

INSPECTION REPORT

Heart Of England Training Limited Reinspection

24 September 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. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes 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.

SUMMARY

The provider

Heart of England Training is a private training company based in Rugby. It also has sites in Coventry and Birmingham. It was established in 1996 and its origins lie in the Martanne Hair Designers artistic team, which has provided in-house training since the 1960s. In the 1980s, the Martanne organisation became a managing agency, providing training for hairdressers in Warwickshire and Birmingham. Hairdressing remains a very significant area of learning, but other vocational areas have been added, including business administration, management and professional, information and communications technology and customer service and retailing. Since the original inspection, Heart of England Training has stopped offering retailing. The number of learners in information and communications technology was too small to justify inclusion in either the original inspection or the subsequent reinspection. The company has acquired another work-based learning provider in Leicester since the original inspection. This part of the provision, which is funded by the Leicestershire Learning and Skills Council, was not included in the reinspection. Heart of England Training receives most of its funding from the Coventry and Warwickshire Learning and Skills Council, but it is also funded by the Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council. At the time of the reinspection, there were 406 learners. The number of learners in business administration, customer service and hairdressing and beauty therapy were 108, 45 and 246 respectively.

The management structure has changed since the last inspection. The manager has become the managing director and new managerial posts have been created. The company employs 19 full-time and 16 part-time staff.

Overall judgement

The original inspection in June 2001 found that the provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy was satisfactory, but provision in business administration, management and professional was unsatisfactory and provision in retailing, customer service and transportation was very weak. Inspectors judged the leadership and management and the quality assurance of the provision to be unsatisfactory, but equality of opportunity was satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, the provision of work-based learning in hairdressing and beauty therapy was found to be good, and the provision in business administration and customer service was satisfactory. Leadership and management were satisfactory, as were equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The provision is now adequately meeting the reasonable needs of learners.

Grades awarded

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

	Original	Reinspection
Business administration, management & professional	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

	Original	Reinspection
Retailing, customer service & transportation	5	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	5	3

	Original	Reinspection
Hairdressing & beauty therapy	3	2
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	2

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following key strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

KEY STRENGTHS

- good support for learners
- effective employer links and good work placements
- good internal and external communications

KEY WEAKNESSES

- some unsatisfactory retention and achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more widespread sharing of good practice

- better access for wheelchair users

THE REINSPECTION

1. The reinspection of Heart of England Training Limited (HOET) which was carried out in three stages, involved four inspectors over a total of 14 inspection days. The first visit was on 24 September 2002. The second stage was completed over three days starting 5 November. The final stage lasted for two days and was completed on 11 December 2002. Inspectors considered a self-assessment report dated July 2002 and a development plan which was produced in August 2002. At the reinspection, seven learning sessions were observed and graded as two grade 3s, four grade 4s and one grade 5.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Hairdressing & beauty therapy	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	4
Total	0	1	5	2	0	0	0	8

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**Grade 3**

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- clear strategic direction and effective business planning
- good internal and external communication
- thorough staff appraisal and training

WEAKNESSES

- no improvement in retention and achievement rates in some areas

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better target-setting for retention and achievement rates in individual areas of learning
- better sharing of good practice in internal verification
- more awareness of equality of opportunity among some learners
- more effective use of questionnaires to gain feedback
- better access for wheelchair users

2. There are close and effective working relationships between the chairman and managing director in the production of the business plan. Although brief in content, it sets clear and measurable performance indicators such as increased turnover and client satisfaction. The plan sets realistic objectives for training, achievement rates and the implementation of a new management information system. Following the original inspection and a review of the company's aims, a decision was made to discontinue the retail training provision. The chairman concentrates on the company's strategy and the strategic aims are discussed with the managing director. The business plan is shared with all staff and their views are valued. Annual meetings are held to explain the strategy to staff and frequent team meeting are used to keep it under review. Performance targets for staff are closely and effectively monitored. Targets linked to the business plan are set for senior management, and subsequently, individual targets are set for line managers and staff. Contractual targets for starts and outcomes are monitored and the training provider has also set its own, higher, achievement targets which are monitored at monthly staff review meetings. Performance information is analysed and appropriate actions are taken. All areas of learning have the same target of 60 per cent achievement, regardless of past performance and other factors which might affect particular areas.

3. There are good communications. Internally, an annual schedule of meetings helps to

ensure that different meetings occur on time. The meetings are also used as an opportunity to train staff and to standardise working practices, such as in the approach to key skills. Staff are kept well informed and they have the opportunity to raise any concerns. The monthly individual meetings provide a good opportunity to discuss problems and actions to meet individual needs. There are good links with external organisations including frequent and effective contacts with Connexions and schools. Regular visits to these organisations raise the profile of HOET's work-based learning provision. A recent event which was attended by about one hundred people, including learners, employers and representatives from other organisations, celebrated learners' success. There are good communications with employers who are given an informative brochure which explains the programme and clarifies roles and responsibilities. Employers are also involved in the progress review, adding their own assessment and agreeing any actions required. A quarterly newsletter was introduced over a year ago and is sent to employers and learners.

