

INSPECTION REPORT

BNFL Westinghouse

22 July 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- adult and community learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of her majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

The training department is part of the UK Fuels business of BNFL Westinghouse, which offers advanced modern apprenticeships in engineering, business administration and health. Training is provided for BNFL Westinghouse and other employees. There is one training centre at the Springfields site. There are 109 learners, 98 are engineering apprentices and eight are health apprentices. Business administration was not inspected as there are only three learners.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically the quality of training in engineering and health is good. Leadership and management are also good.

GRADES

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

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

Health, social care & public services	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- good retention and achievement rates
- good links with external organisations
- good management and support for further and higher level qualifications
- good off-the-job-training in the training centre
- exceptionally good support for learners
- good range of resources

KEY WEAKNESSES

- incomplete arrangements to quality assure work-based learning

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better sharing of good practice across areas of learning

THE INSPECTION

1. Five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at Westinghouse BNFL (BNFL) in July 2002. During the inspection, 62 learners were interviewed and there were 29 interviews with the provider's staff. Inspectors observed and graded four learning sessions. Inspectors visited 10 employers premises, where they interviewed 10 workplace supervisors and 10 learners. They also observed assessments and examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios and files, personal records, plans, policies and procedures, management information and awarding body's reports. Inspectors studied the self-assessment report produced in December 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	4
Total	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	4

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. BNFL is a company involved in the nuclear power industry and currently employs more than 23,000 people. The UK Fuels business operates from the Springfields site in Lancashire. The principle business of the site is the fabrication of fuel for nuclear reactors. It also produces nuclear intermediate products for world-wide consumption. The company started its engineering apprentice scheme in 1950 and it has been operating every year since then. The company now has business administration modern apprentices and health modern apprentices, who are studying laboratory and associated technical activities (LATA). Since 1996, the company has trained engineering modern apprentices from a range of other companies. Most of these companies are located in the Northwest within a 30-mile radius of Springfields, but one is based in the south of England and has learners there and in Coventry. All of the engineering apprentices are employed by BNFL or one of these companies. All of the business administration and health learners are employed by BNFL. The company's training programme for all the learners is funded through a contract with the Lancashire Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

3. In April 2002, the unemployment rate in Lancashire was 2.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.1 per cent. The 1991 census shows that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is 3.5 per cent in Lancashire and 10.2 per cent in Preston, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above, was 50.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

4. The quality of work-based learning for young people is good in engineering and health. There is good retention and achievement rates and good off-the-job training supported by appropriate resources. There are good links with external organisations and additional learning opportunities that are well managed. There is good on-the-job training, but it is not sufficiently planned in engineering. The support for learners is exceptionally good. The self-assessment process is weak and the arrangements for quality assurance of engineering training are incomplete. There are some poor assessment practices in the workplace.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

5. The apprentice training programme is managed by the Springfields site training department. It is run by the training centre manager, who reports to the European human resources manager. There is an apprentice board which operates as an a committee for overseeing all modern apprentices on the programme. The chief engineer has overall responsibility for the standards of engineering on the site. The training centre manager has 12 staff. The training centre also provides a range of adult training. The apprentice training programme is administered by the apprentice training officer who reports directly to the training centre manager. The engineering training manager also reports directly to the training centre manager and is responsible for all training, staff, resources, and adult training. In April 2000, co-ordinating responsibility for the business administration and LATA apprentice training programme was given to the training centre manager, but some of the staff involved in running these training programmes do not report to the training centre manager.

6. There is a company-wide policy on equality of opportunity and all departments are required to implement the policy. All learners, including those not on BNFL apprenticeships, receive a booklet that explains the company's policy and commitment and what is expected of employees and learners. The harassment code of practice is given to all learners. The company has an open policy on recruitment, regardless of sex, marital status, race, disability, colour, age, sexual orientation, nationality or ethnic origin. Applicants are judged on their capability to perform the work. All learners can use the extensive welfare services provided by BNFL throughout their apprenticeship. The performance management system requires staff to adhere to company policies such as the equal opportunities and harassment.

