

INSPECTION REPORT

Howarth Hancorn

02 September, 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

Howarth Hancorn is a private training company based in Hereford. The company provides work-based learning in business administration and management, retailing and customer service, and hospitality, sport and leisure.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the quality of work-based learning in retailing and customer service, and hospitality, sport and leisure is unsatisfactory. However, the quality of work-based learning in business administration and management is satisfactory. Howarth Hancorn's leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The quality assurance in the company is unsatisfactory, but equality of opportunity is good.

GRADES

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

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

Retailing, customer service & transportation	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- good internal and external communications
- good training for learners in equal opportunities
- good partnership arrangements with employers
- good individual support for learners

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks
- poor management of key skills training
- weak strategic planning
- weak assessment planning
- poor monitoring of quality assurance procedures

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better short-term target-setting in learners' progress reviews
- better structured induction for learners
- more detailed analysis of equal opportunities data

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at Howarth Hancorn in September 2002. The inspectors interviewed 37 learners and conducted 16 interviews with members of staff, including both the directors of the company. They reviewed 37 portfolios and files, and the individual learning plans of 66 learners. They visited 24 work placements and interviewed 19 workplace supervisors. They inspected the company's policies and procedures, internal and external verifiers' reports, training materials, the company's business plan and records, and minutes of meetings. Two learning sessions were observed. Inspectors also made use of the company's self-assessment report produced in May 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Howarth Hancorn has its offices and training room in the centre of Hereford. The company was formed in 1996 by two directors. It provides work-based learning in business administration and management, retailing and customer service, and hospitality, sport and leisure. Learners receive on- and off-the-job training. The company has contracts to deliver national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and short courses to local businesses and the local authority and a contract with a broadcasting company to deliver training at their London sites. Howarth Hancorn has eight members of staff, comprising two working directors, three full-time and one part-time assessors, and one full-time and one part-time administrator.

3. Howarth Hancorn currently has 106 learners, most of whom are employed. There are 35 foundation modern apprentices and 70 advanced modern apprentices. One learner is working for an NVQ. There are four learners taking training in hospitality, but because of the low number of learners, this area was not inspected. In business administration and management there are 16 learners, of whom 11 are advanced modern apprentices and five are foundation modern apprentices. In retailing and customer service there are 60 learners, 48 of whom are advanced modern apprentices and 12 are foundation modern apprentices. In sport and leisure there are 10 advanced modern apprentices and 15 foundation modern apprentices. There is also one learner working towards an NVQ in this occupational area. In 2000, Howarth Hancorn developed a new course to provide training in the leisure industry for 16-18 year old foundation modern apprentices, who would not otherwise have been able to work in this sector until they were 18. The training is funded by Hereford and Worcester Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

4. Hereford is in the geographical centre of the county of Herefordshire. It is the main administrative, leisure and commercial centre of the county. The principal employment sectors are the wholesaling and retailing trades, manufacturing, and health and social work. The unemployment rate in Herefordshire in May 2002 was 1.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 3 per cent. At the time of the 1991 census, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups was 0.6 per cent, significantly lower than the national average of 6.2 per cent. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers in Herefordshire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 54 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

5. Howarth Hancorn provides training in business administration, management, retailing and customer service, and sport and leisure. The achievement rate for foundation modern apprentices in retailing and customer service over the period 1998 to 2001 fell from 60 per cent to zero. Only one learner recruited after 2000 has completed a modern apprenticeship framework. In sport and leisure, only 16 per cent of those learners who started in 1999-2000 have completed a modern apprenticeship framework. None of those who started in 2001-01 and 2001-02 has yet completed a framework. Retention rates in both of these occupational areas are unsatisfactory. The achievement rates for learners in business administration are generally satisfactory. There are small numbers and no consistent trends. Both foundation modern apprentices recruited in 1999-2000 completed their framework and both of those recruited in 2001-02 remain on the programme. Only three out of seven recruited in 2000-01 remain on the programme. Sixty per cent of the advanced modern apprentices recruited in 1999-2000 achieved the full framework, but only 25 per cent are retained from those recruited in 2000-01. Seventy-five per cent of those recruited in 2001-02 remain on the programme.