4. Staff training is good. The self-assessment report identified that staff appraisal is well conducted, comprehensive, up to date and contributes to a successful staff training and development programme. The appraisal process has been developed to include a 360° appraisal, in which staff are able to comment on the performance of their line manager. The process is supported by monthly reviews which monitor performance against targets and identify training needs. Staff attend a good variety of training events and there has been a recent emphasis on key skills in order to deal with the weakness identified through self-assessment. Staff who carry out progress reviews have achieved qualifications in that process. In addition, plans are in place for managers to work towards a national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 4 in management, starting in 2003.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

5. Since the last inspection, action has been taken to raise the learners' awareness of equality of opportunity. The subject is now timetabled into off-the-job training sessions where a video, supported by learning materials, is used. The subjects covered include discrimination, harassment and bullying, racism and disability. Learners discuss the issues in order to increase their understanding. A recently revised review form includes a reference to learners' awareness of equality of opportunity. The reviewer discusses the issues with the learner and determines whether the learner's awareness is appropriate or needs further development. Where the latter is the case, the learner may attend another equal opportunity awareness class. An equality of opportunity forum was recently held and learners, employers and other interested parties were invited. Further meetings are planned at different centres. Inspectors identified that learners' understanding of equal opportunities is good in hairdressing, but only satisfactory in business administration and customer service.

6. There has been action to ensure that the equal opportunities policy is satisfactorily monitored. Although little information is held on employers' policies, each employer is given a copy of the HOET policy and they also receive an informative brochure with some specific information on issues such as harassment in the workplace. In the learners' induction pack there is little reference to equality of opportunity, just an abstract of the policy statement and it has a much lower profile than health and safety. It is, however, covered in detail during induction. In order to encourage participation by people from minority ethnic groups, HOET makes regular visits to schools and local community centres to promote its provision. Some of these visits are to areas with a relatively high proportion of people from minority ethnic groups. Visits have been made to all-boys schools to promote hairdressing. Little action has been taken since the original inspection to resolve the problem of access for wheelchair users. There is poor access at one of the Coventry sites and in Rugby. Arrangements were made for one learner to attend a local college as access to the training provider's premises is unsatisfactory.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

7. HOET has improved its quality assurance arrangements since the original inspection. The emphasis has moved from ensuring contract compliance to review and continuous improvement. The process of self-assessment has become much more central to the quality assurance system. Since the original inspection, a new self-assessment report has been produced and all staff contributed to the sections on their own area of learning. Meetings were held to determine strengths and weaknesses and the managing director wrote the final report. Inspectors found the self-assessment process and report to be satisfactory, although they felt that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice.

8. Since the original inspection, there have been improvements in the retention and achievement rates in a number of areas. Reasons for poor retention rates have been analysed and improvements have been made to the initial assessment. A four-week trial period has also been introduced for learners to experience the programme before deciding whether to sign up. The new management information system is providing more accurate information, and performance targets are monitored each month. A new management structure has led to clearer reporting and monitoring of activities which specifically impact on the retention and achievement rates. For example, in hairdressing and business administration, the number of learners who are either still in learning, or who have successfully completed their foundation modern apprenticeship, has improved. However, these improvements have not yet taken place for advanced modern apprentices and for some programmes such as the NVQ in customer service.

9. The methods of gathering learners' views have been revised, but the questionnaires are insufficiently developed to get the candid opinions of learners. Questionnaires are used to gather feedback from learners at induction, during training and on exit and there is also an employer questionnaire. Evaluations are scheduled for every six months. However, the feedback is not confidential which could stop some learners expressing their true feelings. Responses are generally in the form of a tick against a written statement and this does not allow for any detailed information from the respondent.

10. Observation of training is now an established part of the quality assurance process. When weaknesses are identified, a corrective action plan is produced. Internal verification is at least satisfactory and it is good in hairdressing. Assessors are given helpful feedback from internal verifiers and good practice is shared within the area of learning. However, the good practice in hairdressing has not been extended to customer service.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	108	3

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- good support for learners
- effective employer links and good work placements

WEAKNESSES

- poor planning of training
- inadequate facilities for off-the-job training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- greater use of workplace assessment
- more professional development directly related to training

11. Learners are well supported by staff at HOET. The trainer/assessor meets each learner at least fortnightly, in order to monitor progress and to plan future work. These meetings are recorded and the assessor and the learner keep a copy. Staff are always accessible and in some cases will arrange weekly meetings to help ensure that units are completed by the due date. Those learners who are in a work placement or employment with HOET also have good access to support. The review process has improved since the original inspection. Not only are reviews more frequent at every 10 weeks, but they have a much sharper focus on achievement. Reviews are carried out by a member of staff who maintains close contact with the assessors. Progress towards the completion of each unit is recorded.

