

INSPECTION REPORT

Metals Industry Skills and Performance Limited

29 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
- **learnirect** 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

Metals Industry Skills and Performance Limited is a limited company, owned and led by employers, which seeks to achieve improvement in business performance in the United Kingdom (UK) metals industries. It has a wide range of activities, which include the provision of government-funded work-based learning for young people in those industries. It was formerly the national training organisation for the sector. It provides foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships for 136 learners on engineering, technology and manufacturing, and business, management and professional programmes.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the quality of learning on engineering, technology and manufacturing, and business administration, management and professional programmes is satisfactory. Metals Industry Skills and Performance Limited has satisfactory leadership and management but its equal opportunities and quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

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

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- good rates of achievement of additional qualifications
- effective use of particularly good key skills learning resources
- good support for learners
- highly effective links with employers in the metals' industry
- good use of additional funding to enhance learners' experience

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor progress reviews
- poor qualification progression monitoring
- insufficient use of management data to bring about improvements in training
- weak internal verification
- lack of a fully established quality assurance system
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more focus on work-based learning programmes in the business plan

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 24 days at Metals Industry Skills and Performance Limited (MetSkill) in July 2002. They examined a range of documents, including MetSkill's contracts with the Black Country and South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), the company's business plan, policies and procedures related to health and safety, equal opportunities and quality assurance, minutes of meetings and staff training records. The inspectors also examined 36 learners' portfolios and learners' achievement data. Forty-eight learners, 23 MetSkill staff and 13 assessors were interviewed. The inspectors visited 21 workplaces, conducted 18 interviews with employers and examined 40 individual learning plans. The inspectors observed 11 assessments and two progress reviews. In addition, six teaching sessions were observed.

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	1	3	1	1	0	6
Total	0	0	1	3	1	1	0	6

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. MetSkill, formerly Steel Training, was founded in 1990 and has been operating in its present form since April 2001. Until March 2002, it was also the national training organisation (NTO) for the metals industry. The company is owned by employers in the industry and provides a range of services for member and non-member organisations. The services include recruitment of new learners, and the planning, delivery and management of training programmes to meet the skills needs of the industry. As part of its role as an NTO, MetSkill was responsible for developing the awards and standards for training in the metals industry. It is currently involved in negotiations to set up one of the new industry-sector skills councils.

3. MetSkill has two operational centres, one in Tipton and one in Sheffield. It has 55 member companies, many of which are national employers. MetSkill's youth programmes team provides work-based learning and modern apprenticeship programmes primarily to the metals industries. There are 136 learners on modern apprenticeship programmes funded by the Black Country and South Yorkshire LSCs. Some off-the-job training is carried out by subcontractors.

4. The metals industry has gone through a massive restructuring process in response to international competition. It is now repositioning itself as a manufacturer of specialised metal products. As a sector, it aims to recruit high-calibre young people. There are many opportunities for able young people to progress to well-paid jobs with good career prospects.

5. In May 2002, the unemployment rate was 4.8 per cent in the Black Country and 4.5 per cent in South Yorkshire, both higher than the national rate of 3 per cent. According to the national census in 1991, the percentage of the population belonging to minority ethnic groups was 6.2 per cent in England, 8.2 per cent in the West Midlands and 4.4 per cent in Yorkshire and Humberside. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 45.8 per cent in the West Midlands and 43.1 per cent in Yorkshire and Humberside, both below the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

6. In engineering, technology and manufacturing, there is a wide range of workplaces which provide good experience for the learners. Learners' prior achievements are taken into account fully, and training is planned accordingly. Many learners achieve additional qualifications which broaden their knowledge and increase their effectiveness at work. The learners benefit from good resources for key skills training, and they complete work-based projects to demonstrate their ability and knowledge. Retention rates are good, but learners make slow progress towards achieving their qualifications. Training towards the metal processing and allied operations national vocational qualification (NVQ) lacks structure. Progress reviews are poor. Some employers do not pay sufficient attention to health and safety matters in the workplaces.

