beginning of training, but are not updated to take account of subsequent meetings between learners and assessors. The monitoring form is used as a short-term action-planning tool, but is not sufficiently detailed to enable learners to prepare adequately for assessment. New assessors have a poor knowledge of accreditation of previous learning or achievement. Some learners have to repeat work because their qualifications and their relevant occupational experience was not accredited. This is a barrier to learners' progress. The range of assessment methods is limited. There is insufficient use of witness testimonies. One learner, working in a busy environment, had to write personal statements rather than use recorded, guided discussion. Some evidence in learners' portfolios is not verified or authenticated and there is no clear indexing. Learners are not encouraged to take responsibility for their portfolios of evidence. Some assessors write lengthy observation reports, which are insufficiently evaluative and are often not linked to the NVQ or key skills requirements. There are no clear assessment decisions or recording of constructive feedback after assessment. Some elements were signed by the assessor as complete when there was insufficient evidence. There are some examples of good assessment, but good practices in assessment are not shared. Internal verification has identified some poor assessment practice and more than 50 per cent of assessed evidence is returned to assessors. An action plan has been introduced to deal with some of these weaknesses. Assessors are being trained in new assessment methods and are learning how to record guided discussions. Twenty-four learners are using electronic portfolios, but there are insufficient ICT resources for more learners to be involved.

49. Some individual learning plans do not accurately reflect learners' achievements. Some are not updated to reflect identified training needs. Other individual learning plans are not updated to record the achievement of planned training, and NVQ units within the learners' apprenticeship framework.

50. Key skills training and assessment are good, and learners are well prepared for

external assessment. Many learners know the evidence requirements of key skills. Key skills training is carried out from the outset as an integral part of vocational training. Some learners develop appropriate work-based projects which further develop their key skills.

51. Staff's curriculum vitae show little evidence of professional development, although some staff have recently done work experience or job shadowing in organisations in their industry, to keep abreast of correct working practices.

52. Zodiac has a learning resource library which is available to trainers and learners. Each training centre has a catalogue of the resources. These resources are not promoted effectively and few people know about them. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

Good Practice

There is an excellent working relationship between one assessor and a learner's employer. The learner is given time to work on their NVQ. The assessor has been given the building security code to get into the employer's offices. The learner and the assessor can then use the employer's training facilities for development sessions.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	170	4

53. Zodiac offers training in hospitality NVQ at level 1, 2 and 3. There are 10 advanced modern apprentices, 135 foundation modern apprentices and 25 NVQ learners. There are eight training centres. The training programmes lead to NVQs in food preparation and cooking, food service, quick service, bar service, hospitality service and housekeeping. Learners on the modern apprenticeship frameworks are also working towards key skills qualifications and a basic food hygiene certificate. Learners also work towards an additional qualification in basic health and safety. All learners are employed in a wide range of businesses including public houses, hotels, restaurants, fast-food restaurants, coffee shops, bowling alleys and wine bars. Learners can join programmes at any time. They are recruited through direct referral, marketing initiatives and referrals from local careers services. Learners take an occupational and basic skills initial assessment before starting their training programme, to identify the most appropriate qualification and level of training for them. All learners attend an induction at the beginning of the training programme. It is given either individually in the workplace or in group sessions at one of the eight training centres. Learners are given details of their training programme, including equal opportunities, health and safety and the appeals procedure. Learners receive a further assessment to identify what support they need for basic skills and key skills training. They are formally reviewed every eight weeks and are assessed every two weeks. There are 11 assessors and four internal verifiers.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	8		23		5											
Retained*	0		1		0	0										
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0										
Still in learning	5		5		0	0										

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	81		203		59		8									
Retained*	2		37	18	16	27	1	12								
Successfully completed	0		1	0	7	12	0	0								
Still in learning	62		68	33	5	8	0	0								

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02		2000-01		1998-99											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	26		26		3											
Retained*	0		4	15	2	67										
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0	0										
Still in learning	18		7	27	0	0										