7. The Springfields site has recently been reaccredited with joint certification for ISO 9001:2000, a nationally recognised quality management systems standard, and ISO 14001, a nationally recognised environmental management systems standard. Within the company-wide ISO 9001 quality management system, there are procedures and instructions applicable to the whole site, such as the company policy on equal opportunities, and local procedures developed for specific applications. Local quality assurance procedures have been written for the publicly funded training in engineering. In health and business administration, quality assurance files contain the relevant working documents used for the quality assurance of their modern apprenticeships.

STRENGTHS

- good links with external organisations
- effective internal communications
- good management and support for further and higher level qualifications
- positive and supportive senior management
- well-managed staff development programme
- effective equal opportunities induction programmes
- good management of equal opportunities
- effective use of surveys to improve quality of learning in engineering

WEAKNESSES

- incomplete quality assurance arrangements for engineering training
- weak self-assessment process

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better analysis of equal opportunities data to monitor effectiveness of recruitment process
- better sharing of good practice across areas of learning

8. There are good links with external organisations and the local community, which are used to involve the learners in a range of charitable and community projects. The projects give the learners experience in a range of related disciplines, such as project management, which enhances their development. Since 1996, BNFL has provided apprentice training programmes for external companies. The staff at these companies are given regular feedback on learners' progress and BNFL is responsive to the needs of learners and their companies. It has good links with the colleges they use for academic training. A syllabus is effectively negotiated to meet the needs of the learners and entry onto training courses for learners who do not quite meet the academic entry standards. BNFL seeks feedback from learners about the colleges informally and at formal meetings. Comments are fed back to improve the experience of the learners. College staff attend formal meetings at BNFL.

9. There are effective internal communications. There are effective regular meetings where staff discuss the learners' progress and the information is shared within the engineering department. However, there is insufficient sharing of good practice across the occupational areas. There is a monthly 'talking business' meeting, which is attended by learners, trainers and management. The meetings have resulted in improvements to the learners' experience. Training staff have regular contact with staff in the BNFL departments.

10. There is good management and support for further and higher level qualifications.

Learners with appropriate capability are encouraged to continue their academic studies to complete a higher national certificate. BNFL's staff successfully encourage other employers to give their modern apprentices this opportunity and most of the learners successfully complete additional qualifications. BNFL's employees are also considered for suitability to progress to a graduate engineer programme. All learners are aware of this option and, in some cases, their completion of the advanced modern apprenticeship framework is accelerated in order to meet university start dates. One modern apprentice who followed this route was also funded for additional tuition to gain suitable qualifications for a university place.

11. Senior management are positive and supportive. Senior site staff take a keen interest in the programme and the development of the learners. There is an apprentice board which is responsible for the strategic direction of the programme and which is outside the normal management chain for the training centre. The board meets every three months and is given written and verbal information on all aspects of the learners progress. The trades union members meet with the learners at their induction and regularly during the training programme. The board also includes the chief engineer, who has overall responsibility for engineering practices on the site and meets with the learners on a regular basis. The self-assessment report did not identify this strength.

12. There is well-managed staff development, which improves the learners' experience in engineering. A comprehensive chart of staff competences is recorded and used to plan future needs for their development. This process is an integral part of the company's staff development programme. Formal performance reviews are held at least twice a year for every member of training staff, and clear targets are set for the development of skills and competences. There is a strong commitment to staff training in occupational and safety areas, as well as encouragement to maintain occupational currency by attending conferences. Some staff have also trained in team leadership. The competency recording extends to other staff to effectively give short-term cover for absent staff and longer-term cover to replace staff. This initiative is being further developed to attract staff from other areas of the business to train as trainers.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

13. The learners demonstrate a good awareness of equality of opportunity. Learners are introduced to equality of opportunity at their induction with a well-structured three-hour session consisting of discussion groups, videos with associated discussion and worksheets. Worksheets and videos cover sexual harassment, racism, and dyslexia. The session ends with a presentation and discussion on the company's equal opportunities policy.

14. There is good management of equal opportunities. For example, management has been closely involved in ensuring that one learner was able to stay on the programme while having three periods of maternity leave. Company procedures are used effectively to eliminate oppressive behaviour. Three employees were dismissed after an incident involving oppressive behaviour. Equality of opportunity is effectively reinforced during training. Progress reviews check the learners' understanding of equality of opportunity and whether they have been subjected to any harassment. In one case, a learner believed he was not being given the opportunity to undertake work on a range of machines. This was discussed with his employer and he was then allowed to do so.

