

INSPECTION REPORT

VT Plus Training

19 September 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Estyn

Arolyglueth Ei Mawrthyd Dros Addysg
A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate
For Education and Training in Wales

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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

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

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

Overall judgement

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.

INSPECTION REPORT

VT Plus Training

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. VT Plus Training (VT Plus) was established in April 2001 and is the merged business of Vosper Thornycroft Training Services and Hospitality Plus (UK). It is part of the larger VT Group. VT Group's other activities include ship building, careers management, Royal Navy training, Fire Service training, consultancy to schools and local authorities, and engineering training for the army.

2. Vosper Thornycroft previously acquired three local training providers, Southampton City College Engineering Youth Training Scheme, West Sussex County Council's Youth Training Scheme, and Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers (REME) Engineering Apprentices. Together they formed Vospor Thornycroft Training Services. Hospitality Plus PLC was founded in 1993 as the Hospitality and Catering Training Partnership Ltd. The company changed name to Hospitality Plus in 1998, working across the UK in the hotel and catering sector.

3. The merged business, VT Plus, operates from 52 sites across the UK with 37 area offices dedicated to the direct training of learners. It has modern apprenticeship contracts with 43 local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) offices plus contracts in Wales and Scotland as well as a national contract for training learners working for a large national pub chain. There are 11,360 young people in learning, of whom approximately 60 per cent are on hospitality learning programmes, 20 per cent on engineering learning programmes, 10 per cent on early years and residential care learning programmes and 10 per cent on sports and recreation learning programmes. A small number of learners are on business administration learning programmes. There are more learners in scope for inspection than are accounted for in the data tables in each area of learning. This is because the company was formed in April 2001 and took on learners that were still on programmes for the two preceding companies.

4. VT Plus has its main headquarters in Hove, East Sussex and employs 465 staff with an average annual staff turnover of 6 per cent. Comprising mainly full-time staff, the organisation operates as six clusters bringing together adjacent area offices. Four per cent of staff are from minority ethnic groups and 67 per cent are women. Senior management consists of a managing director, five directors, six business development managers, one national accounts manager and one personnel manager.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

5. There are 2,084 learners on engineering programmes, 85 per cent of whom are army personnel working towards a modern apprenticeship. The other learners are young people working towards a modern apprenticeship with their employer. Of the army learners, there are 482 advanced modern apprentices and 1,291 foundation modern

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apprentices on engineering learning programmes. The army recruits most of these learners with some recruited by other branches of the armed forces. All learners complete an initial assessment and aptitude test. Successful applicants go onto an army training regiment for military training and further selection processes. After this, learners have a one-week induction and a six-day key skills programme before starting on a four-week basic engineering skills course. They are then selected for particular trades that dictate their modern apprenticeship learning programme. Trades include avionics, electronics, vehicle maintenance, vehicle electrician, metalsmith and armourer. The learning programme lasts from 33 to 69 weeks. Learners who successfully complete their programme are posted to serving units and after a number of years service return to complete an advanced modern apprenticeship programme that lasts from 22 to 44 weeks. The learning programmes take place at the army training centres, Arborfield and Bordon.

6. In Sussex and Hampshire there are 311 civilian learners working towards advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships in engineering and manufacturing. All learners receive an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills and have an induction to their training programme in the workplace. All learners are employed and receive on-the-job training in their companies. These range from small to medium-sized enterprises and large companies. Most learners attend college for one day each week for off-the-job training. Most learners have an initial period of basic vocational skills training at a college of further education where they can achieve a national vocational qualification at level 2 in performing engineering operations. Some learners do this qualification at work. Others work towards an NVQ at level 2 in manufacturing operations in the workplace.

Business administration, management & professional

7. There are 118 learners on work-based learning programmes in business administration. Of these, there are eight advanced modern apprentices and 24 foundation modern apprentices working towards the new revised framework requirements that were introduced in January 2003. There are 28 advanced modern apprentices and 23 foundation modern apprentices working towards framework standards set in 1998. There are also 13 learners working towards NVQs only. These learners were not inspected. Assessment visits take place each month and include progress reviews. Learners can start the learning programme at any time. All learners are employed. Appropriately qualified staff from 15 VT Plus training centres carry out assessment. Regionally based internal verifiers support assessors and carry out internal verification.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

8. Customer service training takes place in 34 of VT Plus's offices. Retailing training is provided in Kent only. There are 176 advanced modern apprentices, 452 foundation modern apprentices and 100 learners working towards customer service NVQs at levels 2 and 3. In retailing there are 10 advanced modern apprentices, 24 foundation modern apprentices and one learner working towards an NVQ only. Most training is carried out in the workplace by employers. Employers range from large multinational companies to smaller independent organisations within the customer service industry. Provider staff visit learners in the workplace to carry out additional individual training and support, assessment and progress reviews.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

9. VT Plus provides a wide range of qualifications in hospitality, sport and recreation. In hospitality learners work towards qualifications in craft baking, food preparation and cooking, patisserie and confectionery, quick service, hospitality and residential services, pub, housekeeping, reception, and restaurant food and drink service. In sport and recreation learners work towards qualifications in operational services and development, and coaching, teaching and instructing in a range of contexts such as gym, circuits, aqua and exercise to music. There are currently 6,981 learners. In sport and recreation there are 1,321 foundation modern apprentices, 228 advanced modern apprentices and 35 NVQ only learners. In hospitality there are 3,270 advanced modern apprentices, 1,646 foundation modern apprentices and 481 NVQ-only learners.