6. Assessors at Howarth Hancorn have a good rapport and effective working relationships with learners. Pastoral support is very effective, and assessors are available and ready to assist learners when their support is needed. Howarth Hancorn works closely with employers. A good partnership has developed with one employer which offers a new opportunity for training in sport and leisure for younger learners. The progress of learners is regularly reviewed and regularly assessed, but these processes are insufficiently planned and poorly distinguished from one another. The learners are unsure of their progress. Key skills training is poorly managed. Key skills are introduced at the end of many learners' programmes. Neither learners nor employers are clear about the importance of key skills. Strategic planning is weak, and the results of annual reviews do not contribute significantly to new revisions of the business plan.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

7. Howarth Hancorn has two working directors. One is responsible for business and development and the other is the operations director, responsible for the day-to-day management of the company. The company has recently been restructured, removing the post of training manager. There are eight members of staff. In addition to the two directors there are three full-time assessors, one part-time assessor, a full-time office manager and a part-time finance administrator. The company also uses a self-employed assessor, and offers work placements to learners working as administrative support in its office. All company staff have job descriptions. New employees receive an induction and are mentored for an agreed period by colleagues. All staff have an annual appraisal of performance. The company has a three-year business plan which is annually updated and one-year development and staff training plans. One of the directors is responsible for equal opportunities and has produced an equal opportunities strategy, policy and procedures, including policies about harassment and bullying. There is a quality assurance manual covering most aspects of the company's activities. The contents of this manual are updated each year and copies are now provided on disk to each member of staff. In August 2000, the company was accredited with the Investors in People standard, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. Self-assessment reports have been produced since 1999. The most recent was produced in May 2002.

STRENGTHS

- good internal and external communications
- open and consultative management
- good training for learners in equal opportunities
- effective promotion of equal opportunities to employers
- very effective six-monthly reviews with employers

WEAKNESSES

- weak strategic planning
- poor management of key skills training
- slow response to some identified weaknesses
- insufficient application of some equal opportunities procedures
- some ineffective quality assurance procedures
- poor monitoring of quality assurance procedures

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more detailed analysis of equal opportunities data

8. Internal communications are good at Howarth Hancorn. This strength is recognised in the self-assessment report. There are formal meetings of directors and managers every three months and these are supported by frequent informal discussions. There are monthly meetings for all staff that cover the complete range of business activities. Staff are made fully aware of the company's performance and discuss, review and agree their individual business targets based on that performance. They review learners' recruitment, retention and achievement rates, along with factors affecting learners' performance. A standard and comprehensive agenda includes quality assurance reviews, health and safety, and equal opportunities. The meetings are clearly minuted with identified action points which relate to the improvement of the management of training. One member of part-time staff voluntarily attends these meetings outside working hours because she values them so highly. Brief daily meetings allow staff to exchange information and remain up-to-date with routine business. Formal and informal communications with employers are frequent and very effective. Employers have a clear understanding of their relationship with Howarth Hancorn and express enthusiasm for, and trust in the company. There is a well-produced newsletter for employers which keeps them informed of formal and social matters within the company and developments in training and qualifications. The company holds events with employers to strengthen relationships and to celebrate the success of learners.

9. The directors at Howarth Hancorn have an open and approachable manner. All staff express a loyalty to, and enthusiasm for, the company and enjoy their work. They are confident and secure in stating their views and ideas and asking questions at every level within the company. All staff have opportunities to influence change and introduce improvements for the learners. For example, equal opportunities workshops were suggested and developed by one assessor who had attended an external training event. The system used to monitor learners' progress was designed by the assessors and is reviewed and evaluated by them. Howarth Hancorn has a strong ethos of teamwork and shared values.