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

STRENGTHS

- good training support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement rates
- slow progress by learners
- insufficient knowledge of key skills

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better take-up of off-the-job training activities
- more varied range of assessment methods

54. Training advisers support learners, not only throughout the training programme, but also after they have completed their training programmes. Advisers visit learners approximately once every two weeks and sometimes once or twice a week. If it is more convenient, advisers visit learners in the evening and at weekends. Formal reviews are frequent, usually every eight weeks. Inspectors observed some good individual training sessions. Most visits to learners are planned to include assessment, instruction, and monitoring of progress, although training advisers encourage learners to talk informally about other issues which may influence their progress. Learners are content with the training process and are not afraid to show their weaknesses. Some learners have recently been helped to find accommodation, to make childcare arrangements, and to cope with bereavement. Some learners are completing their training programme even though their funding has come to an end. In one workplace, several members of staff are enrolled on a training programme. One member of staff is not eligible for funding, but has been enrolled. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report.

55. Achievement rates in hospitality are poor. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. No learners have achieved the advanced modern apprenticeship framework. The rate of achievement for the foundation modern apprenticeship framework in 1999-2000 was 12 per cent. Between 1998 and 2001-02, no learners achieved the full framework. Of the 442 learners who started training with Zodiac since 1998, only 13 per cent have achieved an NVQ at level 2, and 56 per cent left early with no qualifications. The retention rate for 1999 was 12 per cent. Between 2000 and 2001, there has been a steady increase in retention rates. This is still unsatisfactory, but it is improving. The retention rate for the current year is higher, at 62 per cent for advanced modern apprentices, 78 per cent for foundation modern apprentices, and 69 per cent for NVQ learners.

56. Most learners make slow progress towards their qualification. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Training advisers visit learners frequently and set targets for the next visit. This is recorded on a monitoring visit report form. If the learner does not achieve them, the same targets are frequently carried forward to the next visit. One learner had the same targets for five months. Targets set at monitoring and progress review visits are not challenging or measurable. Individual learning plans are prepared for all learners, but some are not sufficiently detailed. A new system has been introduced, since when all individual learning plans include a comprehensive breakdown of the NVQ units and key skills requirements. Target achievement dates are often the same for all units and correspond to the end of funding rather than learners' needs. Most learners do not know the target achievement dates for individual units. Training advisers carry out observations in the workplace, but these frequently do not start until learners have been on programmes for about three or four months. Some experienced learners are ready for assessment when they start. Most learners complete the pre-set questions for a unit and have most of the observational evidence required, but training advisers do not target the achievement of these units. Learners are unsure how much of the qualification they have achieved. Some learners have to repeat units that they have achieved as part of another qualification because their previous qualifications were not accredited. Witness testimonies are not used for experienced

learners to speed up the achievement of qualifications. Many learners do not receive their portfolios until they have been in training for several months. Zodiac registers all learners when they are enrolled, but the awarding body does not always send out portfolios immediately.

57 Most employers have an inadequate knowledge of key skills training. Zodiac does brief learners about key skills training, but does not emphasise it sufficiently. For some learners, key skills training is introduced towards the end of their training programmes and is not carried out as an integral part of vocational training from the outset. Work only begins on key skills training and assessment when learners have partially completed their NVQ units. Three learners were advised to concentrate entirely on their vocational qualification. Inspectors found one example of good key skills training, but this good practice was not shared.

58. Zodiac's staff provide a variety of well-designed one-day learning sessions at the training centres for work-based learners. The sessions include training for the basic food hygiene certificate, induction to modern apprenticeships, and key skills. Few learners attend these sessions. Some employers are unwilling to allow learners to attend. Only 14 per cent of current learners in catering programmes have taken the basic food hygiene certificate, although it is a requirement of their apprenticeship framework.

59. Assessment consists almost entirely of observation and pre-set questions. Some other assessment methods are used, such as witness testimonies and guided discussions, but not consistently. No product evidence is used and learners who find writing difficult are not encouraged to use IT.