7. In the business administration, management and professional area of learning, learners have good support in the workplace from assessors. There is an innovative approach to key skills development using work-based projects. Learners also gain a good range of additional qualifications which equip them well for their jobs and for the future. Retention and achievement rates on foundation modern apprenticeships are good, but there has been slow progress in the past two years. Learners' progress is poorly monitored. Employers are not involved in the planning of on-the-job training. The learners' progress reviews are poor.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

8. MetSkill has a board of directors consisting of a chairperson, two vice-chairmen and 13 other elected members representing a cross-section of its member companies. MetSkill is managed by a chief executive and three directors who have responsibility for operations including work-based learning programmes, marketing and communications, and a lean enterprise initiative. The work-based learning and modern apprenticeship programmes are organised by a youth programmes manager, assisted by three co-ordinators. There is also an accountant and two financial administrators. MetSkill uses four self-employed associate assessors to provide assessment and monitor learners' progress. It also subcontracts with three private training providers and five colleges of further education, to provide off-the-job skills training and assessment.

9. MetSkill has an equal opportunities policy, and a quality assurance policy and procedures. These are currently under review. MetSkill has held the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people, since 1993. The company has produced two self-assessment reports, one in 1998 and one in March 2002.

STRENGTHS

- highly effective links with employers in the metals industry
- good use of additional funding to enhance learners' experience
- effective internal communications
- broad range of promotional activities to encourage participation by under-represented groups

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient use of management data to bring about improvements to training
- poor identification and support of learners who need help with basic skills
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities
- lack of a fully established quality assurance system
- weak internal verification

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more focus on work-based learning programmes in the business plan

10. MetSkill, through its employer ownership, training programmes and its wider industry development remit, has developed highly effective links with employers. These links have helped the company to develop and improve its modern apprenticeship programmes. The youth programmes manager and the other development managers

work with the two LSCs on workforce development projects. These projects, and MetSkill's close association with trade associations throughout the metals sector, have encouraged more employers to participate in modern apprenticeship training.

11. MetSkill makes good use of additional funding to increase its investment in training. It uses subscriptions from its member companies and grants from the European Social Fund to significantly enhance learners' experience. It supports learners who continue their training beyond the period funded by the LSC. Over 80 per cent of MetSkill's learners participate in training for additional qualifications, and the achievement rate is good. Courses include team leader training for potential supervisors, metal industry awareness for all engineering learners, lift truck driving, higher national certificates, and a range of self-improvement and motivation programmes.

12. There are effective internal communications within the company. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. MetSkill has a written communications strategy. There are regular, minuted management meetings. The minutes clearly show what was discussed and what follow-up action was to be taken. The director responsible for the youth programmes ensures that there is effective communication between the senior management team and those involved in the training process. There are regular youth programme team meetings, which are used to update staff, share good practice and monitor performance against LSC contracts. Staff regularly feed back to the management team on areas that could be improved. MetSkill issues regular questionnaires to learners. There have been recent improvements in the poor training by one subcontractor as a result of learners' feedback and intervention by MetSkill. MetSkill produces a widely distributed quarterly newsletter which includes updates on changes in qualifications, celebrations of learners' successes and news about metal companies. There is much informal communication within the organisation, with good interaction at all levels. Members of the senior management team are easily accessible to all staff, and the board of directors receives regular briefings about the performance of the training programmes.

13. MetSkill has a planning process in which the board reviews and updates company strategy and agrees the business plan and budget for the year ahead, in March each year. The staff receive briefing on this plan, which is also used for individual target setting. However, the plan focuses on budgetary matters and workforce development within the industry, rather than on the work-based learning. It does not set clear objectives for the training of young people. The youth programme manager has recently written a departmental business plan laying out solutions to a number of weaknesses. Some of the actions recommended are being implemented. However, it is too early to judge their impact on the learners.

14. MetSkill has the ability to produce a range of data for monitoring purposes, but makes insufficient use of such data. MetSkill has invested significantly in a new data system which is expected to come into use shortly. MetSkill's financial management arrangements are thorough and systematic. Detailed monthly finance reports are produced in consultation with the youth programmes manager. Some local and

national surveys and labour analysis are used to plan which training programmes will be offered. MetSkill has well-developed arrangements for monitoring NVQ recruitment and achievement rates for contractual purposes. However, it does not routinely use management information to guide action-planning by staff or decision-making by managers. Data are not routinely used for comparison. There is no year-on-year analysis of the performance of each training programme. No targets are set to improve achievement and retention rates. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

15. MetSkill's support arrangements for learners with basic skills needs are poor. There is some initial assessment of learners' basic and key skills before they join their programmes. However, this is primarily used to ensure that learners have the necessary skills to start training. There is no strategy in place to support learners, should additional needs be identified at this or at any later stage of learning. Learners are tested at the discretion of the training co-ordinator. Testing is not systematic, and the results are not always used to develop individual learning plans. The reports of learners' progress reviews rarely mention their learning support needs. Many learners are given basic skills tests when they attend college, or at the start of other subcontracted training.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 4**