10. Strategic planning at Howarth Hancorn is weak. There is a three-year business plan which is reviewed annually. However, new versions of the plan do not take full account of the points identified by these reviews. The plan does not include sufficient risk analysis or contingency arrangements to deal with any changes which may adversely affect learners' progress and rates of achievement. The company has experienced considerable difficulty in readjusting when such changes have taken place. Howarth Hancorn has found difficulty in predicting income, and a great deal of the directors' time has been spent dealing with financial matters. The management information system does not provide timely and sufficient information to support target-setting. Manual systems are used to support electronic data collection. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report. The annual staff development plan is generated through the annual appraisal system, which is valued by staff. Staff have a variety of opportunities for training, but the targets within individual training plans sometimes reflect personal wishes rather than the needs of the company, which are not always met.

11. The management of key skills training is poor. This weakness is recognised in the

self-assessment report. A document identifying points for action was produced in August 2002, but the company has only just begun to work on these. The integration of key skills training with occupational training has only just begun. Structured training in key skills began in June 2002. For many learners this was close to the end of their programmes. Staff have received training in key skills, but are not yet fully confident in providing and assessing this area of work. Some employers and learners do not understand the importance and role of key skills training in the modern apprenticeship frameworks. Nineteen learners had been entered for the most recent series of key skills tests but only four attended.

12. The response to some identified weaknesses is slow. This is sometimes the result of a failure to balance priorities. In the recent past the directors spent a great deal of time considering complex financial issues, whereas the poor rate of achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks by learners, which was identified as a key business problem, was only looked at just before the inspection. The late introductions of a key skills strategy and an operating plan are further examples of significant points which have not been rectified in a timely manner. Another example would be the company's response to problems with the learners' planned assessment programmes. The directors identified the source of the difficulties but the remedial action taken had little immediate impact on the problems with learners' planned assessment programmes.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 2**

13. Howarth Hancorn has an up-to-date policy and a comprehensive strategy to promote equal opportunities. This strategy includes regular training for learners in equal opportunities. The training provides a particularly good account of equal opportunities issues and procedures for learners in all occupational areas. In addition, the company holds equal opportunities workshops for learners several times a year and the effectiveness of these is evaluated by those who attend.

14. Assessors regularly discuss equal opportunities with employers. Employers are invited to send members of their staff who are not registered learners to attend Howarth Hancorn's equal opportunities workshops. Senior managers from Howarth Hancorn formally discuss equal opportunities with employers at twice-yearly operational review meetings. At these meetings, employers are actively encouraged to improve the awareness of equal opportunities throughout their organisations. These operational reviews and subsequent meetings are very effective in developing awareness of equal opportunities among employers' staff, especially those managing and supervising learners. These activities were described, but not recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

15. The directors and staff at Howarth Hancorn have a good understanding of the local community and the various equal opportunities issues that it faces. There are only small numbers of people from minority ethnic groups in Herefordshire, but the training provided for learners does look at cultural awareness. Equal opportunities data are monitored and analysed within the company, but this needs to be done in greater detail. Action has been taken to increase the number of young men on business administration and retailing and customer service programmes. The company has ensured that it does not use stereotypical images on its publicity materials and is actively participating in local community projects aimed at helping those with difficulties and disabilities to gain employment and training. Two members of staff are trained to provide counselling for learners with social difficulties and emotional problems.

16. There are procedures covering the monitoring of equal opportunities among employers and learners, but the recording of this activity is sometimes poor. The position of learners with regard to equal opportunities is considered at each progress review. Learners know of Howarth Hancorn's anti-harassment and bullying and complaints procedures. However, on the form recording learners' progress reviews, the section relating to equal opportunities was often filled in only cursorily and was sometimes left blank. Staff report on matters relating to equal opportunities only when problems are identified. Although the equal opportunities procedures do refer to equal opportunities issues being recorded on job specifications, the last one issued to a new member of staff did not include them. The member of staff was fully aware of the company's belief in, and promotion of, equal opportunities, however, and the job advertisement had referred to this.

