

INSPECTION REPORT

NLT Training Services Limited Reinspection

17 June 2003



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 **learndirect** 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

NLT Training Services Limited is a private training organisation and a registered charity. NLT Training Services Limited provides mainly work-based learning in engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional and retailing, customer service and transportation. The learners are following modern apprenticeship or other work-based learning programmes leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Most are employed and work for engineering companies. The training is funded through the local Learning and Skills Councils for Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Humberside, and Lincolnshire and Rutland. There are also a few clients on Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as commercial clients. At the time of the final reinspection visit there were 168 learners in engineering, 27 in business and 11 in retailing.

NLT Training Services Limited has a chief executive and four full-time managers who are responsible for managing the company. Its member companies elect a board of directors. The company operates from two sites, in Chesterfield and Scunthorpe. The premises in Chesterfield include an engineering workshop, offices and facilities for conferences. The premises in Scunthorpe include training and conference rooms. There are 42 staff at the Chesterfield site and 10 at the Scunthorpe site. NLT Training Services Limited provides some of the training at its training centres and subcontracts the rest to local colleges of further education. NLT Training Services Limited wrote its most recent self-assessment report in October 2002.

Overall judgement

The ALI's inspection in May 2001 found that training for learners in engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional, and retailing, customer service and transportation was unsatisfactory as were the organisation's leadership and management of the provision, including its arrangements for quality assurance and equality of opportunity. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory.

Grades awarded

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

NLT TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED REINSPECTION

	Original	Reinspection
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	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	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- effective business planning and monitoring
- good initiatives to promote equality and diversity
- comprehensive quality assurance system
- good support for learners' progress

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- insufficient systematic recording of basic skills assessments

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- further improve the use of management information

THE REINSPECTION

1. Reinspection was carried out in four stages. A total of 17 inspection days was used. The first visit was on 12 November 2002. The final stage was completed on 17 and 18 June 2003. NLT Training Services Limited's (NLT's) latest annual self-assessment report was examined by inspectors.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

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

STRENGTHS

- effective business planning and monitoring
- good initiatives to promote equality and diversity
- comprehensive quality assurance system

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- insufficient use of targets relating to learners' achievements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- further improve the use of management information

2. The board of directors approves an annual strategic plan, which team managers then communicate to staff and use to produce appropriate team development and improvement plans. The process helps all staff to clearly understand the business strategy and how they can contribute to it. Plans include retention and achievement rates and the quality of training. The process for reviewing the work of teams has been much improved. Team performance reports are reviewed monthly and include monitoring progress on the team's development plan. A quality performance review team reviews all external and internal reports relating to a team each quarter, and identifies actions to be included in the team's development plan. The good communication throughout the organisation assists the business process.

3. Senior managers have implemented actions to improve retention and achievement rates. There are some improvements especially in retention rates. However, overall, retention and achievement rates remain poor. NLT continues to support a significant number of learners to complete their programmes after their funding has stopped. NLT's directors pay close attention to ensuring the financial viability of the company, but there is insufficient consideration given to monitoring and improving the poor retention and achievement rates.

4. There is effective target-setting and monitoring of the number of learners recruited. However, the targets for overall retention and achievement are modest. They are not sufficiently time related or sufficiently detailed. Some targets relating to learner achievement are set for staff in their individual progress reviews, but those involved have poor recollection and understanding of the targets. Monthly performance reports are published which provide a useful summary of learners in training in the occupational

areas and those in or out of funding. However, they do not distinguish between achievements by learners in or outside the planned duration of their training and give no information regarding the achievement of intermediate milestones.

5. Written job descriptions have been produced for all staff in the organisation and include key performance indicators. Appraisal of individual members of staff has been introduced and objectives and targets are linked to relevant business plans. NLT continues to offer support for its staff to attend a wide range of appropriate courses. An annual sum is set aside for staff to attend courses of their own choice, but in their own time. Induction for new staff is planned carefully. It consists of a two-day general introduction to the company and continues over an extended period with further briefings and work-related activities overseen by a senior member of staff.