Health, social care & public services

10. There are 1,436 learners on early years and childhood education training programmes. Of these, 945 are foundation modern apprentices and 365 are advanced modern apprentices. All modern apprentices are employed. There are 122 learners working towards NVQs only. Eighty-five learners have additional learning or support needs. Eleven per cent of advanced modern apprentices and 7 per cent of foundation modern apprentices are men. Six per cent of learners are from minority ethnic groups. Some off-the-job training is provided by some employers and there are coaching sessions by some of the provider's 34 vocational assessors. The learning programmes are provided by 25 area offices. Learners can start training at any time.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

| | |
|--|-----|
| Number of inspectors | 40 |
| Number of inspection days | 353 |
| Number of learner interviews | 803 |
| Number of staff interviews | 402 |
| Number of employer interviews | 312 |
| Number of subcontractor interviews | 4 |
| Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited | 424 |

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

11. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, leadership and management are satisfactory. Equality of opportunity is good, but the quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. Training in engineering, hospitality and sport, care, and retailing and customer service is satisfactory, but is unsatisfactory in business administration.

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| Leadership and management | 3 |
| Contributory grades: | |
| Equality of opportunity | 2 |
| Quality assurance | 4 |

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

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

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

| Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel | 3 |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Contributory grades: | |
| Work-based learning for young people | 3 |

| Health, social care & public services | 3 |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Contributory grades: | |
| Work-based learning for young people | 3 |

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

12. **Retention rates are high in all areas.** In retailing and customer service, almost three-quarters of advanced modern apprentices and 79 per cent of foundation modern apprentices are still in learning. Retention in business administration has improved from 2001-02 and current retention on advanced modern apprenticeships is 85 per cent and on foundation modern apprenticeships is 89 per cent. Retention on engineering programmes and hospitality and sport has been consistently very good since 2002-03.

13. **There is slow progress for some learners in care, engineering, business administration and retailing and customer service.** Some learners have been on foundation modern apprenticeships and NVQ programmes since 2000-01 which was before the company was merged. VT Plus Training has recognised this and has put a strategy in place to speed up the achievements of these learners.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

| | Grade 1 | Grade 2 | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Total |
|---|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Engineering, technology & manufacturing | 1 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 |
| Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel | 0 | 4 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 19 |
| Health, social care & public services | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 1 | 9 | 17 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 38 |

14. Ninety-five per cent of learning sessions observed by inspectors were graded satisfactory or better and 71 per cent were good or better. There were two sessions in hospitality and sport graded as unsatisfactory.

15. **Learner support is very effective in care, retailing and customer service, and hospitality and sport.** Assessors will often visit at unsocial hours to fit in with the operational requirements of employers. **Learners receive good on-the-job training from employers.** They also achieve good occupational and personal skills. VT Plus provides

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good relevant resource packs.

16. **There is good teaching and practical training for engineers in the army, with good access to a wide range of military equipment and clear detailed training objectives and instructional specifications. Learners in business administration receive good on-the-job training** and can attend relevant training courses, such as time management and first aid. **The occupational skills of learners in retailing, customer service and sport are well developed and there is good teaching of technical certificates for hospitality and sport learners.**

17. **Progress reviews are poor in all areas.** Short-term target-setting is not clear for learners and reviews are often poorly recorded. Some reviews did not clearly involve the employer. **Assessments are poor in sport and there are some poor assessment practices in engineering.**

Leadership and management

18. VT Plus manages each area of learning satisfactorily, although business administration lacks clear direction and overall management. **The company has good communication systems in place, with regular meetings,** a well-developed intranet and newsletters. Employers are regularly informed of learners' progress and also kept well informed of other important news. VT Plus helps to promote the industries that it works with and regularly attends fairs and conferences to enhance the profile.

19. **The company has a clear strategic plan** and has recently taken steps to improve retention and achievements. Retention on all programmes has improved, although it is too early to see improvements in achievement. There is weak internal verification in some areas.

20. **Equality of opportunity is promoted well at VT Plus. Staff receive good training in equal opportunities** and related issues, and have a clear understanding of equality and diversity. Complaints are dealt with promptly and actions monitored. Learners' understanding is checked at reviews, although this is not always clearly recorded. Equal opportunities data are not systematically collected across all area offices and data are not thoroughly analysed or used.

21. **The quality assurance arrangements are new and not fully implemented.** There are clearly written procedures to cover most of the important aspects of quality assuring the learning process, although some other procedures are yet to be developed. **The self-assessment process is weak** and does not reflect the key issues highlighted by each area office.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- clear strategic-planning
- good internal and external communications
- good equal opportunities training for most staff
- good promotion of equal opportunities

Weaknesses

- slow impact of actions by managers to improve achievement
- inadequate initial assessment
- insufficient co-ordination of additional learning support
- inadequate collection and analysis of equal opportunities data
- incomplete implementation of the new quality assurance arrangements
- weak self-assessment process

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good achievement of practical skills by learners
- wide range of additional qualifications and enrichment activities for most learners
- good teaching and practical training for military learners
- good practical resources
- very effective key skills training and assessment for military learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners towards framework completion
- ineffective reviews of learners' progress
- poorly planned training for civilian learners
- some poor assessment practice
- some weak internal verification practice

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good on-the-job training
- good workplace product evidence in portfolios

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion
- insufficient training resources
- poor progress reviews
- poor management of modern apprenticeship programme