17. Howarth Hancorn's premises are in a listed building. This means that, although the

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building is old and there is poor access to all parts of it, it cannot legally be altered. However, Howarth Hancorn has arrangements in place to move training, if needed, to other buildings which have good access and accommodation for those with physical disabilities, including wheelchair users.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

18. There is a very effective system to ensure that employers provide feedback on Howarth Hancorn's work. It is based on six-monthly operational reviews with each employer, which are used to evaluate all aspects of Howarth Hancorn's work with them. There is a comprehensive agenda for discussions with employers and Howarth Hancorn's directors focus on obtaining constructive criticism from them. Detailed action plans are drawn up and agreed with each employer. The employers' evaluations and the action plans are fed into the quality assurance and self-assessment arrangements. Improvements have been made as a direct result of these reviews. Learners' views are obtained by evaluation surveys and the results of these are considered in the monthly staff meetings and used to guide the self-assessment process.

19. There are quality assurance procedures covering most of the company's activities. Some procedures are not sufficiently detailed to ensure that learners consistently receive good training at Howarth Hancorn. The procedures do not always specify who is responsible for particular activities, when and how the use of the procedures will be monitored, and where particular records should be kept. This makes it difficult for quality assurance arrangements to be applied systematically and for problems and omissions to be identified and remedied. The quality assurance system has not identified some important weaknesses, such as the planning of some learners' programmes, learners' confusion between progress reviews and assessment planning, or the introduction of training in key skills towards the end of the training programmes. The system does not promote continuous improvement and does not always focus clearly enough on the learners' experiences. There is some confusion within the company as to who is responsible for specific activities and there is poor management of records. Often records are kept by individual members of staff and are not readily available for review or monitoring. In the case of some initial assessments of learners' basic and key skills, the information is kept by their assessors or by the test administrator, rather than being recorded on their individual learning plans or kept in their personal files. The system does not guarantee that the information held about learners will be used to guide or construct their training programmes. These weaknesses in quality assurance procedures are not identified in the self-assessment report. However, there is a procedure whereby the directors observe staff carrying out training. This is used as part of the staff appraisal system and helps to improve the quality of training within the company.

20. The monitoring of the application of quality assurance procedures is poor. Where there are timescales for the monitoring of the application of procedures they are not always followed. When monitoring has taken place it has not always identified some important omissions in the way that records have been made. Some records and documents, such as learners' progress reviews, are completed in a perfunctory way and lack necessary details, such as signatures and dates. These omissions were not identified by quality assurance audits or monitoring activities.

21. Internal verification is of a satisfactory standard. There are formal procedures for

how it should be conducted in the company's quality assurance manuals and they comply with the requirements of awarding bodies. There are internal verification sampling plans for all of the occupational areas covering assessors, learners and NVQ units. Assessors are observed at least twice a year carrying out assessments, and constructive feedback is provided on their performance. Issues regarding assessments are discussed at staff meetings. Separate regular meetings are also held between internal verifiers and assessors to ensure that assessments are all of an appropriate standard.

22. Self-assessment reports and action plans have been produced each year since 1999. A director of the company was responsible for writing the self-assessment report in May 2002, before the inspection. All of the staff were fully involved in the process of producing it. Staff know and understand the contents of the report and of the associated action plan. Feedback from learners and employers was also used in the self-assessment process. Many of the strengths identified in the report were no more than normal practice, however. Some issues which were only recorded as required improvements, were understated and are significant weaknesses. Other key weaknesses were not identified as such, but merely referred to in the text.

Good Practice

Howarth Hancorn provides work experience in its reception facility for a person with severe visual impairment. Staff are working with a national organisation which provides expert advice on the requirements of those with impaired vision, to ensure that the arrangements are suitable. Some improvements have been made to the premises to give better access. Current working practices are being reviewed to ensure the person can work effectively as a full team member.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	16	3

23. Howarth Hancorn offers training in business administration and management. There are 11 advanced modern apprentices and five foundation modern apprentices. Eleven of the 16 learners are employed and work in either small, medium-sized or large organisations. All learners are given an introductory interview and have an initial assessment and key skills tests. Their competency in using computers is also assessed. There is a planned programme of off-the-job training for foundation modern apprentices. This covers key skills, equal opportunities and other job-related activities. Advanced modern apprentices receive all their training on the job. Learners can join the programme at any time of year. Two members of staff act as internal verifiers and there are two assessors. Learners' progress is reviewed every 12 weeks in accordance with contractual requirements. Employers receive a monthly progress report.

