

INSPECTION REPORT

Rocket Training Ltd

09 December 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.

Overall judgement

In those cases where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Rocket Training Limited is a private training company based in Liverpool and the Wirral. It offers work-based learning for young people in engineering, business administration, information technology, retailing, customer service, transportation and preparatory training and Life Skills. There are 295 young people on these programmes. Three are in information technology, six are in customer service and one learner is in warehousing, but these programmes were not graded.

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the quality of work-based learning in engineering and business administration is unsatisfactory. Retailing, preparatory training and Life Skills are satisfactory. The leadership and management of the company are unsatisfactory, as is the quality assurance. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

GRADES

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

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

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

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

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- extensive and beneficial external links
- good understanding of equal opportunities by learners
- supportive and involved employers
- highly effective induction

KEY WEAKNESSES

- some ineffective policies
- weak management information system
- inadequate quality assurance system
- inadequate promotion of training to under-represented groups
- poor support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of 10 inspectors spent a total of 40 days at Rocket Training Limited (RTL) in December 2002. Inspectors visited 37 workplaces and interviewed 77 learners and 30 employers and workplace supervisors. They carried out 63 interviews with members of RTL's staff and observed progress reviews and assessments. They observed and graded 12 learning sessions. Inspectors examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios and records, progress review documents, assessment records, external verifier's reports, minutes of meetings, plans, policies and procedures. Inspectors studied RTL's most recent self-assessment report which was produced in August 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	4
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Foundation programmes	0	0	1	3	2	0	0	6
Total	0	0	2	7	3	0	0	12

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. RTL was originally founded as the Brothers of Charity Youth Training Workshop in 1981. They began to offer work-based learning in the late 1980s and the organisation was restructured in 1992 and Rocket Training was formed. In 1994, it became a limited company. RTL is owned by two directors. There are a further 51 staff, all of whom are full time, with the exception of one who is part time. RTL now has company offices on six sites, including one on the Wirral. In August 2002, RTL took over the Liverpool base of Q Mat Training Limited, which was previously part of the mid-Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce. This added retailing and warehouse operations to the work-based learning already offered. There are 295 learners on work-based learning programmes for young people and Life Skills and preparatory training programmes

3. Training and assessment are carried out on the job and in-house. Four subcontractors are used for the training and assessment, including colleges of further education and private training providers. RTL contracts solely with Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for work-based learning, including national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1, 2, and 3, and foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships. RTL also offers preparatory training and Life Skills. RTL is an active member of the local provider network which is a forum of seven training organisations who meet monthly to share good practice and plan joint initiatives and developments to support learners.

4. Most learners are recruited from Liverpool and Knowsley and both of these areas have suffered a significant decline in employment opportunities in recent years, particularly in the manufacturing and transport areas. In May 2002, the unemployment rate for Liverpool was 6.9 per cent and in Knowsley was 8.9 per cent, compared with a national average of 3 per cent. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in Liverpool was 35 per cent and Knowsley was 27 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. The 1991 census shows that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups within the Liverpool area represent 3.8 per cent of the population and in Knowsley it was 1 per cent, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally.

Work-based learning for young people

5. Work-based learning for young people is offered to 248 learners in three areas of learning. There are 87 learners in motor vehicle and manufacturing, 112 in business administration, three in information and communication technology and 46 in retailing, customer service and transportation. Employers are supportive and are actively involved in training in motor vehicle and manufacturing. In retailing, learners benefit from good work placements with employers. Induction is informative and memorable and includes information on health and safety and equal opportunities. Although literacy and numeracy needs are identified at induction and through initial assessment, insufficient support is provided for learners once they are on programme, particularly in motor vehicle and manufacturing. Retention and achievement rates are poor in motor vehicle, manufacturing and business administration, and for NVQ learners and foundation modern apprentices. None of the learners in motor vehicle have completed their modern apprenticeship framework. Over a three-year period, retention rates for NVQ provision have averaged 16 per cent. Achievement rates for modern apprenticeship training are declining in business administration and the retention rates are around 50 per cent.