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good development of learners' personal and occupational skills
- very effective learner support

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion by some learners
- ineffective progress reviews
- weak internal verification

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good development of occupational skills in sport
- good teaching of technical certificates
- comprehensive assessment-planning in hospitality
- good individual learner support

Weaknesses

- inadequate key skills arrangements
- poor assessment in sport
- ineffective use of individual learning plans
- poor progress reviews
- inadequate co-ordination of training

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good development of learners' practical skills in the workplace
- very good individual learner support by assessors

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion
- weak planning and co-ordination of off-the-job training
- insufficient support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT VT PLUS TRAINING:

- the practical work and job promotion opportunities
- the individual support from VT Plus's staff
- working in an adult environment and being treated accordingly
- the bonus pay for successful achievement
- the quick response to queries by staff
- working in a practical environment
- being able to work at their own pace with flexible arrangements
- the support and encouragement from employers

WHAT LEARNERS THINK VT PLUS TRAINING COULD IMPROVE:

- the time provided to meet other learners
- the feedback on progress made
- the wording on background knowledge questions
- the guidance at the start of the programme
- the support for key skills exams
- the time between assessments

KEY CHALLENGES FOR VT PLUS TRAINING:

- full implementation of the quality assurance system
- continued progress towards improving achievements
- focus on initial assessment and support for additional learning needs
- better planning, co-ordination and monitoring of all training
- maintain high retention rates

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- clear strategic-planning
- good internal and external communications
- good equal opportunities training for most staff
- good promotion of equal opportunities

Weaknesses

- slow impact of actions by managers to improve achievement
- inadequate initial assessment
- insufficient co-ordination of additional learning support
- inadequate collection and analysis of equal opportunities data
- incomplete implementation of the new quality assurance arrangements
- weak self-assessment process

22. There is clear strategic-planning. The company has a well-structured development plan for 2003-06 that includes forecasts of skill requirements by the industries which it serves. It has used the clear strategic vision emerging from the plan to restructure the company with the aim of focusing all staff on the critical issues of poor retention and achievement. As part of the strategy, the job roles of assessors, verifiers and trainers have been separated so that each can be given a defined caseload with associated targets. This strategy has been communicated effectively to all staff.

23. Internal and external communications are good. As a large and dispersed organisation, VT Plus has developed a range of effective communication systems. The new strategic vision was communicated by means of an annual conference with subsequent consultation, feedback and modification. Newsletters and e-mails are used well. Increasing use is being made of the company's intranet, parts of which are accessible to employers. The new management structure has improved communications and there are regular, minuted meetings of directors, cluster managers and area managers. VT Plus keeps in regular contact with employers to monitor learners' work. One large hospitality company has seconded a member of staff to work with VT Plus and the two companies meet monthly.

24. Staff development is satisfactory overall and is good in equality of opportunity. All staff have undergone training in relation to performance management. The company's main priority is for staff to receive training in specific, job-relevant NVQ units. VT Plus has developed its own management information system which is networked to each area

office. This provides the company with reliable data. In its self-assessment report, VT Plus identified that these data are not being used sufficiently well by managers and teams. Target-setting by managers is improving and is satisfactory. Business development and area managers have targets for retention and achievement. However, some of these targets are not sufficiently demanding. Assessors who achieve a caseload of 40 learners or more are eligible for bonus payments if they reach certain targets for monthly NVQ and framework completion rates. The company's financial management is satisfactory.

25. Actions by managers over the last two years to raise learners' achievements have been slow to have an impact on the provision. The self-assessment report identifies that the overall rate of framework completion is low. Many of the local LSCs with whom VT Plus contracts have identified issues relating to retention and achievement during the performance reviews carried out in June 2003. Although there are some improvements in retention in 2002-03, currently many learners have not achieved their framework by the end of their planned programme.

26. Initial assessment arrangements of learners are inadequate. The company has recently changed the initial test to one that can be completed online. However, this is not yet fully established and it is too early to judge its impact.

27. VT Plus is working to increase its capacity for providing additional learning support in literacy and numeracy. Currently there are not enough appropriately qualified tutors to provide this support. There is insufficient co-ordination of literacy and numeracy support. VT Plus does not routinely analyse the level of support it provides or measure its impact on the learner.

28. Area offices are currently responsible for monitoring learner support. It is planned that an operational director will soon have overall responsibility. Thirty of the 37 offices have staff qualified to support literacy and numeracy skills needs up to level 1. Five out of six clusters have two staff each to cover literacy and numeracy support. VT Plus is working to recruit additional qualified staff for each of the clusters. There is an emphasis on employer information and induction to identify learners' support needs. Where needs are identified, further assessment is provided. VT Plus has used a computer learning package since May 2003 to identify levels of literacy and numeracy and to support learners. However this has not yet been fully developed. Learners with identified learning support needs are supported by subcontracted providers. This support can be provided on an individual basis. The current internal verification cluster system monitors the provision of support through assessment and internal verification contact with the learner. Where learners are identified as requiring English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) support, this is contracted out.

29. Army learners complete an initial assessment and support is given as required by either qualified further education staff or VT Plus's staff. However if learners do not achieve set REME standards they are either redeployed or discharged from the service.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

30. There is good staff training and development in equal opportunities. All internal verifiers attend a one-day equal opportunities training course. Staff have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities, and most vocational assessors have completed the equal opportunities learner pack. In business administration, three internal verifiers have not yet received relevant training. Many staff have gained or are working towards additional relevant qualifications such as NVQs in equality and diversity and British sign language. In addition, staff further develop their knowledge and skills by attending courses in dyslexia, counselling, anti-bullying and anti-harassment.