15. The company attends various careers evenings and conventions as part of its general promotion of training opportunities. It advertises for jobs through schools and the local media, including a weekly Asian community newspaper. Promotional leaflets feature successful Asian and women engineers. Based on local information, the upper age limit for potential applicants has been raised to encourage people from minority ethnic groups to apply for apprenticeships. Learners who have passed the initial tests, but are not successful in gaining an apprenticeship with BNFL, may join apprenticeships with other companies in the BNFL apprentice training programme. Although the company has equal opportunities data relating to recruitment, there has been little analysis of the data to check the effectiveness of specific recruitment activities.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

16. There is effective use of surveys to improve the quality of learning in engineering. Surveys are undertaken every quarter to obtain the views of engineering learners regarding the off-the-job training and their work placements. Separate surveys are undertaken for learners who have a work placement with BNFL and for those who have work placements with other companies. A further annual survey is used to gather the views of companies on the training given by BNFL. The results of the surveys are collated and are generally positive. When necessary, actions are proposed and taken. However, there is no feedback given to employers on the actions taken in response to their comments. There is some use of surveys to evaluate specific activities such as the induction, and improvements have been made after comments on the previous year's inductions. In business administration and health, the quality assurance processes are satisfactory.

17. The arrangements for the quality assurance of engineering training are incomplete. Local quality assurance procedures have been developed which cover most aspects of the engineering training, such as the recruitment and induction of learners. There are also procedures for the initial approval of companies as training placements, and for further education colleges. However, they do not cover the monitoring of the maintenance of standards. Information on self-assessment and external verifier reports, is not routinely sent to BNFL. College staff are involved in a range of meetings with BNFL, and feedback from learners is collected at various times. Procedures are being reviewed, but there are no routine checks to see if they are being carried out effectively.

18. Publicly funded training is discussed at the monthly quality and safety committee, which has representatives from engineering, health, business administration, and the apprentice board. The engineering instructors meet each month. All staff and learners attend the 'talking business' meetings, which are led by the skills training manager. One nominated college is used for most learners but learners do attend other colleges. There is a formal annual meeting with the designated college and informal termly meetings to review progress. Minutes of the annual meetings show that discussions focus on the quality of the training received by learners and suggested improvements.

19. Internal verification is satisfactory overall in engineering, but there are some inconsistencies. Observation of the assessors' performance is primarily carried out in the training centre and not sufficiently in the workplace. The requirement for assessment by observation in the workplace has not been adequately stated by the internal verifiers. Systems for internal verification in health are thorough and well recorded. They currently verify all of the assessment decisions.

20. The self-assessment process is weak. The self-assessment report was written by one member of staff and was only made available to other staff for comment. The sections on business administration and health are brief and contain little evaluative comment. In quality assurance and equality of opportunity, the text makes reference to engineering only. The self-assessment report does not identify some of the strengths and weaknesses

BNFL WESTINGHOUSE

identified by inspectors. In the quality assurance section, the text is based on engineering, and inspectors did not agree with two of the three key strengths identified.

Poor Practice

Placement companies are checked at the start of placements. However, there is no systematic annual check of the currency of employer's liability insurance.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	98	2