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		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	12		4		10		10		5							
Retained*	0		1		8		8	80	4	80						
Successfully completed	0		0		6		7	70	4	80						
Still in learning	9		1		1		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	2		7		2		2									
Retained*	0		3	43	2	100	1	50								
Successfully completed	0		0	0	2	100	1	50								
Still in learning	2		3	43	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 on-the-job training
- very effective pastoral support from assessors
- good rate of progression into jobs by learners

WEAKNESSES

- some late introduction of key skills training
- insufficient planning of assessment

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- wider range of off-the-job workshops
- better short-term target-setting in learners' progress reviews

24. Employers offer good training. Learners work in a variety of jobs and roles and many have high levels of responsibility. Employers value the trust which they have built up with the training provider. Howarth Hancorn matches learners to the right jobs. Learners on management programmes work in responsible positions in leisure centres, hotels and manufacturing. On-the-job training is provided mainly through coaching and mentoring schemes. Many learners have gained additional qualifications, such as first aid, manual handling, life guard, health and safety, and risk assessment certificates, as well as qualifications in information technology (IT). One of Howarth Hancorn's managers is an assessor for an internationally recognised IT qualification. Most employers have good IT and training resources and provide learners with a wide variety of opportunities to increase their skill levels. Employers are extremely supportive and most provide learners with opportunities to work on their NVQs during working hours. Employers are very knowledgeable about NVQs and have a good understanding of the evidence required by their learners.

25. Assessors are in frequent contact with learners. All learners have their assessor's mobile phone number and are able to speak to them at any time. Learners value this support and advice. The business administration assessor and the management internal verifier each have a counselling qualification. Assessors provide support over and above what is normally expected. For example, one learner had significant problems at home which affected his work and he was constantly absent or late. The employer, who did not know the background to the problem, was about to dismiss the learner. Following thorough investigation by the assessor, however, the reason for the learner's behaviour was discovered. Howarth Hancorn then helped the learner to get suitable alternative accommodation in the town. The learner is still working at the same company and the

employer is very pleased with their progress.

26. Many learners progress into jobs with high levels of responsibility. For example, Howarth Hancorn's own business administration assessor is a former learner. A manager with one of the employers, who now has responsibility for two leisure centres and over 20 staff, gained a level 3 NVQ in management with Howarth Hancorn. After completing a level 3 NVQ in business administration, another learner has taken up a very responsible role with the county council.

27. Overall achievement rates for business administration and management are satisfactory. There have only been small numbers of learners and there are no consistent trends. In 1999-2000, both of the foundation modern apprentices successfully completed their apprenticeship frameworks. However, of the seven who started during 2000-01, none has yet completed the frameworks for their foundation modern apprenticeships, although three are still in training. Both of those who started last year are still in training. Similarly, for advanced modern apprentices, 60 per cent of those who started training during 1999-2000 successfully completed their frameworks, but only one out of the four who started during the following year managed to do so. Three-quarters of the learners who started last year are still in training and making satisfactory progress.

28. Some learners are not introduced to key skills until they are some way through their programmes and have already completed most of their portfolios. Learners are unable to identify opportunities for generating evidence of key skills during the course of their regular work for their employers. Howarth Hancorn has recognised this problem and is developing a strategy to remedy it.

29. Assessors do not have a system to identify when each learner will achieve individual units of their NVQs. Learners' progress is recorded by assessors, but many learners do not know what remains for them to do or when they will complete their NVQ. Progress reviews are regular and are linked with assessments, but the same form is used for both and there is confusion among the learners about the difference between the two activities. The action plans agreed between learners and assessors during progress reviews focus on assessment and do not always contain short-term targets.