31. There is good promotion of equal opportunities in most areas. The equality of opportunity policy is written clearly. It is available to learners in appropriate languages on request. The policy gives clear reference to relevant legislation and includes a general statement and sections on discrimination, grievances and harassment. However, the policy refers only to staff and does not refer to learners and their programmes. There is a thorough induction for learners on equal opportunities, which includes discussions and worksheets. Learners are given a copy of the equal opportunities policy and NVQ appeals procedures. There are effective procedures to ensure that employers comply with current legislation on equal opportunities. Employers are provided with a copy of the provider's equal opportunities policy if they do not have one of their own. If employers have their own policy copies these are kept on file and are carefully checked before learners start their training. However, there is no regular monitoring of employers' equal opportunities policies and procedures. Publication materials are satisfactory and clearly represent diversity. At one employer in the Hampshire and Sussex area there is poor promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities.

32. Procedures for appeals against NVQ decisions, and for grievance and complaints are written well and are clearly understood by most learners. Some learners do not have an adequate understanding of equal opportunities issues and their rights as employees. VT Plus has recently introduced an equal opportunities pack for learners and learners' understanding is gradually improving. VT Plus responds quickly to resolve relevant issues raised by staff or learners during progress reviews. However, during some reviews, equal opportunities is not adequately discussed or recorded. There are good resources for learners with additional learning needs, including the loan of a computer for learners with poor writing skills and software for learners with dyslexia. For military learners in engineering there are annual equal opportunities briefings and regular reinforcement through daily orders.

33. There is inadequate collection and analysis of equal opportunities data. VT Plus has an overall development plan for equality of opportunity and widening participation. However, equal opportunities data are not systematically collected across the area offices. Not all data submitted to the main office are adequate. Although some data have been compared with national published data across the company, no targets are set for individual occupational areas to improve participation by under-represented groups.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

34. Internal verification procedures are satisfactory. Area business development managers are responsible for the management of verification through groups of internal verifiers. The verifiers agree schedules and sampling plans with assessors. Verification is formative and covers all aspects of the assessment process. Feedback is given to all assessors and staff development is discussed. In hospitality and business administration internal verification is thorough, with good records maintained and good feedback given to assessors. In engineering, and retailing and customer service, some aspects of internal verification are inadequate, with some poor recording and incomplete cross-referencing of assessment to portfolio evidence. Groups of internal verifiers hold monthly standardisation meetings that are minuted and compiled into action plans. The internal verification system has only recently been introduced and it is too early to judge the impact of it on the assessment process.

35. Learners' and employers' views are collected at the start, at the middle and the end of the learning programme. A sample survey is also made of learners' and employers' views. These are analysed and evaluated and in some cases lead to actions for improvement. For example, attendance at key skills external test centres was poor, and achievement was poor with some employers unable to release learners for long periods. All tests are now carried out in the workplace and employers' feedback on this new approach is good.

36. Some aspects of the new quality assurance arrangements have not been fully implemented. VT Plus is developing a quality assurance system to meet national standards. Operating procedures have been written and placed on the company's intranet. Some staff have good access to the procedures and are using them effectively. Other staff do not fully understand how to use them. There are no working instructions for these procedures and in most areas staff are using other documents. For example, some assessors are using different review forms. Some aspects of the quality assurance framework have not been monitored and training is not provided at a consistent standard across the provider. VT Plus has started to produce a quality assurance manual and establish an independent audit team. It is too early to judge the impact of these processes. Most teaching and training activities are observed and feedback is given with staff development needs clearly identified. On-the-job training is not systematically observed. Service level agreements are in place for all subcontracted provision.

37. The self-assessment process is weak. A senior member of management produced the report. Each area office team produced a report and all staff were fully involved. However, staff in most areas are unable to identify their area of learning in the report. Many staff use their own report as a working document. Learners, employers and subcontractors were not sufficiently involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report was generally descriptive. Inspectors judged some of the strengths to be no more than normal practice and found additional weaknesses. The development plan to rectify weaknesses does not accurately cross-reference to the self-assessment report.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Work-based learning for young people | 2084 | 3 |

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good achievement of practical skills by learners
- wide range of additional qualifications and enrichment activities for most learners
- good teaching and practical training for military learners
- good practical resources
- very effective key skills training and assessment for military learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners towards framework completion
- ineffective reviews of learners' progress
- poorly planned training for civilian learners
- some poor assessment practice
- some weak internal verification practice

Achievement and standards

38. Retention rates are very good. Retention rates for advanced modern apprentices starting in 2001-02 and 2002-03 are 93 per cent and 89 per cent respectively. Most of these learners are in the army. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices starting in 2002-03 is 82 per cent, compared with 48 per cent in 2001-02. The achievement rate for advanced modern apprentices in 2001-02 is 50 per cent with a further 43 per cent still in learning.

39. There is good achievement of practical skills by all learners. Learners carry out tasks from simple maintenance, to the replacement of line replaceable units under field operating conditions. Army learners work to particular standards under external conditions and are expected to perform to military standards when they leave the training centres and join their operational units.