21. The training department trains engineering modern apprentices for BNFL and for 16 other companies. One of these companies has learners based in the south of England and in Coventry. The rest are based in the Northwest, within 30 miles of the Springfields site. Learners can specialise in engineering production, electrical maintenance, mechanical maintenance, or technical services. There are 98 advanced modern apprentices. During their apprenticeship, learners work towards levels 2 and 3 of the national vocational qualification (NVQ), and key skills. They also receive a range of training including national and higher-national awards, health and safety, and first aid. Some learners progress to degree level. Learners take up to three and a half years to complete the framework and many learners progress to responsible positions in their company. All learners are employed. Learners spend their first 26 weeks working towards a level 2 NVQ in the training centre. During this time, they also work towards key skills at level 2. After this, some learners return to their employer to work towards the level 3 NVQ in the workplace. BNFL's learners and some other learners continue at the training centre for a further 52 weeks. Throughout their apprenticeship, learners attend a local college of further education for one day a week. Most learners are assessed for the level 3 NVQ in the workplace by BNFL's training staff. A few companies have their own work-based assessors. Four members of staff are key skills trainers and assessors. Two members of staff are internal verifiers. Assessors meet every four weeks.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	24		26		29		26		32		29		22		21	
Retained*	0		0		0		0		28	88	24	83	19	86	17	81
Successfully completed	0		0		0		0		28	88	21	72	18	82	17	81
Still in learning	23		25		26		24		0	0	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 retention and achievement rates
- good off-the-job-training in the training centre
- good range of resources
- thorough monitoring and assessment at level 2
- good induction process
- exceptionally good support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient planning of on-the-job training
- some poor assessment practices in the workplace
- some poor recording of progress reviews

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better understanding of basic skills support by staff
- better use of modern apprentices' time for high achievers

22. Retention and achievement rates are good and have been consistently good since 1997. Most learners complete their framework within three and a half years. They complete a level 2 NVQ in 26 weeks and all of the learners who started in 2001, completed key skills at level 2 within their first year of training. BNFL and other employers successfully encourage learners to achieve additional qualifications. Many modern apprentices achieve additional NVQ units and technical qualifications and progress to higher national certificate and diploma awards. Some continue their education at university. Over 80 per cent of modern apprentices continue to develop their skills and remain in jobs with their employers on completion of their apprenticeship.

23. Training in the training centre is good. The training programmes are well structured with clear objectives and lesson plans. Learners are given a good introduction into engineering. A variety of assessment methods is used and NVQ achievement rates are excellent during this stage of training. Training sessions are well carried out and include good interaction with learners. The monitoring of learners' progress in the training centre is good, with charts to record achievement on the notice boards. Employers value the skills and knowledge that modern apprentices gain in the early stages of their training programmes. These learners are not always given more demanding or challenging tasks while waiting for others to complete.

24. The self-assessment report correctly identified the good resources as a strength. Trainers are enthusiastic, have good industrial experience and are well qualified in training and assessment. They give good personal support and successfully motivate the learners. The training centre is particularly well equipped. Training workshops are spacious and well arranged to promote a safe working environment. There is a wide

range of well-maintained equipment and machinery for turning, milling, welding and maintenance systems. Well-equipped training rooms are adjacent to the workshops. Additional facilities include lecture rooms and a good range of information technology (IT) equipment. A wide range of books and videos is available. Computer areas are effectively arranged and are available for group work, classroom sessions or for learners to work on their own.

25. There is thorough monitoring and assessment at level 2 of the NVQ. Assessments are carried out on an ongoing basis and are an integral part of the training plans. Assessors use assessment action plans which, are updated each week and any outstanding actions are pursued to completion. Learners' progress is entered onto the main computer system and staff and learners are aware of their progress. Charts in the workshops support this information and many learners consider this to be a motivating factor during their training programme. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report.

26. There is a good induction process. The training last for two weeks and an extensive range of subjects is covered. The training is well recorded with a strong emphasis on health and safety and equality of opportunity. Learners are able to use some of the evidence towards their key skills. Learners can recall this part of their training and value the emphasis placed on their welfare.

27. There is exceptionally good support for learners. Staff meet regularly with learners to resolve problems and to identify assessment opportunities. All areas of concern are dealt with quickly and many recommendations have been implemented. All learners are given specific work responsibilities during training and report that these activities have improved their confidence. Learners are effectively involved in the management of their programmes and are highly motivated. Some assessors visit learners on night shifts to ensure that support is available during unsociable hours. BNFL offers free transport to the training centre and, during the first stages of training, offers free transport to college from the training centre. All learners have access to a welfare officer throughout their apprenticeship. Learners who have dyslexia are particularly well supported. Success is celebrated from the beginning of the training programme, with local press coverage for those selected. There is an annual prize day and deed signing attended by modern apprentices and their families. Awards are presented for apprentice of the year, and other categories, and are awarded to BNFL and other company's modern apprentices. Outstanding achievement is also celebrated. Learners are encouraged to work in teams whenever possible and weekly sessions are arranged to discuss opportunities for gathering evidence towards their NVQ. Portfolio-building and cross-referencing of evidence are the responsibility of the learner, with guidance and support from the assessor. Some learners take on responsible positions in health and safety and working groups in the organisation. Representatives from the modern apprentices are also invited to contribute to management meetings.