30. There are structured training workshops aimed at learners taking NVQs at level 2. Some learners taking NVQs at level 3 said that they did not understand the NVQ process at the beginning of their programme and would have welcomed some structured training on the subject. The value to learners of this structured training is shown by the case of a learner who works in a town 10 miles outside Hereford and who felt thoroughly disadvantaged because they were unable to attend the workshops. There is no structured training in the softer key skills of learners planning their own learning, problem-solving and working with others.

Good Practice

One learner, who is training to be a manager in a large leisure and hotel complex, has a tailor-made programme. In order to ensure that he is familiar with and understands every aspect of the business, the learner will work in every department in the organisation, over a two-year period. So far he has worked in housekeeping, the shop, the kitchen, the leisure complex, and maintenance. So far he has gained extra qualifications as a lifeguard, archery instructor and pool plant operator, as well as gaining a food hygiene certificate. He hopes to gain further qualifications.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	60	4

31. There are 60 modern apprentices in the areas of retailing and customer service. Of these, six are foundation and 48 are advanced modern apprentices in customer service, taking NVQs at level 2 and 3, respectively. There are six foundation modern apprentices in retailing. Five are taking NVQs at level 2 in retailing operations and one is taking an NVQ at level 2 in visual merchandising. Most learners are recruited by contacts with employers, although a few are referred by the local Connexions service. All but two of the learners are employed. They are employed by a wide range of organisations in Hereford and surrounding market towns, ranging from small local businesses and shops, to leisure centres and national retailing and hotel companies. Howarth Hancorn carries out a health and safety inspection of workplaces before learners start their programmes. Learners have a short induction at their place of work, which includes information about health and safety issues and equal opportunities. They also take a test in basic skills at this time. There are four assessors and two internal verifiers for retailing and customer service NVQs.

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		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	46		36		40		22		23							
Retained*	0		5		8		9	41	13	57						
Successfully completed	0		1		6		9	41	13	57						
Still in learning	38		9		1		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	12		14		12		5									
Retained*	0		5		4	33	3	60								
Successfully completed	0		0		2	17	3	60								
Still in learning	8		4		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 individual support for learners
- good off-the-job training in retailing
- close monitoring of learners' progress

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate initial assessment of some learners' basic skills
- weak assessment planning
- some late introduction of key skills training
- poor retention and achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better structured induction
- more detailed recording of assessment notes

32. Assessors visit learners approximately once every two weeks to review their progress, help them plan their work towards their NVQs and agree dates for future assessments. During these progress reviews assessors provide good pastoral support for learners, who are also able to contact them by mobile phone at other times if they have problems. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. There are two qualified counselling staff at Howarth Hancorn to whom assessors can refer learners who may be experiencing personal problems. At their induction, learners are also provided with a list of telephone numbers of local and national agencies which can provide individuals with support on particular issues. Learners usually receive their induction on an individual basis at their place of work. Staff from Howarth Hancorn

explain the NVQ programme to them and go through the requirements of their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Learners also complete the relevant paperwork. These induction sessions are not clearly structured, however, and are often too brief. They leave many learners uncertain as to what happens next.

33. Howarth Hancorn provides satisfactory training sessions or workshops on customer service for all learners in this occupational area. These cover such subjects as telephone techniques and the interpretation of body language. One large employer in the leisure industry also provides training towards a qualification in customer service related to tourism, but other companies offer no structured training to learners. The learners taking foundation modern apprenticeships in retailing also have individual coaching sessions provided by a member of Howarth Hancorn's staff at their place of work. These sessions are well planned, and designed to complement the on-the-job training provided by employers. The sessions take account of the seasonal nature of retailing and are carefully matched to the requirements of the NVQ. In particular, very effective guidance is provided for learners on researching and designing shop displays.