Life Skills

6. There are 41 learners on Life Skills and six on preparatory training. These programmes enhance learners' self-esteem. Groups are small and learners are well supported by specialist and experienced staff. Learners are confident that the programmes are helping them to move on. Within Life Skills, 59 per cent of the learners have progressed to mainstream training, further education or found employment in the past 16 months. There is a clear induction and initial assessment process, but the results of initial assessment are not routinely communicated to learners and are not used for planning their learning programmes. There is also little support for learners who have literacy or numeracy needs. Opportunities for learners to carry out work-related activities are limited.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

7. RTL is owned by two directors who are responsible for the strategic, operational and financial management of the company, including equality of opportunity. A training manager is responsible for training and quality assurance. Other managers have management functions including the management of local training centres. There are 53 staff employed in the company. It has various policies and procedures including equal opportunity and health and safety policies. RTL has produced four self-assessment reports and the current one was produced in August 2002. An updated section for the newly acquired retailing area, was produced in September 2002.

STRENGTHS

- extensive and beneficial external links
- good understanding of equal opportunities by learners
- good initiatives to secure improvements in the quality of training

WEAKNESSES

- some ineffective policies
- weak management information system
- inadequate promotion of training opportunities to under-represented groups
- poor access for people with restricted mobility
- inadequate quality assurance system
- inadequate internal verification

8. RTL has extensive and beneficial external links. Over many years it has developed strong links with many companies and other training providers. RTL is a member of a local provider network which is a forum of seven training organisations which meet monthly to share good practice and plan joint initiatives and developments to support learners. In recent years, effective links with many local schools have also been developed.

9. Senior managers are supportive and accessible to staff. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities, and those of their managers. Recently, all job descriptions have been updated. Communications are generally effective, as there are many varied methods by which information is transmitted to staff and learners. The recent takeover of QMat and the transfer of its staff and learners to RTL have proceeded satisfactorily with little interruption to their training.

10. The annual staff appraisal system has recently been revised. No staff appraisals have taken place this year and none are planned until spring 2003. There is good

development for most of the staff. The training and development is correlated to strategic objectives and is effective in developing and supporting training needs. Induction arrangements for new staff are effective.

11. There are some ineffective policies. Five main strategies and 11 strategic objectives partly provide the company's direction for staff. However, there is no clear strategic objective for improving the retention and achievement rates of learners. There is no policy on training, teaching and learning and no year-on-year analysis. The policy on quality assurance is inadequate and it does not include detailed objectives or standards. Most of the procedures have recently been updated. There is a useful management and training procedures handbook for staff, which covers administration procedures, but it does not adequately cover teaching and learning. Most of the targets in the development plan are not clear and this makes it difficult to monitor them. Minutes of management meetings have insufficient details of the meetings and insufficient details of the actions required. There is also little review of previously identified actions.

12. RTL's management information system is not effective as a management tool. It is able to produce accurate funding and data returns to the local LSC, but RTL recognises that there are insufficient detailed monitoring reports on training. RTL also recognises that the timeliness and accuracy of data entry on training details and progress is a weakness. Staff often rely on paper-based records for their management of learners. RTL have recently installed a new management information system which should be operational in January 2003.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

13. The operations director is responsible for equal opportunities in the company. RTL has satisfactory equal opportunities policy and procedures, which are regularly reviewed and shared with staff, learners and employers. The procedures are clear and deal with harassment, complaints and grievances. For example, one learner reported that he was being harassed by a co-worker. The incident was reported to the manager of the company, who took effective action to resolve the situation. Most staff have attended some training in equal opportunities.

14. There is good understanding of equal opportunities by learners. The induction process is comprehensive and the learners' understanding is checked. In the Life Skills programme, equal opportunities is emphasised through the use of a short written commitment on discrimination which is signed by the learner and held in portfolios. There is adequate reinforcement of equal opportunities during training, particularly in the workplace. Equal opportunities is fully discussed at progress reviews. In all areas of learning, learners are easily able to discuss how equal opportunities relate to them and their particular workplace. They are also very aware of their rights and who to approach if they need help or support. Questionnaires for learners and employers also include equal opportunities and identified problems are followed up by the operations director.