28. There is insufficient planning of on-the-job training. In most cases, it is limited to a schedule which shows that learners will move from one section of the company to

another at set times or for set periods. There are few medium- or long-term plans which identify the objectives, methods, evaluation processes and who is responsible. Progress reviews concentrate mainly on immediate problems and do not give a full picture of progress against plans. There are few attempts to link the on- and off-the-job training. The programmes generally run independently of each other with little or no co-ordination. Progress reviews seldom cover on- and off-the-job training. The self-assessment report did not identify this weakness.

29. There are some poor assessment practices in the workplace. There is limited assessment by observation in the workplace and evidence in a few of the portfolios is limited to copies of company records. In a few portfolios, there are signatures relating to assessments, evidence and witness statements missing. There are sometimes delays in advising learners of the outcome of assessment. One learner waited more than six months after submitting his portfolio to be advised of the outcome. There are records of assessors checking learners' knowledge by question and answer, but there are few details of the questions asked and how they relate to the evidence presented. Internal verification is satisfactory overall, but there are some inconsistencies. Observation of assessor performance is primarily carried out in the training centre and not sufficiently extended to assessments in the workplace. In one case, the sampling of an assessor's work did not take place over an extended period of time. Internal verification has not identified the lack of assessment by observation in the workplace as a weakness.

30. There is some poor recording of workplace reviews. Learners and employers are not informed of targets and the recording of the reviews is often brief. There is little involvement of supervisors or managers in the reviews. Employers are verbally informed of learners' progress and, in most cases, BNFL writes separately to the employers summarising the main findings. However, the employers are not given a copy of review paperwork. The review documents do not encourage the discussion of equal opportunities, although there is a separate document available for recording these issues. Assessors use different methods and documents to monitor progress in the workplace. The review process is not used as a means of ensuring that all relevant information is available to learners and employers. Individual learning plans are kept in the learners' file and, in some cases, are not working documents. They are not always incorporated into the review process.

31. Initial assessment of learners' basic and key skills is undertaken when they join the training programme. All learners undertake a numeracy and literacy test and the results are analysed and discussed individually with learners. Until 2001, the results of initial assessment were not used as a basis for the individual learning plans, but since then they have been used and further improvements have recently been made.

Good Practice

Newly recruited learners have an assignment to produce a word-processed report on a good or poor aspect of safe practice. The report has to include a digital image and is used to introduce the modern apprentices to the key skills. The briefing for the assignment includes using a digital camera and associated computer systems, it stresses the safety aspects of the assignment, and warns the modern apprentices not to use the digital images as a form of harassment.

Health, social care & public services

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	8	2

32. BNFL offers training for laboratory technicians and currently has eight advanced modern apprentices. They work towards the NVQ at level 2 and 3 in laboratory and associated technical activities and follow a day-release programme at a local college to achieve a higher national certificate in applied sciences. Of the eight learners, four are in the second year of the three-year programme, and four are in the third year. The second-year learners are all awaiting verification of their level 2 NVQ and official confirmation of their higher certificate results. The third-year learners have all achieved the level 2 NVQ and the higher national certificate and three of them have achieved the level 3 NVQ. The remaining third-year learner is expected to achieve by the planned end date. All of the learners are employed by BNFL. Learners who already have level 3 science qualifications are recruited and must be over 18 because of the legislation regarding working with uranium. Training and assessment take place on site, in fully equipped industrial laboratories. Learners have day release at a local college to study applied sciences. Most NVQ evidence is gathered in the workplace, but the project conducted as part of the higher certificate also provides suitable evidence. The learners have a half a day each week for portfolio work and BNFL provides a resource room for this activity. There is a co-ordinator for the training programme who is also the internal verifier. There are five assessors who are all occupationally competent but have not completed the assessor training. The team leader carries out progress reviews every six to eight weeks with the learners.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts					4		4									
Retained*					0		0									
Successfully completed					0		0									
Still in learning					4		4									