34. Assessors closely monitor learners' progress towards achieving their NVQs and key skills qualifications. They keep careful note of each individual element of each unit the learners achieve, as well as details of any problems which the learners encounter. This allows them to compare learners' actual progress against previously agreed target completion dates and to take action to provide additional support for learners if they appear to be having difficulties or are failing to make good progress. Since the introduction of these monitoring and recording arrangements, the proportion of learners staying in training has risen in comparison to previous years.

35. Some learners, especially those who are already at work when recruited to a training programme, are not tested to ensure that their literacy and numeracy skills are adequate to meet the requirements of their programme. Others are tested, but the results are not recorded on their individual learning plans. This has resulted in some learners having difficulties with parts of their NVQ and key skills training, although they do have additional training support to help them overcome these difficulties.

36. Assessors usually visit learners every two weeks. These visits are used for reviewing learners' progress and planning future assessments. Targets are set for learners, specifying what they need to achieve by the next progress review. Employers are not always involved in these review meetings but are aware of the progress which their learners are making. This system fails to distinguish between assessment planning and the process of reviewing progress and drawing up appropriate action plans. A single form is used for recording information relating to both activities. Assessors often dominate the planning process and learners do not always understand when or how they are being assessed. Assessors observe the learners carrying out tasks in the workplace and record professional discussions. They often omit important details from their notes, however, such as how long the observation lasted, where it took place and how exactly the competence was demonstrated. Assessment judgements are sound and, although internal verification has not identified some of these omissions, it is

satisfactory in other respects. Every six months, the internal verifier observes each assessor as they carry out assessments and provides them with written feedback on their performance.

37. Many learners have been introduced to training and assessment in key skills only after they have been on their programmes for considerable periods of time. Some learners leave before they have completed their modern apprenticeship frameworks, while others, in order to generate evidence of key skills, have to duplicate work they have already done. Key skills training workshops have been introduced over the past three months and learning materials are still being developed. Some learners, however, are already setting a good example of how competence in key skills can be demonstrated, using work-based activities such as using stock control as evidence for application of number. The attendance of learners at recent key skills tests has been low, with only three out of a possible 15 learners attending the last ones.

38. Over the past three years, the retention and achievement rates of advanced and foundation modern apprentices have declined to unsatisfactory levels. In 1997-98, nearly 60 per cent of advanced modern apprentices successfully completed the full framework for their apprenticeships. Over the next three years, however, the achievement rate declined to less than 33 per cent. Similarly, the achievement rate for foundation modern apprentices over the period from 1998 to 2001 fell from 60 per cent to zero. Only a quarter of the advanced modern apprentices who started their training during 2000-01 are still in training and only one has successfully completed their apprenticeship framework. Over the past year, there has been an improvement in the retention rate, with 75 per cent of those who started training during this period remaining in training. Achievement rates for NVQs are generally satisfactory and in recent years, across the occupational area, have ranged from 50 to nearly 70 per cent.

Good Practice

When the new standards were introduced for the level 3 NVQ in customer service, one of the directors of Howarth Hancorn took and achieved the new qualification. They thereby ensured that they understood the new standards, while also demonstrating their commitment to training and the importance of customer service.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	26	4

39. There are 26 learners taking programmes in sport and recreation. Of these, 15 are foundation modern apprentices taking an NVQ at level 2 in sport and recreation operational services. A further 10 are advanced modern apprentices, of whom four are taking an NVQ at level 3 in coaching teaching and instruction and six are taking an NVQ at level 3 in sport, recreation and allied occupations supervision. There is one learner working towards an NVQ at level 2 in sport and recreation operational services. Learners are recruited through local employers, schools and referrals from the Connexions service. They work at local leisure centres and at a hotel fitness centre. Seventeen learners are employed and some receive a training allowance through Howarth Hancorn. Learners receive an induction to the workplace from their employers, who also provide on-the-job training. Howarth Hancorn gives learners an introduction to their modern apprenticeship and provides them with off-the-job training in both vocational and key skills. The company's assessors assess the learners in the workplace.