12. At the original inspection, the retention and achievement rates were identified as poor. There has now been an improvement in the retention and achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices and for learners undertaking NVQs. However, they continue to be unsatisfactory for advanced modern apprentices, which accounts for

about one-third of all learners. In 2000-01, around two-thirds of all learners taking NVQs and foundation modern apprenticeships were retained and over half achieved all the targets on their individual learning plan. This represents a significant improvement on the previous year. No significant improvements have occurred on the advanced modern apprenticeship programme, although one-quarter of those who started in 2000-01 are still in learning. Some learners are making slow progress, but there are satisfactory arrangements to give additional support in basic literacy and numeracy for those who encounter difficulties.

13. There are effective partnerships with employers, particularly with several employers in Coventry, including the city council. The council takes a close interest in the progress of learners on its young persons' training scheme, some of whom are placed with HOET for their training. Frequent contact, including visits, ensures that any problems relating to training are quickly dealt with. Learners who are in work placements are in jobs which are highly appropriate for the development of occupational competence in business administration. They also have access to a good range of resources to support their learning.

14. Insufficient attention is paid to the planning of training. For off-the-job training, trainers follow a scheme of work which only states the broad subject area to be covered each week. There are lesson plans in place, but they are not used as working documents and their effectiveness is not evaluated after each session. Staff are qualified assessors, but they do not hold qualifications relating to training. In its self-assessment report, HOET has identified this as an area to be addressed. For on-the-job training, employers do not have a detailed training plan. HOET works with the employer before training begins to ensure that the job adequately covers the requirements of the qualification. Employers respond to requests from HOET to cover specific topics, but there is no systematic attempt to plan training in advance.

15. A variety of methods of assessment are in use. For those learners in work placements or in employment, most of the evidence in portfolios originates from the workplace. Good use is made of witness testimony and this is complemented by assessment in the workplace by HOET's staff. However, this aspect of assessment is not sufficiently developed. There is a tendency to rely too heavily on evidence which can be brought to the training centre and is assessed away from the workplace. Internal verification arrangements are sound.

16. The training facilities at HOET's premises in Rugby and Coventry are not adequate. The main training room at Rugby is equipped for information technology (IT) teaching, but learning is disrupted by noise from an adjacent open-plan office. Theory training sessions are sometimes taught in the boardroom, but it is small and is not properly equipped as a teaching room. In the IT room in Coventry, the chairs are not appropriate

for an office technology area. Half of the learners have to sit with their backs to the whiteboard and there is very little desk space unoccupied by equipment. The cables trail across the floor, and this reflects poorly on the good business practice that the qualification is intended to promote.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	45	3

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- good support for learners
- effective links with employers

WEAKNESSES

- unsatisfactory retention and achievement rates
- inadequate initial assessment

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- clearer target-setting
- better recording of discussions during progress reviews
- more thorough internal verification in customer service

17. Learners are well supported. Assessors visit learners every two weeks and more frequently if needed. Learners can contact assessors through email and telephone between visits if they have queries. Good communication between assessors and employers ensure that problems which affect learners are dealt with as soon as they arise. The training is meeting learners' needs and aims and they feel more confident in their jobs. Training advisers visit learners every 10 weeks to carry out a progress review. The reviews involve the learner and the employer. Problems and actions taken are recorded in an issues book. There are satisfactory arrangements for literacy and numeracy support for learners who have identified basic skills needs. This takes the form of group work and individual sessions. Learners' success is celebrated in the training provider's newsletter and at an awards evening. The good support ensures learners are motivated and remain on their training programmes.

18. Links with employers are very effective. HOET has good, frequent communications with employers to inform them of the progress of their learners. Any problems affecting learners are discussed and dealt with promptly. Managers and supervisors support the

training programmes and give learners work and projects which generate evidence for their qualifications. Assessors ensure that projects and case studies carried out by learners in the workplace are linked to the employer's everyday work. The workplaces are all appropriate for customer service and employers say that the training has improved learners' performance at work.