15. There is inadequate promotion of training to under-represented groups. RTL collects data on gender, ethnicity and disability of their learners which is then collated and used to identify trends. There are also targets for recruitment from each of the groups. However, there are no effective strategies to implement the targets or to increase the number of learners from under-represented groups. Overall, 58 per cent of the learners are men, but this varies greatly between programmes. For example, in motor vehicle and manufacturing there are 87 men and no women. In business administration, most of the learners are women. Insufficient attention is given to equal opportunities in promotional literature and displays. For example, there is little use of positive images in displays which are taken out to recruitment and marketing events.

16. The company's training premises are not accessible to people with restricted mobility. Many rooms are on the upper floors of the buildings. Access to the head office is by several flights of steep stairs and there is no lift.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

17. RTL has introduced good initiatives to rectify weaknesses and to secure improvements in the quality of training. A welfare support officer has been appointed to visit each learner in the first month of their work placement to deal with problems which may occur in the early stages of training. In addition, as part of the monitoring of learners and employers in the workplace, a questionnaire is completed, the results are analysed and action points are planned. However, the employers are not informed of these actions. To date this has taken place in manufacturing, business administration and retailing. Results are analysed and suggestions for improvements are passed on to tutors. A new post of learning support officer has recently been created as part of the strategy to improve the retention rates. Workshops are organised for learners who are not in a work placement and include communication, interview techniques, NVQs, progress reviews and equal opportunities. There have been changes to the training documents including new progress review sheets, assessment planning documents, visit reports, training agreements and individual learning plans. Changes have also been made to the organisation of portfolios. In foundation studies, a new system has enabled closer monitoring of the learners' progress. All employers have been given a new handbook. A more thorough system of collecting feedback from employers has recently been introduced in manufacturing, business administration and retailing.

18. The quality assurance system is inadequate. RTL do not have a formal, overall quality assurance strategy or system. Although the self-assessment report and the organisation's latest manual refer to a quality assurance policy statement, it is brief and is not a working document. The introduction of the new internal verification procedure has not been planned systematically. For over six months before the introduction of the new system in business administration and during the transition period, very little internal verification has taken place.

19. The management of subcontractors is poor. RTL uses four subcontractors for off-the-job training and internal verification. The service supplied by one subcontractor for off-the-job training was affecting the learners' progress and achievement but no actions have been taken, although some changes are planned. Until September 2002, subcontractors were not required to submit records of attendance. Internal verification for one area of learning has been subcontracted, but it has not taken place. There has not been any planned observation of training and assessment.

20. Internal verification is inadequate. It is not consistently managed across all areas of learning. Observation of assessors is infrequent and some staff have not been observed. A new system of internal verification has been produced and it is currently being used for learners who started from September 2002 in business administration. The system used before this relied on internal verification only being completed at the end of the qualification. The new procedure requires internal verification to be carried out at least three times during the learners' training period. Learners who started before September 2002 will remain on the old system of internal verification.

ROCKET TRAINING LTD

21. The current self-assessment report was produced in August 2002 and is the fourth to be produced by the organisation. RTL's staff were involved in the process as part of the area of learning teams. However, many significant weaknesses were not identified. In two areas of learning and in leadership and management, inspectors gave a lower grade than in the self-assessment report.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	87	4

22. There are 87 learners working towards NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. There are 43 foundation modern apprentices in vehicle fitting and one advanced modern apprentice. There are a further 43 learners taking NVQs in performing manufacturing operations, upholstery and motor vehicle fast fit, but these are not shown in the tables. The standard length of the learners' training programme is between one and four years depending on the qualification aim. Fifty-three learners are endorsed as having additional learning needs. Learners are recruited through referrals from Connexions, by direct contact from employers and responses from advertisements placed in local newspapers. Forty-six of the learners are employed and 41 are either on pre-placement or work placement. Work placements range from small, privately owned garages to national companies. Learners who have secured a work placement in motor vehicle attend one of two subcontracted providers for off-the-job training. All training for manufacturing learners takes place on-the-job. Learners who are waiting for a work placement attend a pre-placement programme. A work-based assessor carries out assessments every four weeks, while progress reviews are undertaken every 12 weeks. There are two motor vehicle trainers, one of whom is part time. Both members of staff are occupationally competent and are qualified assessors. Of the two manufacturing trainers, one is a qualified assessor and the other is working towards the assessor qualifications. None of the trainers has any formal teaching qualifications.