6. A new learner data system has been introduced. Separate databases for Chesterfield and Scunthorpe align with the different local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) contract areas. Reports are combined for management purposes. Data are beginning to be used to manage training. For example, the system is used to identify when learner reviews are due and to check if they have been completed on time. Accurate and detailed financial data are produced regularly. Plans are advanced for a new management software system which will allow the costing of individual courses to be introduced.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

7. NLT has continued with its initiatives to promote equality and diversity. An equality and diversity action plan has been developed and progress on implementing the plan is reviewed frequently at senior management meetings. The new, well-written equal opportunities and diversity statement and policy are comprehensive. All staff completed a questionnaire and were invited to make suggestions about how equality of opportunity could be improved. Staff have had the same equal opportunities training as new learners now receive. The training provokes active discussion and allows sharing of good practice. All employers have been invited to experience the training through breakfast meetings, but there has been no response.

8. Improvements have been made to increase learners' awareness of equal opportunities. Pocket-sized advice cards have been developed to help learners recall equal opportunities, health and safety procedures, and complaints and grievance procedures. A separate set of cards has been designed for employers. A passport booklet full of useful information for young people is now available for all new learners. The modified learner review process includes checking learners' understanding of equal opportunities. A bank of related questions is used to spot-check the learners' knowledge and understanding. Some questions relate to their employer's equal opportunities policy and this has increased the opportunities for NLT to monitor the extent to which employers promote equal opportunities. However, there is insufficient use of questions to further increase learners own research skills into their employer's policy and procedures. These initiatives are still being established. Learners who have been training for some time still have little knowledge of equality and diversity. Some employers still need more monitoring and assistance to help raise their awareness of equal opportunities.

9. Data on equal opportunities are collected and analysed and have been used to target training for under-represented groups. Letters and promotional material have been distributed to several ethnic associations. One item of promotional material focuses on a woman in engineering, but there is still insufficient use of a wider range of images. NLT continues to run a two-year engineering programme for school-age pupils. A new initiative to engage young people from travelling families and fairgrounds has been run in conjunction with local schools. The programme develops engineering skills and aims to improve attendance at school.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

10. A clear and comprehensive quality assurance system has been introduced. The associated manual incorporates the company policies, the procedures manual and associated documents. The manual also identifies how the system cross-references with the quality assurance criteria identified in the 'Common Inspection Framework' and the contractual requirements of the LSC and Jobcentre Plus. There are clear objectives for each aspect of the system and a member of staff is identified for monitoring the achievement of these objectives. Annual audits are beginning to test the effective operation of the procedures. Audits are well conducted and instances of non-compliance are highlighted and re-audited until compliance is achieved.

11. There has been an improvement in the involvement of employers in monitoring the quality of training. The learner review process now includes the views of employers and this has resulted in a significant increase in employer feedback and resulting actions. NLT staff are more thorough in their monitoring of the quality of education and training in most subcontractors, although one college in particular remains resistant to allowing external observers into lessons. NLT has developed a good practice/good news folder which is shared between sites and is gaining momentum in sharing good practice across sites. It also incorporates good practice from external partners such as local colleges.

12. NLT's self-assessment process has been integrated with the business planning process. Procedures are thorough and actively involve staff in discussions on the quality of service with which they are involved. The frequent reviews of the resulting development plans in the business planning cycle are developing a system of continuous improvement.

Good Practice

A previous learner who has undergone a gender change has been assisted by NLT to change their name on their certificates.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	168	3

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

STRENGTHS

- closely matched training to the needs of learners and employers
- comprehensive paperwork facilitating training and assessment

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- insufficient systematic recording of basic skills assessments

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- extension of internal verification to include observation of assessors

13. NLT provides a wide range of engineering training programmes which allows it to match the training of learners closely to their needs and to those of their employer. Training programmes have been devised for learners being trained in occupations such as estimators and moulders as well as the more conventional engineering specialisms. Learners attend further courses leading to additional occupational qualifications. These include portable appliance testing, electrical regulations and abrasive wheels. Some employers have encouraged learners to progress to higher-level academic courses. Other learners have followed manufacturers' courses in pneumatic and hydraulic systems, injection moulding and maintaining specific manufacturing equipment.

14. NLT has comprehensive paperwork to support the training and assessment of the NVQs. A package for each unit of the NVQ sets out the type of evidence required and a clearly structured procedure for its assessment. The method of assessment for each element of the unit is clearly specified and includes a checklist of all the points to be observed. There is a comprehensive list of oral and written questions which learners must be able to answer correctly. Assessors check carefully that learners are able to answer these questions. There are clear examples of where a witness testimony is appropriate for each unit. Helpful references to other projects support the provision of additional evidence.

