

INSPECTION REPORT

The Employee Development Forum Limited Reinspection

18 April 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

The Employee Development Forum Limited is a limited company based at Slinfold, near Horsham, West Sussex. The company was founded in 1998 and is owned by its managing director. The Employee Development Forum Limited provides work-based learning programmes in engineering for advanced and foundation modern apprentices and in national vocational qualifications (NVQs). There are 31 learners, all of whom are employed. Engineering training is funded through a contract with Sussex Learning and Skills Council. The company has one direct-employed administration co-ordinator and six self-employed associates.

Since the original inspection the company has moved into new premises with improved administrative facilities. Off-the-job training in engineering is subcontracted to local colleges.

Overall judgement

The ALI's inspection in June 2001 found that training in engineering was satisfactory but that the company's leadership and management were unsatisfactory, including its arrangements for quality assurance and equality of opportunity. At the end of the reinspection process, engineering training, and leadership and management, including equality of opportunity, were found to be good and quality assurance was satisfactory.

Grades awarded

	Original	Reinspection
Leadership and management	4	2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity	4	2
Quality assurance	4	3

	Original	Reinspection
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3	2
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	2

THE EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT FORUM LIMITED REINSPECTION

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- very good work placements
- good retention rates
- good business planning and operational management
- good use of management information systems

KEY WEAKNESSES

- no specific testing of basic skills

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better liaison between some employers and learners during off-the-job training

THE REINSPECTION

1. The reinspection was carried out by two inspectors in three stages. A total of seven inspection days were used. The first visit was on 7 January 2003. The other visits were on 19-20 February and 1 April 2003. Inspectors interviewed 10 learners, and visited three employers and two subcontractors. No learning sessions were observed at the reinspection. Inspectors examined a range of documents including individual learning plans, portfolios of evidence, the business development and action plans, management information and monthly performance reports, the Employee Development Forum Limited (the EDF) newsletters and the self-assessment report which was produced in March 2002.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

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

STRENGTHS

- good business planning and operational management
- effective communication
- good use of management information systems
- comprehensive service level agreements

WEAKNESSES

- no specific testing of basic skills

2. Since the original inspection, the EDF has produced a detailed and comprehensive business and action plan. This contains a number of key objectives cross-referenced to the weaknesses that were identified and to targets set by the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the actions needed to achieve them. The plan is being used effectively and helps the EDF's operational management to keep up to date. The plan is updated regularly following consultation between the managing director and the associates. There is a clear focus on the key objectives. Training is managed well and general administration is good. However, the EDF is a small company and the managing director is responsible for much of the day-to-day management, supported by the administration co-ordinator.

3. Communication between the managing director and other members of staff is open and effective. Formal management meetings are held every two months but effective informal communication takes place daily. Detailed notes of meetings are distributed and any necessary actions are monitored. Communication between the EDF and the learners is good with frequent progress reviews. Learners are able to contact the company whenever they need support or guidance. The EDF has greatly improved the way it communicates with employers. The EDF responds promptly to enquiries from employers on any topics concerning training, health and safety and human resources. A few employers still do not fully understand their role in the development and training of their learners and rely on the EDF to prompt them with any necessary actions. The EDF has provided all employers with a detailed guide to work-based learning that is reviewed and amended as required.

4. The management information systems are sound and effective and are put to good use. A database and spreadsheet have been developed and introduced to record learners' progress and achievement. The information is displayed in tabular and graphical format and reviewed in detail at the management performance review meetings. The schedules for monitoring visits are reviewed regularly and any actions

recorded at the visits are checked to ensure completion. Staff can easily identify any outstanding issues and monitor the progress of learners.

5. Comprehensive, well-developed and demanding service level agreements have been introduced for subcontractors and employers, following much consultation and discussion with both parties. The agreements for subcontractors include clear statements on the monitoring of their performance by the EDF. The agreements also specify the subcontractors' responsibilities for reporting on learners' progress and attendance to the EDF and employers, and for equality of opportunity.

6. The EDF has not yet introduced basic skills screening or diagnostic testing and there is no specific basic skills test at the start of the programme. The company has introduced a series of initial assessments which adequately screen starters to their programmes. These assessments cover numeracy, literacy, information technology (IT) and occupational aptitude and are used with all learners. Although the tests give adequate guidance for the new learners' levels of literacy and numeracy, they are not used in the learners' individual learning plans to note any specific learning support needs they may have. Insufficient data have been gathered at this stage to judge the effectiveness of the initial assessment tests and the arrangements for basic skills initial assessment are not yet fully developed.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

7. The EDF has a clear policy on equal opportunities. The policy is reviewed and updated annually as required. The business and development plan states clearly the actions for implementing the policy. Learners are given a copy of the policy at induction and their rights and responsibilities are explained in detail. The policy is reinforced during progress review visits and recorded on the review form. Learners understand the principles of equality of opportunity and show a clear understanding of the appeals and complaints procedures. The EDF recently held a successful training workshop on equal opportunities for all staff and employers. Further training workshops are planned.

8. The EDF provides good support to employers by helping them to develop and promote equal opportunities policies. There are clear statements in the service level agreements that relate to employers' responsibilities for equal opportunities. Similarly, the service level agreement for subcontractors details their responsibility for promoting and monitoring equal opportunities.