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	3		1		3		2									
Retained*	1		1	100	2	67	1	50									
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0	0	0	0									
Still in learning	1		0	0	0	0	0	0									

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	80		26		31		19									
Retained*	30		11		11		5										
Successfully completed	0		0		0		0										
Still in learning	30		11		1		1										

*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

- supportive and involved employers
- highly effective induction
- good planning of training in manufacturing

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- inadequate monitoring of health and safety in motor vehicle
- slow progress in motor vehicle
- poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- inadequate guidance into manufacturing placements
- inadequate key skills training
- poor support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- clearer assessment feedback
- better promotion of pastoral support

23. All employers are very committed to the learners' training, although some want to be more involved. In manufacturing, employers have a good understanding of the training programmes and are involved in the assessments and progress reviews. Some employers have also developed company training plans to supplement the NVQ programme. Employers have recently been given an updated handbook to ensure that they are familiar with the learners' needs.

24. The induction for learners is highly effective. Learners have a good recall of the content which is informative and memorable. For example, information on equal opportunities, harassment and bullying, and health and safety is presented clearly and is easily understood by learners. Particular emphasis is placed on engaging learners' interest through group discussion which allows trainers to check the learners' understanding.

25. Training is well planned in manufacturing and all learning takes place on the job. Learners are visited frequently and employers are involved in the assessment and review process. Trainers produce good action plans at the end of each visit which show what learning needs to take place before the next visit. Feedback from assessments is satisfactory.

26. Retention and achievement rates are poor for NVQ training, foundation modern apprentices and advanced modern apprentices. Over a three-year period, the retention rates for NVQ provision has averaged 16 per cent, while the retention rate for foundation modern apprentices was 35 per cent. Since 1998-99, NVQ achievement rates have averaged 12.5 per cent, while none of the foundation or advanced modern apprentices completed the framework. Although current learners are making slow progress with their qualification, an increase in the number of assessment visits has led to some recent improvements.

27. There is inadequate monitoring of health and safety in motor vehicle. Although all work placements are visited every six months to check compliance with health and safety requirements, a number of health and safety concerns were identified during inspection. At two work placements, tyre changing and wheel balancing machinery was not securely bolted to the floor. Some work placements have fire extinguishers where the test inspection certificates have expired. At another two work placements, there was no follow-up action by an agreed date, despite a health and safety audit identifying specific improvements.

28. There is slow progress in motor vehicle. Some learners experience considerable delays before being allocated a work placement. After starting at work placements, some learners have waited many months before starting their off-the-job training with one of the two subcontractors. Attendance for off-the-job training with one subcontractor is poor, and averages between 45 and 50 per cent. Production of evidence from the workplace is slow. Many learners experience difficulty in keeping portfolio systems and entries up to date. Progress reviews are insufficiently detailed and contain little evidence of short- or long-term targeted training. Employers' involvement in the review process is limited.

29. There is poor co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training in motor vehicle. Most of the training by one subcontractor is poorly planned and schemes of work are inadequate. Employers are unaware of the training taking place during the off-the-job training. Training in the workplace is not well structured and is not recorded effectively.

Workplace supervisors and employers have insufficient knowledge and understanding of NVQs and rely on visiting tutors and the learner to manage the programme. In addition, little use is made of individual learning plans for target-setting and monitoring of progress. Employers are not given a copy of the assessment action plan and are often unaware of the short-term targets which have been agreed with learners.