16. MetSkill has an equal opportunities policy, a copy of which is given to staff during induction. The policy is under review, but has not been updated for more than two years. It does not reflect current equal opportunities legislation, and still refers to MetSkills under its previous name. The current policy does not identify individual responsibilities. It does not define the scope of the policy. Staff have attended some training in equal opportunities. Employers and learners have little awareness of equality of opportunity. Learners have little recall of equal opportunities being explained during their induction. No written policy is given to the learners.

17. MetSkill uses a broad range of promotional activities to encourage learners into training. It is careful to promote equal opportunities by using positive images of women and learners from minority ethnic communities. MetSkill has developed a broad range of highly informative and well-presented materials, including videos, a CD-ROM, and colourful pamphlets and information leaflets. To promote training and career opportunities within the metals industries, MetSkill has prepared specific information for the Black Country Connexions Service, youth and community groups and primary school children. Work placements are also used to encourage young people to consider a career in the industry. Inspectors attended a well-planned and targeted promotional event for careers advisers, young people and school teachers in the Black Country. Two women engineers employed by MetSkill are used as good role models. They regularly attend careers fairs to promote opportunities for women in engineering.

18. There is insufficient monitoring of employers' and subcontractors' equal opportunities arrangements. MetSkill's training agreement with learners includes an explanation of the company's policies and procedures for resolving grievances and complaints. MetSkill's staff and learners know who to approach if they wish to make a complaint. Most complaints are dealt with informally. Equal opportunities does not form part of the company's business planning, staff development arrangements or learners' review procedure. There is insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace or at subcontracted training providers. Subcontractors and employers are not vetted thoroughly enough to establish their commitment to equality of opportunity. MetSkill fails to ensure that all employers and subcontractors have an equal opportunities policy and procedures. MetSkill's own equal opportunities arrangements and its agreements with employers are not enough to protect learners from harassment in the workplace. However, there have been no reported incidents of discrimination.

19. MetSkill has not set targets for participation in training by under-represented groups. Of the 136 learners, there are 16 women and 11 men on business administration programmes, and 100 men and one woman on engineering programmes. MetSkill has four learners from minority ethnic groups and no learners with disabilities. It has no formal strategy to bring these proportions closer to those in the local populations. The company has contacts with local schools and has been involved in careers events to try to broaden its range of learners, and market careers in the metals industry. It has not explored other more effective channels to attract learners from minority ethnic groups.

For example, in some of the companies in the West Midlands, 85 per cent of the workforce are from minority ethnic groups, yet they have not been encouraged to recruit people to the industry by word of mouth.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

20. MetSkill has a quality assurance policy, but some of its arrangements for the continuous improvement of learning and training are not fully established. Training and learning are evaluated at all stages including initial assessment, induction, creation of an individual learning plan, and progress reviews. However there is little strategic analysis of the findings. Learners are asked closed questions and their answers do not give enough qualitative information to plan improvements. The methods of assessment used in business administration are limited, with not enough emphasis being placed on direct observation of training. The action plan devised by the youth programmes manager focuses on improving processes, but does not consider their benefits to the learners. It has only recently been implemented, and it is difficult to judge its impact at this stage. The quality of handouts given to learners ranges from excellent to poor. Assessors provide their own handouts. They are not standardised, and their quality is not checked. There is no overall strategy for sampling resources. The standard of learners' work ranges from poor in some aspects of engineering, to excellent in key skills. Reviews of learners' progress towards their vocational qualification and their key skills awards are carried out independently of each other. Action plans do not include specific targets or timescales. A range of documents is used to record learners' progress reviews. MetSkill does not routinely check the quality of its subcontractors' work. There is no systematic observation of subcontractors carrying out training or progress reviews. Managers do not observe reviews conducted by MetSkill's own staff.

21. Internal verification at MetSkill is weak. There is no internal verification strategy. Learners are not all given written assessment plans. There is no standard procedure for feedback from the internal verifier to learners. MetSkill relies on external verifiers to quality assure internal verification and assessment. Managers do not check the quality of internal verification themselves. The approach to assessment planning, internal verification and review procedures differs between MetSkill's assessors and subcontracted assessors. Assessors do not always issue written action plans or use the same review documents. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. A strategy to deal with the problem has been developed, but it is too early to judge its impact on the learners.