9. The EDF regularly collects and analyses data on the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of its learners and candidates for its programmes. At reinspection there was one female learner and one learner from a minority ethnic group. Recognising the under-representation from these groups, the company has taken specific action to promote its engineering training opportunities to these groups. The EDF has a very effective programme with a local charitable foundation that provides a residential facility for homeless and disadvantaged young people. Over 50 per cent of the EDF's learners, all those referred through the charity, require additional learning and social support. The local LSC and the awarding body for engineering have praised the EDF's contribution to this programme in supporting disadvantaged learners to acquire new skills and recognised qualifications.

10. The EDF is also working on another project with an organisation that supports under 18 year old refugee children who are separated from their families, by helping to prepare them for employment or further education. The EDF's support for the project provides the children with an introduction to engineering as a possible career and outlines the training routes available to them.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

11. At the original inspection, the EDF did not have an overall quality assurance system. Since then, a comprehensive system has been introduced taking into account all the successful procedures that were already in existence, and with additional procedures to cover the deficiencies. A quality assurance manual has been produced and is under regular review. An internal audit process has been introduced and this provides data for the management performance meetings. The new arrangements are comprehensive but the benefits have yet to be fully realised and assessed. Staff meet regularly to discuss training and share good practice. Internal and external verifiers' reports are discussed and any concerns are dealt with. The most recent self-assessment report, the third for the company, was published in March 2002 following consultation with all staff and employers.

12. The company has established effective links with other local work-based learning providers to share good practice on training, and data on recruitment and employment opportunities. The EDF has worked closely with the local LSC to introduce a new continuous improvement system for work-based learning providers.

13. The EDF now uses questionnaires to collect feedback from learners and employers and also interviews employers individually. The feedback is analysed and used as a basis for making improvements. The results of the surveys of learners and employers are published in the EDF's newsletters. The EDF has taken prompt and effective action to resolve the specific issues identified in the surveys.

14. The EDF has revised its review form for subcontractors to monitor their compliance with the service level agreements. The EDF visits each subcontractor three times a year to interview learners and teaching staff. The EDF looks at the teaching resources and classrooms and, whenever possible, observes lessons.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	31	2

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

STRENGTHS

- very good work placements
- high retention rates
- effective support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate identification of learning support needs

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better liaison between some employers and learners during off-the-job training

15. Learners are employed in a variety of good work placements. The EDF has developed strong links with local employers. Employers' premises are well equipped with modern machinery. Advanced manufacturing and production techniques are widely used. Most learners are funded by their employers to attend college, and many achieve educational qualifications and additional skills beyond the requirements of their frameworks.

16. The EDF has formed a particularly effective link with one employer, a charitable foundation. The foundation provides outstanding experience for its learners. All of the foundation's learners are from disadvantaged backgrounds and make up 50 per cent of the EDF's learners. These learners were previously unable to secure formal vocational qualifications in the engineering activities in which they are involved. The foundation has a specialist basic skills teacher to cater specifically for these learners' needs. The learners are well motivated and demonstrably proud of their achievements. Products created by the learners are sold at the employer's own shop and at other retail outlets. Learners are encouraged to work to the highest production standards, and to learn

additional skills. Many are funded to attend other developmental activities. One learner employed in the metalwork shop has been seconded to another agency to train as a farrier, having expressed an interest in this profession. Others have been assisted by funded driving lessons and tests.

17. The EDF's staff provide good support, mentoring and direct coaching for learners. Learners have frequent and regular progress reviews during which all aspects of their training, career and personal development are discussed. Learners are set effective targets and goals which they understand and which they feel confident to discuss with their reviewer. The EDF's system for monitoring learners' progress is good. Achievement of NVQ units is presented on a spreadsheet and is reviewed regularly at management meetings. The frequency of monitoring visits is also reviewed at management meetings and any outstanding actions are highlighted. The EDF works closely with employers, and all contact meetings and communications are formally recorded. Employers regard the EDF as their main source of information about modern apprenticeships and NVQs. Learners' successes are celebrated and the EDF uses its newsletter effectively to profile learners who have successfully completed NVQs, further education qualifications and frameworks. One major employer has recently published a lead article in its international in-house magazine featuring a female learner on the EDF advanced modern apprenticeship programme. The engineering awarding body recently published an article celebrating the EDF's success with charitable foundation learners who achieved level 2 NVQs.

18. The retention rates for learners are high. The overall retention rate for advanced modern apprentices since 1998 is 91 per cent and for foundation modern apprentices it is 80 per cent. Since the last inspection, a further eight learners have successfully completed their programmes.

19. Data held on initial assessment outcomes are not analysed or used as the basis for management decisions on individual support needs. However, the EDF is a lead partner in the regional council of training providers and is working with the local LSC to secure resources and training to enable basic skills needs to be identified and dealt with. A strategy for basic skills testing is being developed for all new recruits to their programmes. The chief executive is responsible for additional support, assisted by a personal development partner, who is currently responsible for initial assessment, and who carries out basic skills tests and interprets the test results. Approximately 50 per cent of the EDF's learners are from disadvantaged backgrounds and have diverse support needs. The remainder of the EDF's learners have been screened using a variety of initial assessment tools. None has been judged to be in need of specialist support.

20. There is insufficient contact between some employers and their learners during the off-the-job training. Some learners feel that they are not yet fully part of their employer's organisation. Their employers do not visit them regularly at the subcontracted off-the-job training location and the learners have little idea of what the future holds for them in employment. Learners feel excluded from their employer's activities during their off-the-job training.

Good Practice

The provider offers a cash bursary each year to the best performing learner based on a number of criteria, including progress on the NVQ, attendance records, college progress and employer's reports. The bursary can be spent on equipment, tools, books or additional training.