30. There is inadequate guidance given to prospective learners who express an interest in going into manufacturing. In the recruitment process, learners are told about the type of work involved, but the staff are not familiar enough with the range of work carried out in the companies.

31. One of the subcontractors is not teaching key skills. Foundation modern apprentices have little knowledge of key skills and are not completing the modern apprenticeship framework. The other subcontractor, who only has six learners at levels 2 and 3, is starting to become successful with key skills assessments. When tutors visit the workplace, they are not assessing evidence which would be suitable for key skills and are not checking that learners are progressing with their key skills.

32. All learners' have an initial assessment which identifies literacy and numeracy needs. However, the needs are not routinely recorded on individual learning plans. This has been rectified for more recent learners. There is inadequate support available for learners with literacy and numeracy needs. Tutors deal effectively with learners' personal difficulties and with problems which arise at their work placements, but many learners are unaware of the additional pastoral support which is available to them.

Business administration, management & professional**Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	112	4

33. There are 112 learners on modern apprenticeships in administration. Sixty-five are foundation modern apprentices, 36 are advanced modern apprentices. There are 11 learners on NVQ training, but these are not shown in the tables. Thirty-seven learners are employed and 75 are on work placement. Some learners have work placements within RTL. Eighty-one of the learners are women and 16 learners have additional learning needs. Learners are recruited mainly as schools leavers, although there are some direct applications from employers. Connexions refers some learners but most applicants are self-referrals, either by peer recommendation or in response to newspaper advertising. Learners can start at any time of the year. All learners have an initial assessment, which includes basic skills assessment and reference to prior learning and achievement. However, some of these assessment tools are not used with advanced modern apprentices, where more emphasis is placed on employment history and self-assessment. An initial interview and an assessment is carried out at the head office and the off-the-job training is carried out at a city centre site. The one-day induction programme consists mainly of health and safety, appeals procedures, equal opportunities and information on portfolio-building. Learners return during their first week for further computerised diagnostic testing, which produces a profile of strengths and weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. It also identifies which particular workbooks will best support learners. Modern apprentices are all following an administration NVQ at level 2 or 3 with additional units from administration and customer service and five key skills at appropriate levels. An RTL assessor visits each learner every two to three weeks and completes a visit form each time. A review is also carried out every 12 weeks. Three of the four tutors are qualified assessors and the other is working towards the qualification. Two of the assessors are also qualified internal verifiers and one is working towards the qualification. The internal verifier co-ordinator is also a qualified assessor and internal verifier.

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																	
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	19		47		23		46										
Retained*	14		1		6		33										
Successfully completed	0		1		4		33										
Still in learning	14		18		3		1										

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																	
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	84		73		38		10										
Retained*	41		22		20		7	70									
Successfully completed	0		16		16		7	70									
Still in learning	41		22		2		0	0									

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

STRENGTHS

- effective induction
- good initial assessment
- well-resourced off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- some slow progress by learners
- some poorly organised portfolios

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more communication with employers

34. There is an effective, one-day induction programme which is normally held at one of the main sites. Induction can also take place in the workplace for employed learners. It introduces learners to health and safety, equal opportunities and documents which explain the NVQ programme. Key skills are also introduced at induction, as well as how to organise a portfolio. All learners have a good recall of the induction process.

35. The initial assessment is good. At the initial interview learners are given a basic skills test. Following this they are invited to return the application form, where information regarding social needs, any prior learning and work-experience details are recorded. The learner signs a learning plan and is assigned to a tutor. During the learner's first week, a more detailed, computer-based, diagnostic test is carried out, which further identifies areas of weakness and additional learning needs. The results are shared with the learner. The learning needs are also recorded on the individual learning plan and a copy of the results are entered into the learner's personal file. A copy is also sent to the key skills tutor which enables them to arrange targeted learning sessions for the learners. These sessions can be in groups, off-the-job training sessions or individual support sessions, either in the workplace or at the city centre site.

36. Off-the-job training is well resourced with three training rooms at the city centre site. There are 10 computers with up-to-date software packages and good access to the Internet. Several relevant software training packages support effective learning. Good commercially produced, paper-based materials, worksheets and administration textbooks are also available for use. One training room has a television and several videos for open learning and a CD ROM for tutor use. A telephone system can be set up for simulation in one of the training rooms.