*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

- very good on-the-job training
- good retention and NVQ achievement rates
- excellent portfolios of evidence
- strong commitment to health and safety
- effective support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- some poor assessment practices

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better integration of NVQ with BNFL assessments
- better allocation of assessors to internal verifiers

33. The practical laboratory training is very good. It is designed around the BNFL training programme, which has specific procedures for every activity undertaken in the laboratory testing areas. Experienced and qualified employees carry out the training, which is well planned and well taught. Learners spend approximately nine months in each of the four laboratories, and develop a range of specialist skills required by the industry. The learners become experienced in a range of analytical techniques. Work on the higher national certificate projects requires learners to solve work-based analytical problems, and many of these are implemented by the company. The learners all value the good training they receive.

34. Currently, all of the learners who started are still on the training programme and are progressing at the expected pace. The company and the learners are awaiting confirmation that all have successfully achieved their higher national certificate in applied sciences. Similarly all learners have completed their level 2 NVQ assessments and await final verification. Three learners have achieved their level 3 NVQ qualification and the remaining third-year learner will complete by his expected end date. Two learners have now been given permanent positions within BNFL. At present, key skills are not part of the advanced modern apprenticeship framework.

35. The NVQ portfolios are exemplary. The learners put a great deal of time and effort into collecting and presenting the evidence. The detail included in the evidence demonstrates a very thorough understanding of the practices and procedures. Innovative use of digital photography helps the learners devise very effective storyboards to demonstrate complex techniques and plan their assessments. Detailed answers to questions also allow the portfolios to be used as reference documents. The portfolios have a very clear indexing and cross-referencing system, which allows the learners to use evidence for a range of units. Good use is made of problem-solving exercises to help the learners develop their team-building and communication skills.

36. Health and safety is a priority and is a key part of the learning process throughout the training programme. Learners routinely attend safety improvement meetings and site safety forums. One learner recently attended the European safety convention. All learners have successfully completed an institute of safety and health certificate together with many company specific safety courses. There are ongoing safety training and assessment packages throughout the period of the apprenticeship. The regular risk assessments are supplemented by the 'seconds out for safety' initiative, which requires staff to reassess the environment, before undertaking an activity, to check the current situation for risks. All learners are trained on 'behavioural safety' reporting.

37. Learners are given a good level of support throughout their apprenticeship and this support takes place in many different ways. All learners commented that they could ask and receive help on any aspect of their programme from laboratory supervisors, colleagues, and the internal verifier, in addition to their assessors. Two learners have been on maternity leave during their training programme, and with the company's supportive arrangements, have completed the advanced modern apprenticeship in the expected timescale. In general, the progress reviews are effective in giving feedback on progress and setting negotiated targets for completion by the next review. Learners are also well supported with a dedicated room for portfolio-building, generous time allocation to enable them to complete tasks, industry standard equipment and free transport to the site.

38. There are some poor assessment practices. The programme co-ordinator is also the internal verifier and there are five work-based assessors, none of whom is qualified. All are working towards their assessor qualifications, some for nearly two years. Currently all assessment decisions by the trainee assessors are verified. Although there is a good ratio of assessors to learners, the shift patterns of assessors make it difficult for assessments to be planned and undertaken. Assessments are very thorough and well recorded, but much of the assessment is carried out on portfolio evidence. Learners are given verbal and written feedback, but this can often be several weeks after the assessment. Much of the evidence for the NVQ is collected from the workplace, but there are few observed assessments. Observed assessments are often used to assess the BNFL training procedures, but they are not used for NVQ assessments. There are clear systems for the internal verification of assessments and portfolio evidence. The documents and feedback show attention to detail and are clearly presented. Internal verification is carried out on all observations and assessments. Lack of progress with one learner has meant that the internal verifier is now acting as an assessor. These assessment decisions have not been internally verified.

Good Practice

Learners are required to undertake projects for their higher certificate and two of the units of the NVQ. The projects are based on real site issues and learners are required to investigate and propose solutions. The evidence is collated and formally presented to company representatives. This evidence is used towards their qualifications and the company benefits from the investigations and subsequent outcomes.