Foundation programmes

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	100	4

60. Zodiac offers Life Skills training to 100 learners at three of its training centres in Blyth, Gateshead and Newcastle. The training programme is intended to prepare learners for employment with training, further education or work-based learning. The training programme runs for 19 weeks initially, but individual learners can extend their training programme, depending on their needs. Learners are referred from Connexions. Following discussions with learners, their careers adviser and Zodiac staff, an individual action plan is drawn up. Learners are allocated to a group and attend for about 16 hours a week. There is a two-day induction which includes basic skills assessment, self-assessment, health and safety, equal opportunities and familiarisation with the training premises and routines. Core modules are offered to develop their social and employability skills, including topics such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving and jobsearch. Work experience is available if it is identified as a development need. There are four staff in this area of learning.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Life Skills																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	147		144		69		37		2							
Retained*	42		63		22	32	14	38	1	50						
Successfully completed	1		9		20	29	14	38	1	50						
Still in learning	85		15		0	0	0	0	0	0						

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

STRENGTHS

- good personal support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- poor action-planning
- inadequate resources
- poor achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more appropriate induction material
- better developed session plans
- more use of external accreditation

61. There is good personal support for learners. Many learners on the Life Skills programmes have significant barriers to overcome, including homelessness, drug misuse and teenage pregnancy. Zodiac's staff work hard and are committed to supporting learners with social and emotional problems. They regularly ensure that learners are not experiencing personal difficulties and provide advice and guidance to learners. In addition, a range of external organisations provide specialist advice and guidance to meet learners' needs, such as help with housing, childcare and the avoidance of drug misuse. Tutors respond rapidly to learners' problems. Individual coaching is based on learners' needs, identified through discussion. Tutors give learners constructive individual feedback about their personal development. Learners are highly motivated by their tutors' personal support. Work-placement providers are also supportive.

62. Action-planning is poor. Learners' action plans contain broad aims, but no clear targets or objectives. Learners are unsure of what they have to achieve, how their identified needs will be met through specific learning activities and opportunities. Learners are unclear about what support arrangements there are, how their progress will be measured and any deadlines. Initial assessment activities include an element of self-assessment, but the results do not adequately influence action plans. For example, action plans do not take sufficient account of the way that learners prefer to learn or learners' skills. Review dates are on the action plans but the progress reviews focus more on learners' personal and social issues and do not adequately deal with increasing their skills. New or revised targets are rarely set and action plans are not amended after progress reviews. The company has recognised this weakness and is piloting a revised process to include initial assessment findings and support arrangements, learning methods and progress reviews.

63. Training resources are inadequate. There are not enough staff to offer a sufficiently varied programme to meet learners' individual needs. At one training centre, there is only one member of staff for the Life Skills group. At two training centres, staff work

with learners in the morning and the afternoon sessions. There are few computers, few appropriate videos and not enough opportunities for problem-solving or practical teamwork activities. There is not enough time to develop learning materials, and to assess and carry out effective progress reviews. The range of activities is not sufficiently challenging, imaginative or practical. The accommodation at all three training centres is too small. Induction materials are not appropriate to learners' reading abilities. The layout and readability of some generic documents, such as the learning agreement, are poor. Session plans are not always used, and when they are, they do not adequately define the learning outcomes or the methods necessary to achieve them.

64. Achievement rates are poor. In 1999-2000, 29 per cent of learners progressed to employment with training, further education or work-based learning. In 2000-01, the proportion was only 23 per cent. Retention rates are satisfactory. In 1999-2000, the retention rate was 32 per cent, however, this increased to 53 per cent in 2000-01 with 10 learners still in training. Many learners are on programmes where their previous work is not accredited and their achievements are not recognised.

Good Practice

One learner due to start employment could not find his way to his place of work. The tutor arranged for him to come to the training centre, explained the situation to his employer and took the learner to his destination.

Poor Practice

A session on sexual health involved learners confronting topics beyond their experience and irrelevant to the lesson objectives. One of the introductory activities was inappropriate and resulted in a frivolous approach to a sensitive issue.