37. Achievement rates are poor with a decline in modern apprenticeship framework completion each year for the past four years. This was identified in the self-assessment report. The retention rates are poor as approximately 50 per cent of learners leave the programme early.

38. The learners' progress is slow and some have still not achieved the level 2 NVQ in over 18 months. Many of the learners have been training for a year or more, but have little signed off in their portfolios. Many learners do not know what they have achieved or what remains to be done to complete their framework. They are not aware of timescales and do not know their actual completion date. Little emphasis is placed on progress. Individual learning plans are not treated as working documents, although copies are permanently kept in the learners' portfolios. Many employers are not involved in a three-way review and this was identified in the self-assessment report. Opportunities for assessment in the workplace are not taken. Poor progress reviews were also identified in the self-assessment report, as an area for improvement. A revised

review process was introduced in October 2002, but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this change.

39. There are some poorly organised portfolios. Many have little evidence of different assessment methods and there is poor cross-referencing of evidence. Since September, checking sheets has been introduced and a more structured approach to portfolio-building is evolving.

Good Practice

While learners work on health and safety in the workplace, they are encouraged to calculate areas and volumes to demonstrate their key skills.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	46	3

40. RTL has a contract to offer retail operations training in Merseyside. In July 2002, RTL took over responsibility for 30 learners in retailing and customer service from another training provider and a number of staff also transferred to RTL. Currently, there is one experienced and qualified retail assessor, one newly appointed trainee internal verifier and an internal verification co-ordinator. There are 39 learners in retailing, two of whom are advanced modern apprentices, 27 are foundation modern apprentices and 10 are on other NVQ training. Thirty-one learners are placed with employers at retail outlets across Merseyside and eight are on pre-placement programmes at two of RTL's learning centres. There are also six learners in customer service and one learner in warehousing. All learners have an initial assessment of literacy, numeracy, key skills and any prior achievement and the results are used to produce an individual learning plan which lists qualification aims, NVQ units, key skills units, support needs and any additional requirements. Learners have a one-day induction with RTL, covering terms and conditions, rights and responsibilities, health and safety and equality of opportunity. Learners who are waiting for a work placement follow a pre-placement course consisting of background knowledge in retail, personal skills, key skills and interview techniques. They also start to assemble a portfolio of evidence which they can later use on work placement. All learners in the workplace have an additional induction from their company. All background knowledge training and NVQ assessments are carried out in the workplace. The retailing assessor carries out progress reviews every month. In addition, there are pastoral reviews every three months. There are no tables shown in this section, as most of the learners have transferred from another training provider and the historic data would be theirs and not RTL's.

STRENGTHS

- good progression into jobs
- frequent, productive contact with learners
- good work placements with employers

WEAKNESSES

- delayed assessments in key skills
- poor planning of off-the-job activities

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- clearer referencing in portfolios
- better information and guidance for employers
- more work experience for pre-placement learners

41. There is good progression from NVQ programmes and foundation modern apprenticeships into jobs. Seventy-nine per cent of NVQ learners and foundation modern apprentices are employed. Two of the learners started off with RTL as Life Skills learners who had several barriers to learning and employment. Both learners have now progressed onto retail NVQs and are employed. Once employed, learners make good progress and several of the workplace supervisors are ex-learners.

42. There is frequent, productive contact with learners. Since RTL took over responsibility for this area of learning, the retail assessor has made additional visits to all learners to help them to progress. In most cases, the visits are weekly and include NVQ assessments, learning support, individual coaching and progress reviews. Since September, learners have been more focused on achievement and have been set much clearer targets. This has resulted in much better progress towards achievement of completed NVQ units. Learners have achieved a total of 33 units and many individual elements. Of the seven learners interviewed in the workplace, all had units signed off by their assessor and two are due to complete them within a month.