22. MetSkill developed its second self-assessment report through discussions with its youth programme team members. Learners, employers and subcontractors were not involved in the process in any meaningful way. The evidence produced was not specific enough.

Good Practice

MetSkill is sponsoring and training six new work-based assessors to increase the opportunities for assessment in the workplace.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	101	3

23. MetSkill trains 101 learners in engineering, technology and manufacturing. In the Black Country, there are four foundation and 12 advanced modern apprentices on engineering programmes, and seven foundation and seven advanced modern apprentices on manufacturing programmes. In South Yorkshire, there are seven foundation and 54 advanced modern apprentices on engineering programmes, and nine foundation and one advanced modern apprentice on manufacturing programmes. The learners take a range of courses including mechanical and electrical engineering, metal processing and allied operations, and laboratory and associated technical activities. All the learners are employed.

24. There are two full-time and three part-time associate assessors for engineering and manufacturing programmes, and two key skills assessors. All have vocational and training qualifications, and five have qualifications in occupational safety. Learners are recruited through the careers service, careers conventions, school open evenings, and by local advertising. For learners whose modern apprenticeship includes a technical certificate, off-the-job training is subcontracted to a local college or another training provider. Learners are given their background knowledge training in the workplace. Key skills training is available either at a monthly drop-in session, or a four-day block at MetSkill's premises, or is provided in the workplace by MetSkill's assessors. Learners are encouraged to take additional 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)																
	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			36		22		10		13		8		14		3	
Retained*			0	0	0	0	1	10	3	23	8	100	13	93	3	100
Successfully completed			0	0	0	0	0	0	3	23	6	75	6	43	0	0
Still in learning			31	86	18	82	8	80	9	69	2	25	4	29	2	67

*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		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	24		15		9		9		24		25					
Retained*	0		0	0	8	89	9	100	21	88	24	96				
Successfully completed	0		0	0	4	44	6	67	14	58	23	92				
Still in learning	14		9	60	3	33	1	11	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

- wide range of good-quality work placements
- good use of accreditation of prior learning
- effective use of particularly good key skills learning resources
- good retention rates
- good rates of achievement of additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- some slow progress towards completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- unstructured training for metals processing and allied operations NVQ
- poor progress reviews
- insufficient attention to health and safety by some employers

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better sharing of effective methods of background knowledge training among employers

25. Learners benefit from a rich experience of work with a wide range of good employers. MetSkill has learners in 55 companies ranging from small private businesses to very large international companies. Their production processes include forging and metal working, casting and foundry work, rolling and coating operations and structural fabrication. Some learners are placed with highly specialised companies. Others benefit from moving between companies and gaining a diverse range of experiences.

26. Good use is made of the learners' prior achievement. MetSkill carries out good

initial assessments which take into account the learners' achievements, and allocates them to an appropriate stage of the programme. Learners have their previous awards credited towards their current programme. Several learners have general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) and key skills awards, and their learning plans have been adjusted to reflect this. Learners who had achieved a level 2 NVQ have been put onto advanced modern apprenticeship programmes.

27. MetSkill's learners make effective use of particularly good key skills resources. MetSkill has produced a comprehensive key skills development pack which contains detailed guidelines and instructions for learners and supervisors. The pack allows key skills assignments to be applied to any company and draws upon the learners' experiences in their working environment. The pack has been used effectively to allow problems in the workplace to be solved by the learners and their supervisors. In some cases, the projects have produced commercial benefit to the learners' companies. MetSkill has two members of staff dedicated to key skills training.

28. Very few advanced modern apprentices leave their programmes early. For the years 1995 to 1998, retention rates for advanced modern apprentices exceeded 90 per cent. Most learners who started between 1998-99 and 2002-03 have not yet completed their programme. However, the proportion who have either achieved all the targets in their modern apprenticeship framework, or are still in learning, exceeds 80 per cent for each year. Retention rates for foundation modern apprentices have been good in the past. Between 1996-97 and 1999-2000, the retention rate remained at 88 per cent or more. However, forty per cent of learners who started programmes in 2000-01, and forty-two per cent of those who started in 2001-02 have left early. The potential retention rate for these two years is therefore less than sixty per cent.