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		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	9		10		7		32		17							
Retained*	0		0		2	29	16	50	11	65						
Successfully completed	0		0		1	14	14	44	9	53						
Still in learning	8		2		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		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	31		14		5		1		1							
Retained*	0		3		1	20	1		0	0						
Successfully completed	0		0		1	20	1		0	0						
Still in learning	14		1		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																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02		1999-2000		1998-99											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		1		3											
Retained*	0		0		3											
Successfully completed	0		0		3											
Still in learning	1		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 partnership arrangements with employers
- innovative and successful training programme for younger learners
- good pastoral support

WEAKNESSES

- slow progress by learners
- some late introduction of key skills training
- poor achievement rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of learners' progress

40. There are good partnership arrangements with employers. Learners have good

work environments with a wide range of facilities offering appropriate learning and assessment opportunities. Employers provide additional opportunities for assessment through job rotation and projects. Howarth Hancorn organises monthly workshops to help learners develop specialist skills and encourages employers to allow staff who are not on training programmes to attend. Employers have a good understanding of their learners' NVQ programmes. Learners are well supported by employers and are allowed time for portfolio-building. Learners often gain promotion during or after their training programmes. For example, one former learner is now an assistant manager and another is a duty manager.

41. There is an innovative and successful training programme for younger learners. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. The programme is called 'The Academy' and provides work placements for young learners at leisure venues where they could not usually be employed under the age of 18. Learners for this programme are recruited from local schools and through the Connexions service. They are interviewed and assessed for aptitude and suitability by leisure centre managers. There is a structured training programme linking on- and off-the-job training. Learners are transferred between leisure sites to gain practical experience of different parts of the industry. They also have opportunities to gain a range of practical and vocational awards, such as life guarding and coaching awards, and first aid and pool plant operation certificates.

42. The staff at the leisure centres and the assessors provide the learners with good pastoral support. The assessor visits learners fortnightly to carry out assessments, agree action plans and to provide practical advice on portfolio-building. Communication between staff and learners is effective. Learners value the support they are given. Any issues they raise are dealt with effectively.

43. At progress reviews, learners are not set individual or challenging targets and their progress is slow. Action plans do not have clear aims. Some learners have been on the programme for several months and have not yet completed a single unit of their NVQ. Most learners receive an initial assessment but it is not always used to develop their individual learning plans. Learning goals are not always appropriate. For example, one learner was working as an assistant manager in a fitness centre but, instead of taking an NVQ at level 3, was only required to complete a level 2 NVQ. Some of the documents used by assessors to monitor learners' progress are not completed. The evidence summary sheets are not signed off and individual progress charts are not completed, making it difficult for learners and assessors to measure the progress that has been made.

44. The qualified assessor for this occupational area left recently. The person taking over this position is not yet qualified as an assessor. An external consultant has been appointed to assess coaching, teaching and instruction. The internal verifier is on extended leave and has not been replaced. Though there is no suitably qualified and occupationally experienced assessor available, staff from Howarth Hancorn still visit learners fortnightly to review their progress and agree action plans with them. Qualified assessors from other occupational areas are assessing those more general units of the learners' NVQs which are not specific to sport and recreation.

45. Training in key skills has only recently been introduced, when some learners are nearly at the end of their programmes. Some learners who gain their NVQs do not go on to complete their key skills units and therefore do not complete their modern apprenticeship frameworks. New learners are introduced to key skills training at the beginning of their programmes.

46. The achievement rate for of modern apprenticeship frameworks is poor. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report. Of the 75 advanced modern apprentices recruited since 1997, only 24 have completed the full apprenticeship framework and 10 are still in training. Of the 52 foundation modern apprentices recruited since 1997, only two have completed the full apprenticeship framework, while 15 learners are still in training. Achievement rates for NVQs are also poor. Since 1997, only 29 NVQs at level 2 and 23 at level 3 have been completed. In 1999-2000, only 29 per cent of advanced modern apprentices and 20 per cent of foundation modern apprentices were retained. Of those recruited during 2000-01, eight out of nine advanced modern apprentices and 16 out of 31 foundation modern apprentices are still in training.