43. There are good work placements. Learners are placed within large national and local retail outlets across the Merseyside area where they gain work experience and practical retail skills. This was identified in the self-assessment report. Learners receive excellent in-house practical training from their employers. Learning programmes are well structured and recorded by employers. Learners have some very good learning support materials in the form of self-study modules for the generic retail skills such as customer care, security, health and safety and merchandising.

44. There have been delays in assessing key skills. Learners in retailing who transferred to RTL have had many workplace observations of their activities and have been assessed for NVQ units. The assessor discusses and agrees where the evidence can also be cross-referenced to key skills. However, during the change-over of learning provider, RTL had to apply for awarding body approval for retailing and key skills. During the delay in gaining approval, the assessor continued with the retail NVQs and has gathered some good toolkits to help the key skills cross-referencing process. However, the key skills evidence has not yet been recorded in the appropriate logbooks. All new starters begin to work on their key skills while awaiting work placement. Other learners are making good progress with the external key skills tests.

45. The planning of off-the-job activities is poor. Learners do not attend RTL centres for off-job-training and all background knowledge training is carried out in the workplace. There are no records of planned or structured training on individual learning plans. Employers are not fully involved in planning activities with the assessor and there are no clear links between the very good employer training and assessments. Time allowed for learners to come away from busy workstations to consolidate learning or record assessments is very limited. In busy retail outlets there is little free time for study. Most employers/supervisors are happy for quiet times in work to be used constructively.

46. The referencing in learners' evidence portfolios is not clear. After each assessment visit, the assessor records which parts of the NVQ have been observed on an activity sheet. This is cross-referenced to other elements and a note is made of which evidence will reference to key skills. Some of the labelling of the portfolio-evidence is not clear, which makes future cross-referencing more difficult for the learners. There is no summary sheet at the front of portfolios and it is not easy to identify gaps in learning.

47. RTL recognised the need to give employers better guidance in the self-assessment report. Most managers or supervisors are confused about their roles and responsibilities in the learning process and do not fully understand the requirements of learning programmes. Verbal communication has, however, improved since the changeover. All employers have received a telephone call from RTL and there is now an employers' handbook as a result of employers' feedback. However, it is too soon to judge its impact.

48. The pre-placement activities have a clear structure, with one day each week devoted to background knowledge in retail. However, some learners do not have short work-experience tasters or work-trials before making a commitment to an employer.

Foundation programmes**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	47	3

49. There are 30 learners on the Life Skills programme at the Kensington centre and 11 at their centre in New Ferry. There are a further six learners on preparatory training. All Life Skills learners have barriers to employment and in some cases these are very significant. The Life Skills programme offers careers guidance, training in independent living, money management, citizenship, equality of opportunity, interview techniques and the preparation of curriculum vitae. The preparatory training programme offers training in a number of these areas, depending on learners' needs. There are four Life Skills tutors and one preparatory training tutor at the Kensington centre, one Life Skills tutor and one preparatory training tutor at the Wirral, with an overall manager for both centres. Learners are mostly referred through Connexions, although some potential preparatory training learners apply directly to the company. All learners attend an induction which includes details of the training programme, health and safety and equal opportunities. An assessment of learners' basic and key skills needs is carried out at the start of the programme. An individual learning plan is constructed through discussion with one of the tutors. In the past 16 months, 216 learners have joined the programme and 72 per cent completed their 12-week programme. Fifty-nine per cent of the learners progressed to mainstream training, further education or gained employment.

STRENGTHS

- good progression
- effective individual guidance and review
- particularly specialised, relevant staff experience

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate use of initial assessment
- poor support for literacy and numeracy needs
- limited range of learning opportunities

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- further revision of documents

50. Learners progress from the Life Skills and preparatory training programmes into work-based learning, further training or education or permanent employment. The progression rate is nearly 60 per cent over the past 16 months and during the current contract year from August 2002, this has risen to over 76 per cent. Learners are confident that the programme will enable them to move forward.