29. Learners make slow progress towards completion of their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Some advanced modern apprentices who started programmes over six years ago have yet to complete them. The learners taking longest to complete the framework are those on the laboratory testing programme. They give their work priority over the completion of their qualifications. They have progressed with their careers, and are continuing with their qualifications at a slower pace. Employers interviewed felt that this programme required a longer timescale for learners to be fully competent. Foundation modern apprentices are also making slow progress.

30. There is a high rate of achievement of additional qualifications by learners. These prepare learners for a wide variety of careers and improve their employment prospects. Courses include lift truck driving, specialist tool use, manual handling and crane-slinging and lifting. Laboratory testing learners take internationally recognised courses in non-destructive testing. Some learners also progress to higher national awards in mechanical, production and electrical engineering.

31. Training for the 12 modern apprentices undertaking the metal processing and allied operations NVQ is unstructured. Their modern apprenticeship framework does not require a technical certificate or a supporting background knowledge qualification. On-

the-job training is carried out by line managers, supervisors, team leaders or the assessors. There is no overarching plan for training learners in background knowledge. Documents are available which relate tasks to the modern apprenticeship standards, but these are not completed until towards the end of the programme. Learners are not clear about the progress they have made or the competences they have successfully demonstrated. This makes continuous internal verification difficult. One employer gives each learner an individual plan which sets out the tasks required in each section of the programme. There is no system for sharing this kind of good practice with other employers.

32. Learners' progress reviews are poor. They are not a useful aid to improvement and do not evaluate the progress made by learners towards achieving their qualifications. Progress reviews for key skills training and vocational training are conducted separately. Most employers are not involved in the review process. There are three types of review documents in use, but it is not known which is the most up-to-date. Employers' and learners' views are not reported. Most of the targets set are open ended. Reviews are not linked to individual learning plans and not used to reinforce equal opportunities. There is also a progress review document for key skills, but most of the comments inspectors saw were of little use as they were bland and non-specific. Targets set for key skills progression do not include timescales for completion.

33. Too little attention is given to health and safety in some workplaces. MetSkill carries out scheduled health and safety visits to the 55 work placements. Inspectors found that in three workplaces the conditions were unsuitable for learners. There were health and safety problems, including neglected work areas, fluid spillage on the floor, missing guards from moving machinery, trip hazards, inaccessible fire extinguishers and blocked fire exits. Some employees did not wear personal protective equipment given to them. This sets a poor example to learners and does not promote health and safety.

34. Training resources are good. MetSkill has produced some good learning materials that are now being sold commercially. Pastoral support for learners is satisfactory, although much of it is informal. The learners are able to contact the assessors by telephone or e-mail. The assessors then provide support from within MetSkill or bring in outside agencies.

35. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Evidence of learners' competence is stored in the NVQ portfolio, but is only cross-referenced to the standards as the learner nears completion of their programme. This makes it difficult to monitor progress and carry out internal verification. Internal verification is poor. Policies and procedures exist, but most portfolios are verified near or at completion. No evidence of internal verification appears in the portfolios and the learners have no knowledge of the process. Assessment processes and practices are satisfactory.

Good Practice

A metals industry learner, through the completion of a key skills work-based project, identified inefficiencies at work. His employer now uses the learner's findings and recommendations to save a substantial amount of money.

Business administration, management & professional**Grade 3**

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

36. MetSkill offers work-based learning for foundation and advanced modern apprentices on business administration, management and professional programmes. The foundation modern apprenticeship is a one-year programme and the advanced is a two-year programme. Most learners are employed in the metals industry. There is a small group of administration learners who transferred to MetSkill after the closure of another training provider. There are 10 advanced and 17 foundation modern apprentices. Learners work towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3, together with key skills awards. The Black Country site has 11 advanced and six foundation modern apprentices. The South Yorkshire site has one advanced and nine foundation modern apprentices.

37. Learners attend off-the-job training at MetSkill's premises to complete a metal industry awareness course. There is no off-the-job training for the NVQ programme. All learners are given a full day induction which covers aspects of health and safety, introduces them to the NVQ process and assesses their key skills and basic skills. They are also given a further four days of key skills training. Assessors visit learners every three to four weeks for assessment and to help them build portfolios of evidence. Formal reviews are carried out approximately every 12 weeks.