40. Most learners obtain additional qualifications. Foundation modern apprentices in the army achieve their basic civilian driving licence and are then trained to drive heavy goods vehicles (HGV) by the army and obtain their HGV driving licence. They are also trained to drive a range of other vehicles such as forklift trucks. Civilian modern

apprentices at a Royal Air Force station gain additional qualifications as flight line mechanics. Many learners obtain other skills such as crane operation and using abrasive wheels. Army learners participate in outdoor adventure training programmes and other personal development activities. The army has clear career path information sheets for learners.

41. Since May 2003 there has been an improvement in army learners' achievement of key skills. A pilot scheme for online testing of key skills was introduced and online testing is now available following the completion of key skills short courses. Since May 2003, 110 learners have sat and passed the key skills examinations. Of these, 88 per cent have completed their key skills portfolio.

42. Many civilian learners in Sussex and Hampshire are taking too long to achieve their NVQ. Learners do not start collecting NVQ evidence until late in the programme. Some learners have not achieved an NVQ at level 2 after three years. One learner is fully responsible for his company's machine shop and carries out all machining tasks to a very good standard. However he has not been assessed for his NVQ and has not collected any key skills evidence. Another learner has been on programme for three years and has only just started working towards his level 3 NVQ. Learners have not started collecting evidence for their key skills after three and sometimes four years on their training programme. None of the foundation modern apprentices in Sussex who started in 2000-01 have completed their modern apprenticeship.

43. Some army learners have made slow progress towards achieving their framework. The provider has had problems in timetabling the large number of learners. Army learners may also be called away from courses for operational reasons and miss the scheduled key skills tests. The army has changed some standards for the technical certificates and learners are posted without being able to complete the programme. The provider employs field staff and is using an external agency to ensure that learners are reviewed regularly and whenever possible complete their key skills.

VT PLUS TRAINING

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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|----|---------|-----|---------|-----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA) | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | 19 | | 338 | | 183 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 303 | | 170 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 28 | | 92 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 19 | | 275 | | 78 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|----|---------|------|---------|------|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA) | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | 33 | | 1368 | | 1308 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 1118 | | 633 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 97 | | 197 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 33 | | 1021 | | 436 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|---|---------|----|---------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| NVQ Training | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | | | 18 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | | | 8 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | | | 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

Quality of education and training

44. There is good teaching and practical training for army learners. Of the background knowledge lessons observed, 80 per cent were graded good or better. Learners gain a good understanding of the technical principles that support the practical training. Tutors make effective use of visual and training aids to illustrate the technical content of the subject. Learners are provided with comprehensive notes and workbooks.

45. There are good resources for practical training. At the military training centres, equipment includes aircraft and battlefield vehicles. The procedures used in training are the same procedures that are used in the military environment. Learning materials are professionally presented. Some classrooms are poorly decorated. There are good basic marine engineering training resources at a subcontracted further education college.

46. Key skills training and assessment is highly effective for military learners and is carried out at the military training centres. Key skills teaching is very good and carried out in classrooms that are well equipped with computers and modern visual aids. Learners produce good portfolios, and assessment and internal verification is sound. Learners' military duties can prevent them from being available for scheduled testing. The provider is working with the awarding body to establish an online testing process.

47. Army learners undergo training on a wide range of military equipment. The army has clear and detailed training objectives and instructional specifications. These include clear assessment criteria. The courses are demanding with frequent tests and continuous assessment. After their NVQ level 2 training and after six months practical experience at other military units, learners are assessed by the army as meeting army class 2 status. After four to six years experience at operational or maintenance units they return to complete an advanced modern apprenticeship.

48. The arrangements for assessment of literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. On military programmes all learners complete an army prior skills assessment and there is effective accreditation of prior learning. Literacy and numeracy skills are assessed by VT Plus. The results are analysed by the army and referrals for additional training are clearly identified. There are good resources for literacy and numeracy. Specialist support is used effectively for dyslexic learners and young people who speak English as an additional language. There are no systems in place to formally record and update individual progress. All meetings on literacy and numeracy progress are informal. There is insufficient sharing of information to ensure that individual needs on literacy and numeracy are recorded and evaluated effectively.

49. In Sussex and Hampshire, the civilian learners have an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills at the beginning of their programme. The results of these assessments are not used to develop an individual learning plan, however learners do receive good additional support if needed. Employers also provide some good individual support.

50. VT Plus continues to support and assess, without payment, more than 390 army learners who are too old to be funded by the LSC, but are still working towards their qualification. Some of these learners have not been able to complete their qualification because of career commitments.

51. The progress review process is weak. On the army foundation modern apprenticeship programmes only three progress reviews are normally completed during the programme. The initial review is completed as a group with not enough individual

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contribution. On the army advanced modern apprenticeship programmes there is an over-reliance on the army training meeting individual learners' requirements. Potential evidence from field training is given insufficient priority and there is not enough reference to progress against the NVQ. There is no reinforcement of equal opportunities. Workplace supervisors and mentors are not invited to contribute to the progress review process. Some army training tasks are not used as evidence. On civilian programmes, action-planning and target-setting at progress reviews are not applied consistently.

52. There is poor planning of training for civilian learners in Hampshire and Sussex. Teaching plans are not available in the workplace. Individual learning plans are often incomplete and are not updated. There is no effective process to co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training. Learners carry out real work tasks as required for their employer's business and assessors match these to the NVQ criteria. Where the learner has not completed enough work to complete the NVQ, relevant tasks are identified. This usually occurs towards the end of the NVQ. For one learner the completion of the NVQ was delayed until suitable work at another location was identified.