51. Learners are regularly and frequently reviewed, informally every one or two weeks and more formally every four weeks. The results of the reviews are recorded and reflect learners' achievement of elements of their schemes of work. Tutor groups are small, averaging less than 10 and this allows effective individual advice and guidance to be given. Learners are helped to provide a curriculum vitae after the tutors have identified the learners' strengths. There are extensive links with a range of outside agencies. Staff refer learners for professional counselling when it is appropriate and frequent use is made of agencies such as housing support organisations, counselling and advice for unplanned pregnancy. Learners speak positively of the efforts staff make to ensure that they can complete their programme. Life Skills and preparatory training staff from both centres meet each month where consideration is given to schemes of work, induction and initial assessment, as well as specific difficulties relating to individual learners. This pattern of meetings is supported by daily contact between staff at each centre who discuss session content, resources and the progress of individual learners. Staff in each centre know all learners personally. Although learners have a designated tutor who is responsible for their development and their review, they have the security of knowing that all staff, including the manager, are able to offer them advice and guidance.

52. There is a particularly good range of relevant and valuable life experiences among the staff which enables them to empathise with learners and more easily understand and relate to them. Their experiences include living independently, experiencing periods of unemployment, working in diverse occupations and being actively involved in sports. Personal interests are used effectively. One staff member has travelled extensively and uses this knowledge to broaden learners' horizons through considering different cultures and customs. This has also brought an interest in horticulture to the programme. Learners have now started to construct a garden using donations of materials from a local charitable organisation. Another member of staff has worked with socially excluded school pupils and is able to transfer this experience to the learner group. He has also worked extensively with community groups, teachers and with learners who have additional needs. The Life Skills team also includes a tutor who currently mentors young offenders and is involved in a literacy support initiative with them. This range of experience enables tutors to understand and motivate learners.

53. There is inadequate use of initial assessment. Initial assessment includes the use of recognised basic literacy and numeracy tests and a computer-based key skills assessment. Learners also complete questionnaires relating to health, personal circumstances and potential barriers to progression, such as involvement with the police or probation services. However, the way the information is used varies between the two centres. The results of initial assessment are not routinely communicated to learners. Insufficient time is given to adequately identify existing skills before learning

plans are compiled. Tutors are given the questionnaires which their learners complete during induction, but the information is not used to influence learning programmes. Many individual learning plans do not identify specific, measurable objectives. While tutors have a good knowledge of their learners' needs, it is not clear how they will be met. There are few challenging targets relating to individual learners and no timescales in several instances. Learners are not clear how their progress will be measured. Reviews are regular and frequent, but many concentrate on the completion of the Life Skills scheme of work and not on the achievement of agreed milestones which were identified through the initial assessment processes.

54. There is little support for learners who have identified literacy or numeracy needs, other than unstructured individual help from their tutor. None of the staff has sufficient expertise to deal with basic skills deficiencies. There are insufficient materials to assist learners who are below level 1. Training and learning activities do not have specific objectives relating to the development of basic skills and it is difficult to measure learners' progress in this area.

55. There are insufficient opportunities for learners to work outside of the training room. Opportunities to experience work tasters or for more extended work experience are very limited, particularly in one centre. Learners complete a questionnaire in anticipation of having work experience, but very few have attempted any significant practical, work-related activities. This weakness is recognised by the company and a tutor has recently been appointed to develop this area. All learners attend a sports centre on a weekly basis, but other than this, there are few opportunities for experiential learning. An outdoor activity had been undertaken several months ago but none of the current starters have attended this. There are few structured activities to develop co-operative working or problem-solving. Some learners have visited the library and museum and some have visited the cinema. It is left to individual tutors whether learners go out of the centre to work on practical projects. There are few opportunities planned to develop learners' awareness of their area and local community services.

56. Some of the documents in use at induction are not specific for the preparatory training programme and others are repetitive.

Good Practice

One tutor maintains a brief written record of any event which might impact on the progress of individual learners. This is useful to maintain informal guidance and support.

Poor Practice

Learners in a group situation at induction are required to complete forms on which they identify details relating to health, personal circumstances and police or probation records. The group situation does not allow for confidentiality and learners have not had time to build their trust in the company before revealing sensitive information.