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)																
	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			12		1		2		1							
Retained*			0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100						
Successfully completed			0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100						
Still in learning			9	75	0	0	1	50	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)																
	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			13		8		12		14		33		43			
Retained*			0	0	5	62	12	100	14	100	33	100	43	100		
Successfully completed			0	0	0	0	8	67	12	86	29	88	33	77		
Still in learning			10	77	5	62	2	17	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 achievement rate on foundation modern apprenticeship programmes
- good support for learners
- good use of work-based projects to enhance learners' key skills training
- good rates of achievement of additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- some slow progress towards completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- poor monitoring of learners' progress towards achieving their qualifications
- unplanned on-the-job training
- insufficient involvement of employers in reviews

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more learning resources

38. There are good retention and achievement rates on the foundation modern apprenticeship programme. Between 1996 and 1999, the retention rate was 100 per cent every year. Learners' achievement rates have been consistently high, ranging from 67 to 88 per cent. However, learners who started programmes in 1999-2000 have made slow progress, and two of the 12 are still in learning. No learner who started in 2000-01 or 2001-02 has yet achieved a qualification. MetSkill continues to support learners who do not achieve within the planned funding period. At the request of the LSC, MetSkill took on six foundation and one advanced modern apprentice from two other providers. They have since left the programme, and this has distorted the retention and achievement rates. The number of advanced modern apprentices has

been too small to make meaningful judgements.

39. There is good support from assessors for learners in the workplace. Assessors visit learners at work every two to four weeks. Visits are planned to suit learners' and employers' needs. Most assessors have good subject knowledge and form supportive relationships with learners, in many cases giving learners their mobile telephone numbers to make contact easier. Learners receive thorough and effective guidance on the NVQ requirements and are fully involved in the NVQ process. Assessors help learners identify the forms of evidence which will best demonstrate their competence in the workplace. Many learners have workplace mentors. MetSkill offers learners continuity of support from assessors. For example, when another training provider closed its business, MetSkill responded to the LSC request, and not only took on the learners but also their assessor.

40. MetSkill uses effective work-based key skills projects to improve learners' competence. The company has devised a good key skills toolkit which guides learners through appropriate exercises to raise the level of their knowledge in each of the key skills. Each learner is supplied with a copy of the toolkit. Key skills projects are linked directly to workplace requirements and negotiated with employers. Guidance is given to the trainers to maximise use of the materials. Some learners have researched and prepared publicity material for their employers. For example, one learner has developed a project in collaboration with his manager which will optimise the use of warehouse space. This approach to key skills training is relatively new and is beginning to have an impact on learners' progress.

41. There is a good rate of achievement of additional qualifications. All learners participate in a range of additional training which broadens their expertise and enhances their performance in the workplace. Learners have gained many qualifications including ordinary national certificates, basic computer literacy qualifications, modules in word processing, text processing and typing awards, and have taken part in spreadsheet, database, Internet and e-mail courses.

42. There is poor monitoring of learners' progress towards their qualifications. There is no unit accreditation of NVQs. Learners do not know what progress they are making with their training and are not well-motivated. Most learners collect a wide range of evidence covering a number of units. Final assessment and internal verification is left until late in the programme. Evidence is not cross-referenced to the NVQ standards as it is gathered. Learners are not accredited with individual units, so those who are unable to complete the programme receive no recognition of the effort they have made and cannot use the units to contribute to further training. A much more structured approach to assessment and recording is being developed by MetSkill's assessment team, and this is beginning to have an impact on new learners' portfolios. Learners are not given any text books to help them gain background knowledge. They either obtain the books themselves or rely on their assessors to provide handouts. MetSkill does not ensure that learners' have sufficient good quality learning resources.

43. The on-the-job learning is unplanned. It broadly meets the needs of the employers. However, it does not have clear objectives. It is not recorded and linked to the NVQ training. Learners do not have specific targets for completion of learning activities in the workplace. With the exception of that given to learners based in MetSkill's own premises, there is little recording of what training is being given so that assessment can be planned around it.

44. There is insufficient involvement of employers in learners' progress reviews. MetSkill carries out progress reviews every three months. Learners are not given an opportunity to identify their own achievements and areas for improvement. Some employers are not fully involved in the process, and some learners do not understand the purpose of progress reviews. Learners and employers very rarely make any comments on the review process or its findings. There are three sets of review documents. Key skills and the main vocational qualification are assessed separately.

Good Practice

A learner transferred to MetSkill from another training provider had been working in customer services. When her job role changed, MetSkill moved her quickly to an administration programme.