53. There is some poor assessment practice. Assessment on the army training programmes at level 2 and 3 is satisfactory where training exercises are used to determine competence. There is thorough recording of background knowledge and practical assessments. Learners self-assess their progress and comprehensive records of achievement are maintained. Learners on these programmes do not complete an individual portfolio of evidence. Many are unaware that they have completed an NVQ. Evidence is cross-referenced by management from army documents to a master portfolio. Cross-referencing identifies training activities, but does not accurately identify assessment. This is in contrast to engineering learners on army field programmes, where there is insufficient training evidence available to complete their qualification. The standard of portfolios is good and contains a wide range of evidence. This activity is completed by a small percentage of learners on electrical programmes. On civilian programmes, there has been a large turnover of assessors. Some learners have had to repeat previous work due to differences of opinion by assessors. Portfolios lack clear evidence of assessment and assessment-planning.

54. Although most internal verification is satisfactory, there is some weak internal verification practice. Internal verification is not consistently applied across all programmes. In some cases there is poor recording of assessment decisions and feedback to assessors. Some sampling sheets inspected fail to identify any observation of assessment decisions and there is insufficient evidence of the quality of assessment. Internal verification in Hampshire and Sussex is weak. Until recently there were not enough observations of assessors and most verification was of portfolios at the end of a learner's programme. A new strategy has been written and a sampling plan is in place, but this has yet to be fully implemented. There are few meetings between assessors to share good practice or to standardise assessment practice. Significant weaknesses identified by the external verifier have not been resolved.

Leadership and management

55. Management of the army modern apprenticeship programmes is satisfactory. There are good working relationships between VT Plus's staff and the army management at the training centres. VT Plus has worked well with the army to improve communications and understanding of the modern apprenticeship frameworks. Planning of training programmes for non-military learners in Sussex and Hampshire is poor. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the revised internal verification procedures. VT Plus's management has identified the adverse effect that earlier poor achievement of key skills has had on framework completion, and has devised a very effective process to improve the pass rate.

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

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Work-based learning for young people | 118 | 4 |

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good on-the-job training
- good workplace product evidence in portfolios

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion
- insufficient training resources
- poor progress reviews
- poor management of modern apprenticeship programme

Achievement and standards

56. Retention rates are very good. In 2001-02, 47 per cent of advanced modern apprentices were retained and this has improved to 85 per cent in 2002-03. In 2001-02, 48 per cent of foundation modern apprentices were retained and this has improved to 89 per cent in 2002-03.

57. Progress towards modern apprenticeship framework achievement is slow for many learners. Only one advanced modern apprentice has achieved a framework completion since 2001. Only thirty per cent of foundation modern apprentices completed their frameworks in 2001-02. In 2002-03, only five learners completed frameworks out of the 57 who started. Of the 96 learners still in learning, 16 are still on programme up to nine months after the target completion date. One learner has not been visited since May 2003 and has no evidence of progress since starting in November 2002. Some learners have had up to four changes of assessor. Progress towards key skills completion is slow. Many learners are not advised of the key skills learning and testing requirements until one year into their programme. There are no arrangements in place to allow learners to achieve technical certificates. The 32 learners registered since January 2003 are currently unable to complete their full qualification. The modern apprenticeship mandatory induction workbooks have not been given to learners. Some staff are unaware of the need for these and employers have not been advised of their responsibility to sign the declaration of framework completion in the workbook.

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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| Number of starts | | | 39 | | 30 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | | | 0 | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | | | 0 | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | | | 33 | | 13 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| Number of starts | 3 | | 57 | | 46 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 8 | | 26 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 5 | | 14 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 3 | | 46 | | 8 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| NVQ Training | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| Number of starts | 1 | | 15 | | 9 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 4 | | 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 0 | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 1 | | 10 | | 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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

Quality of education and training

58. There is good on-the-job training. Employers provide good learner support, which includes learners attending the relevant training courses, such as time management, health and safety at work, telephone techniques, managing resources, workplace security, database, spreadsheeting and first aid. At one large employer there are e-learning suites used by learners and their families. Most workplaces provide learners with a good range of work tasks to prove competence and to match NVQ standards. In

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some workplaces study time is formalised as part of the working procedures and in others learners are permitted to study during quiet times in the workflow. Where assessors identify gaps in learners' knowledge they explain key learning points clearly.

59. Workplace product evidence in portfolios is good. There are many examples of reports, studies, spreadsheets, stock control systems and accounting records. These are clear, accurate, well prepared and presented. Some learners' work is significantly benefiting their employer. Where a learner produces outstanding work, praise is given both locally and across the larger organisation. For example, one learner devised a computer database which has saved a national power company considerable expenditure and staff location costs. This learner is being supported by managers to progress to a more responsible position within the company. In another workplace, a learner deals with imports and exports and has good evidence of her competency and understanding of international trade. Assessment practice is satisfactory with a mixture of skills and experience within the teams. However, there is not enough sharing of good practice.

60. There are insufficient training resources. Some local assessors devise or obtain notes to help learners. Some of these notes are poorly designed and detailed. Most learners are advised to search the internet for relevant information. One learner is awaiting receipt of an administration textbook. There is no standardisation of information to support learning. Learners working towards new frameworks have not been issued with mandatory induction workbooks. VT Plus has no resources to provide technical certificates. Office accommodation is adequate, but on some sites there is poor access for people with mobility problems. Not enough staff have literacy and numeracy training. However, in Sussex, literacy and numeracy provision is well resourced with a wide range of teaching materials available and two appropriately qualified staff. One learner receives individual support at her workplace but this is not well planned or recorded. There is not enough planned and structured off-the-job training. Many learners have to fill gaps in their professional and occupational knowledge by independent study. Staffing is adequate. Assessors are professionally and occupationally competent.