15. The weaknesses identified in the previous report relating to delayed progress by many learners, late introduction of key skills training, inadequate planning of some training in the workplace, and insufficiently thorough reviews of learners' progress have all been improved and are now satisfactory. Progress records show that most learners are now on course to complete their training within the identified timescale. The key skills training has been reorganised and learners start their key skills as soon as is practicable. Learner progress is reviewed frequently and reviews identify future work to be completed. Reviews are now shared with the learner and their immediate supervisor. A learner progress sheet clearly identifies progress on the NVQ units. Internal verification is effective overall, but there are still insufficient observations of assessors in the workplace.

16. Since the previous inspection, the rates of achievement have improved, but they remain unsatisfactory overall. More learners have completed their frameworks, but the proportion of learners who are successful continues to be low. For example, of the 36 advanced modern apprentices who started their training in 1997-98, 14 have completed the framework, compared with four at the time of the previous inspection. However, the overall proportion is still only 40 per cent. Since 1997, a satisfactory proportion of advanced modern apprentices has remained in learning, at over 70 per cent. The proportion of foundation modern apprentices who remain in learning has improved, but is still low overall at around 50 per cent. The proportion of learners who remain in learning on level 2 NVQ programmes has improved. For level 2 NVQ programmes the figure has improved from 28 per cent in 1997-98 to around 60 per cent in 2001-02. Level 3 NVQ programmes now have satisfactory retention rates. Achievement of individual learning plans on NVQ programmes has improved, but remains low overall. For example, 43 per cent of the learners who started NVQ programmes in 2000-01 have achieved the targets on their individual learning plans, compared with 22 per cent of the learners who started in 1996-97. Learners have individual NVQ units accredited more quickly.

17. Three learners are currently receiving additional support for their basic skills needs. Learners who apply to NLT for training are invited for interview and carry out basic skills assessments during this initial period. Learners who are offered work placements and are identified as needing additional support are offered suitable support. However, the results of the assessments are not recorded systematically in all the learners' files. The effectiveness of any support provided is not always recorded. Some learners who are recruited directly by employers have no record of being assessed for basic skills. Other learners have been identified during training as requiring support. For example, one learner with spelling needs and one with possible dyslexia are receiving suitable support.

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	27	3

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

STRENGTHS

- good assessment on administration programmes
- effective support for learners
- good development of learners’ key skills in administration

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more active participation in induction by learners

18. The assessment of competence for NVQs in administration is well planned and effective. Detailed targets are set regularly for learners to help them prepare for assessment. Learners are fully aware of their progress. In many cases, learners are aware of target dates for completion of individual units as well as for the whole qualification. Supervisors are now involved sufficiently to support the assessment process by amending learners’ work roles and responsibilities where this is helpful to the learners’ progress. Employers are better informed about learners’ progress. Learners use off-the-job training sessions at NLT effectively to develop and organise their portfolios. They speak highly of these sessions, particularly at the start of their programmes. They take an appropriate level of responsibility for organising and cross-referencing their portfolios. Learners are well aware of the role and function of internal and external verification. Many learners have claimed certification of individual NVQ units before completing the whole qualification.

19. Learners’ progress in the workplace continues to be supported effectively through regular and well-conducted progress reviews. The learners and their employers value these meetings. Learners are able to use their review meetings to identify practical issues and barriers to progress and to work with their training officers to formulate strategies to overcome them. In two instances, it was agreed that existing work placements did not meet the needs of the learners and NLT was able to resolve the

problems. In one, this involved the company moving the learner to a different department and in the other, after exhausting the company's internal procedures, NLT was able to find a new work placement that better met the learner's needs.

20. There is good development of learners' key skills in administration. Some foundation modern apprentices take key skills qualifications at a higher level than the framework requires in anticipation of progressing to the advanced framework. Key skills are studied from the start of the apprenticeship and administration learners speak positively of their progress in key skills. Learners' portfolios confirm the progress made. There is good off-the-job training in key skills for administration learners. Lessons are well planned, are carried out in an atmosphere which is conducive to learning and make good use of a range of suitable resources including information and communications technology (ICT) equipment.