19. The retention and achievement rates are unsatisfactory. Between April 1998 and March 2002, only 24 per cent of learners reached the end of their planned learning programmes. During the same period, only 22 per cent have completed the modern apprenticeship framework. The training provider has taken action to improve the retention and achievement rates. Following the original inspection, HOET reviewed its provision and it no longer offers work-based learning in retail. Learners currently in training are working towards qualifications in customer service. Learners are motivated, progressing well with their qualifications and producing good-quality work in their portfolios. Learners in business administration have achieved customer service NVQs as an additional part of their programmes. Training in key skills is satisfactory and is now introduced from the outset as an integral part of vocational training. Modern apprentices take the key skills tests and there is useful evidence of project work in their portfolios.

20. The initial assessment is inadequate. All learners are assessed for literacy and numeracy basic skills needs, but they are not always given the results. Some learners are also assessed for IT and computer literacy, but some of the assessments are not marked and unanswered questions are not followed up to see why the learner could not complete them. Some of the assessment paperwork is poorly photocopied. There is no initial assessment for key skills and HOET plans to introduce a key skills diagnostic test. There is currently only an informal assessment to ensure that learners are placed on programmes that are most suited to them and at the right level. There is some accreditation of prior achievements, for example where a learner has previously achieved an NVQ, a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) or general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs).

21. The target-setting for learners is satisfactory. Training advisers set target dates for the completion of units and they are recorded in individual learning plans. There are regular progress reviews which record the learners' progress and learners are aware of what they have achieved. However, the review does not involve the setting of targets for the completion of units. This is carried out by assessors who set a list of tasks to be completed by the next visit. However, these tasks are not clearly linked to targets for units or elements.

22. Most employers offer good on-the-job training, although some provide very little. There are no off-the-job training sessions for customer service learners. Staff from HOET monitor the training given by employers and where needed provide training materials for theory training. They also provide key skills guidance notes and guidance for the NVQ.

23. The regular reviews of progress are well structured and clearly show the progress being made by learners. Employers are involved in the reviews, and opportunities for on-the-job training are discussed. However, the discussions are not recorded on the review documents.

24. Internal verification is satisfactory. Learners' portfolios are sampled and assessment is observed. Internal verification is planned, but not in sufficient detail to ensure full coverage of the NVQ. There are good comments from the internal verifier to assessors on evidence sampled from portfolios. There are also regular standardisation meetings.

Hairdressing & beauty therapy**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	246	2

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- good individual support for learners
- good practical teaching
- thorough and well-organised internal verification
- good portfolio work

WEAKNESSES

- poor individual target-setting

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better integration of key skills with practical training

25. Learners make rapid progress with their NVQ and this is helped by the large number of clients available during practical training sessions. Advanced modern apprentices gain early experience of the level of work required. Learners quickly develop a wide range of hairdressing skills and receive good constructive feedback on how these are best developed. During practical training sessions learners actively seek opportunities for assessment and additional assessment takes place in the learner's workplace. If the salon does not have its own assessors, HOET's staff visit regularly to carry out this function.

26. There is good practical teaching in well-equipped training centres. The Coventry centre is well resourced for hairdressing and beauty therapy and most of the trainers work as commercial stylists. They have good experience and are well qualified. The ratio of trainers to learners is good at one trainer for every five learners. Learners are enthusiastic about their practical training sessions and are encouraged by their trainers to develop their creativity. Individual supervision is given in practical sessions.

27. Learners demonstrate good practical skills, and produce good written work in their

portfolios. They take pride in the production and appearance of their portfolios and are enthusiastic when describing their contents. The portfolios contain diverse evidence including good use of photographs relating to assignments and assessments. Photographic evidence is used creatively to illustrate learners' work. However, key skills are insufficiently linked to everyday activities in the salon.

28. There is good individual support for learners and this was identified in the self-assessment report. Learners feel able to discuss any problems with HOET's staff and some individual training takes place with learners who encounter difficulties. Learners who do not attend off-the-job training are trained by their employers with the support and assistance of HOET's staff. Learners have a good relationship with their trainers.

29. The internal verification is thorough and well planned and this was identified in the self-assessment report. There is a clear internal verification plan for the whole year. Internal verifiers meet with and monitor assessors on a regular basis and there is a strong emphasis on sharing good practice. All portfolios are carefully verified. New assessors are well supported by internal verifiers and this helps with the development of their assessment skills.

30. Progress reviews are carried out every 10 weeks, but some take place without employers' involvement. Targets which are set during reviews are not always clear to the learner and most are not specific and do not reflect the learners' needs. The individual learning plan is updated after each review, but it is not used as a working document.

31. Of the advanced modern apprentices who started in 2001-02, over one-third are still in learning and 28 per cent have completed the modern apprenticeship framework. For foundation modern apprentices in the same period, 21 per cent are still in learning and 44 per cent have completed the framework. Historically, framework completions have been poor, but the completion rate for the foundation modern apprentices over the past two years averages above 50 per cent.