61. Progress reviews are poor. Learners' progress is not recorded on individual learning plans. Some individual learning plans are not fully or accurately completed. Timebound targets, framework enhancements and technical certificates are not all planned or recorded correctly. Guidance on selection of optional units is given late and is unclear. Some reviewers overestimate some learners' progress in their qualification by as much as four units. Pastoral support during reviews is inadequate. Most assessors do not adequately cover issues relating to health and safety and equality. There is not enough monitoring of learners' welfare in the workplace. Employers are not sufficiently involved in progress reviews. Many employers do not have an adequate understanding of their learners' training programmes.

Leadership and management

62. VT Plus has not given sufficient management time or training for relevant staff to ensure that learners' needs are met. There is no clear direction of the programme and no member of senior staff has sole responsibility for this area. Instructions to cease recruitment of learners issued in a newsletter three years ago have not been implemented. This has only been carried out during inspection. There is no internal provision or external contract to provide mandatory technical certificate training. VT Plus was notified in July 2002 that new national standards were to be implemented in January 2003. VT Plus does not currently have the resources to carry this out. Internal verifiers and assessors are unaware of the modern apprenticeship framework requirements. Queries on framework requirements are referred to VT Plus's head office. The self-assessment report is poor and does not detail the individual strengths and weaknesses specific to this programme. The quality assurance system and internal audit system have not impacted sufficiently on a range of activities, including learners' portfolios, initial assessment and checks on the scope for evidence collection to match NVQ standards. The internal verification system is now thorough at a technical level only, after recent revision, but is yet to be fully established. Internal verifiers have good professional knowledge, but they have a poor understanding of the framework requirements. There is insufficient promotion and awareness of equality of opportunity. Not all staff have received appropriate training. Learners' understanding of these issues is monitored only through a question sheet. The provider's system to monitor employers' equal opportunities policies is not effective. Monitoring is based on the existence or otherwise of a policy document and not on the practice at the employer's premises. One employer covering Hampshire and Sussex does not adequately promote equality of opportunity.

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

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Work-based learning for young people | 763 | 3 |

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good development of learners' personal and occupational skills
- very effective learner support

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion by some learners
- ineffective progress reviews
- weak internal verification

Achievement and standards

63. Retention rates are very good. Currently, 72 per cent of advanced modern apprentices and 79 per cent of foundation modern apprentices are still in learning. VT plus has implemented a good range of effective initiatives to improve and maintain retention including very good resources for learners and employers, learners' induction and a sign-up process. At the start of the learning programme, all learners are given the new extensive induction pack. They also receive a detailed and comprehensive employment rights and responsibilities pack that includes an equal opportunities book. These packs are sufficiently detailed and provide learners with a number of relevant exercises for which they receive a certificate on completion. An effective trial to improve induction took place in the Derby area. As part of the improved process, induction is carried out at the training centre away from the workplace. Learners now have a satisfactory understanding of relevant issues. Monthly job chats are completed between managers and assessors to monitor learners' progress and identify issues or concerns. A new sign-up procedure has been introduced to increase employers' involvement in the learning programmes. The workplace manager, assessor, learner and a manager from VT plus meet at the start of the programme.

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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Number of starts | | | 168 | | 248 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | | | 2 | | 48 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | | | 1 | | 43 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | | | 120 | | 66 | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Number of starts | 5 | | 562 | | 397 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 17 | | 139 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 16 | | 76 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 5 | | 429 | | 42 | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| NVO Training | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Number of starts | 1 | | 148 | | 78 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 29 | | 48 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 26 | | 44 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 1 | | 97 | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

Quality of education and training

64. There is good development of learners' personal and occupational skills. Learners develop good self-confidence in customer service skills. Learners' job roles are matched well to the customer service NVO at levels 2 and 3. Some learners attend training including workshops in food hygiene and health and safety, and many achieve the relevant qualifications. Assessors have written job task material for learners to help them collect appropriate evidence. Many learners make good progression within their job

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roles by taking on extra responsibilities or gaining promotion. Some learners achieve qualifications early. Work carried out by some learners contributes to their employers' business objectives. They use this work as evidence for their key skills and NVQ units. Other learners are given pay increases on completion of qualifications. Some employers provide regular study time at work.

65. There is very effective learner support, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Learners receive effective support from assessors during frequent workplace visits. The visits are arranged to meet the needs of learners and employers. There are good working relationships between learners, employers and assessors. Assessors provide good pastoral support and learners are able to contact their assessor at any time. Assessors have good occupational experience. In Cheshire, learners achieve their NVQ early by producing evidence linked to the business plan. Although most employers provide good learner support, many do not fully understand the qualification. Two employers have achieved their assessor qualification and help their learners reference evidence to the NVQ standards. One employer helps the learner prepare for key skill tests by working through practise papers. Some employers, however, do not allow learners time in the workplace to complete work towards their NVQ. It is difficult for assessors to arrange visits to learners with some employers.