21. Although there has been an improving trend over the past three years, retention and achievement rates remain unsatisfactory overall. For example, the proportion of learners who achieved the NVQ has increased from 16 per cent in 1999-2000 to 80 per cent in 2001-02 on level 2 programmes, but was only 50 per cent on level 3 programmes. The proportion of learners who completed all aspects of their advanced modern apprenticeship framework has increased from 11 per cent in 1996-97 to a potential 50 per cent in 2001-02. The proportion of learners remaining on their foundation modern apprenticeship programmes has increased from 27 per cent in 1999-2000 to a potential 50 per cent in 2001-02.

22. Employers who do not have their own equal opportunities policies, cannot recall any discussions with NLT on this subject. They claim they have not received a copy of NLT's equal opportunities policy. They have a poor understanding of equal opportunities in relation to training. Although the checking of the learners' understanding of equal opportunities has improved, learners recall and knowledge of equal opportunities remains poor.

23. The NLT induction is comprehensive, but most learners have a poor recollection of the information given to them. They claim that their induction consists mainly of listening to, or reading, large quantities of information that is not interesting. The induction has few activities that involve learners.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	11	3

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

STRENGTHS

- good support for learners’ progress
- good integration of key skills with vocational training

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement and retention rates
- poor understanding and involvement in frameworks by some employers
- insufficient support for retailing and customer service training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of occupational initial assessment for learners in retailing
- more sampling of assessment planning and feedback records for internal verification

24. NLT’s staff continue to provide good support for learners to help them progress on their programmes. Learners are visited often by training officers for a variety of reasons, such as additional NVQ assessment and guidance, regular reviews and key skills support. Learners appreciate the help given during these visits and build a good working relationship with their training officer. Employers allow training officers easy access to learners. Officers work hard to retain learners who are unsure about remaining on their programmes. Learners regularly attend portfolio and key skills workshops where they can also receive additional help if needed. Learners who have particular problems are given extra support when it is needed. This ranges from support for dyslexia to enhanced key skills support. Careers guidance is available for learners if necessary.

25. NLT has now carefully integrated the development of learners’ key skills into their training programmes. Learners understand the importance of key skills. During portfolio development sessions, reference to key skills is constantly made while evidence is reviewed. Learners are encouraged to reference the evidence for themselves. There are good resources available to help learners with their key skills. Information technology resources are readily accessible and learndirect courses are also available to further enhance progress with key skills. Additional key skills material has been purchased to

help learners when they attend the training centre.

26. Learners are starting to complete the framework and NVQ achievements are improving, but the proportion of learners who remain in training and achieve their qualifications remains low. For example, the proportion of learners who have achieved the targets on their individual learning plans on NVQ only programmes has improved from 14 per cent in 1997-98 to 50 per cent in 2000-01. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices has improved from 20 per cent in 1997-98 to a potential 57 per cent in 2001-02. Recruitment on programmes varies. It has decreased for foundation modern apprentices, increased slightly for advanced modern apprentices and has fluctuated on NVQ programmes.

27. Although employers are very supportive of their learners, they still do not fully understand the modern apprenticeship frameworks and what the learner has to do to achieve an NVQ. The opportunities provided by employers are not always used in the most appropriate way. For example, a qualified assessor in one company is not being used to observe learners in the workplace. Employers are not always fully aware of why their learner attends the training centre. Learners are encouraged to choose relevant units of the NVQ to suit their employment, but there is not enough use of the occupational initial assessments to help employers and learners draw up a well-matched learning programme.

28. Resources are sufficient for key skills training and assessment, but there are insufficient learning materials to support the retailing and customer service occupational training. There are sufficient materials and access to equipment for learners in distribution in Chesterfield. Some training materials are beginning to be shared across the sites, but there is no scheduled on- or off-the-job training for learners to cover aspects of customer service or retailing and distribution.

29. Internal verification is sound at the Scunthorpe site and follows current good practice and national requirements. The self-assessment report recognised that assessment planning needs to be more targeted for learners. The internal verification process does not currently sample the assessment planning or feedback records.

Good Practice

Two retailing/warehouse learners were finding the key skills difficult as they were with the business administration learners and felt uncomfortable. They were rescheduled to attend NLT together for key skills and to work on their portfolios.