66. Key skills training and assessment were not introduced at the start of the programme for many learners, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. Learners do not fully understand the key skills requirements. Individual learning needs are not taken into account when preparing many learners for key skills external assessment. When learners fail key skills external assessments they are entered again without sufficient preparation. Mock test papers are given to learners to complete at home before the external assessments. Some key skills evidence is not relevant to learners' qualifications. Some appropriate key skills resources have now been developed.

67. Some learners make slow progress towards achieving their full modern apprenticeship framework. Many learners have been on programme for six to eight months and have not achieved any units or collected adequate evidence. Some portfolio evidence has not been assessed or referenced to the standards. Many employers are not involved in planning the learner's achievement of their qualification. Most employers do not provide witness testimonies or authenticate evidence. There is some poor assessment-planning, including observations, and some learners do not have written assessment plans. Where these exist they are often not checked regularly to ensure that actions have been completed.

68. Progress reviews are ineffective. The reviews are completed at each assessment visit and generally repeat information from the assessment plan. Long-term targets are not set during progress reviews and learners are not kept up-to-date with their progress. Short-term targets are set, but are poorly detailed and do not have achievement dates. Targets are not negotiated or reviewed with the learner and individual learning plans are not referred to. Most employers are not involved in progress reviews and in some cases do not sign the document. Many learners and employers do not know when a review has taken place as they generally take place at the same time as an assessment.

69. Internal verification is weak. It does not identify poor assessment practice or slow progress by learners. In some areas, verification of learners' work only takes place when the portfolio has been completed. Many portfolios do not have sufficient evidence. Assessors do not use an adequate range of assessment methods. In some areas portfolio evidence comprises only observation.

Leadership and management

70. Management of retailing and customer service is satisfactory. The development plan is well written and has identified six key areas for improvement. Targets for improvement are set and performance is measured. The plan clearly identifies staff responsible for targets and realistic timescales are set. One key area for improvement is internal verification. A new internal verification system has recently been established. However, although some recent internal verification practice is now effective, it is generally weak. For example, where there is poor assessment practice, internal verification has not identified or implemented the necessary improvements.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**Grade 3**

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Work-based learning for young people | 4864 | 3 |

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good development of occupational skills in sport
- good teaching of technical certificates
- comprehensive assessment-planning in hospitality
- good individual learner support

Weaknesses

- inadequate key skills arrangements
- poor assessment in sport
- ineffective use of individual learning plans
- poor progress reviews
- inadequate co-ordination of training

Achievement and standards

71. VT Plus has implemented a range of strategic management decisions and retention rates are now very good for those learners who have registered on programmes since 2002. In sport and recreation, the retention rates for advanced and foundation modern apprentices and NVQ-only learners are 75 per cent, 76 per cent and 63 per cent respectively. In hospitality, these retention rates are 75 per cent, 72 per cent and 82 per cent respectively. When VT Plus was formed in 2001, retention rates were poor at less than 30 per cent for all programmes.

72. Some learners are making slow progress. Staff do not provide adequate support for learners who have been on programme for more than 12 months. VT Plus does not make sufficient use of qualified assessors in the workplace. Some learners have been on programme for several months and have made insufficient progress. Assessment does not always take place at a sufficiently early stage in the programme. In Lancashire, learners are assessed unit by unit.

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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|----|---------|------|---------|-----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA) | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | 20 | | 1890 | | 662 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 44 | | 57 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 7 | | 45 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 20 | | 1384 | | 170 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|----|---------|------|---------|------|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA) | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | 55 | | 3345 | | 2133 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 97 | | 727 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 62 | | 341 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 55 | | 2586 | | 247 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|---|---------|-----|---------|-----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| NVQ Training | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | 7 | | 722 | | 232 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 211 | | 119 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 101 | | 99 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 7 | | 455 | | 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

Quality of education and training

73. There is good development of occupational skills in sport and recreation. Employer-led on-the-job training is effective in developing these skills. VT Plus's off-the-job training is effective in developing these skills. Learners demonstrate good levels of work in their workplaces.

74. Teaching for technical certificates is good. A wide range of appropriate teaching

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and learning methods are used. Learning sessions are well planned and structured. Trainers make good use of questioning and activities. Good use is made of relevant industry examples. Trainers have good up-to-date subject knowledge. There is good use of resources including computer software. Learners have a good understanding of the subject covered. Many learners are given support materials before starting their learning programmes. Technical certificates in sport are taught well. There are good independent study packs for learners, which are written clearly. These packs are used well to encourage learners to work at their own pace with support from assessors. Some learners receive additional support from their work colleagues and managers. Learners who are unsuccessful in either practical or theory tests are given good support by assessors who often make arrangements for extra training.

75. There is comprehensive planning of assessment in hospitality. Assessors have good knowledge of NVQ standards. They visit learners every two to four weeks and usually carry out assessment-planning. Suitable resources and other equipment for assessment are also identified. Additional assessments are scheduled as and when appropriate and assessors make good use of learners' everyday workplace activities. Most assessments are planned to maximise the use of evidence across the framework. Assessment plans are well detailed. There is good use of observation and other assessment methods such as tape-recorded answers to questions for learners with literacy difficulties. Assessment arrangements are discussed with the learner and employer. Assessment plans are recorded well with copies given to learners. Learners are prepared well for assessment. Assessment of background knowledge is based on the use of standard questions and is generally not well planned.

76. There is good individual learner support. Workplace visits take place at least every four weeks and sometimes more frequently. Some assessors help learners achieve their NVQ early. Assessors plan visits around workplace activities and often outside normal working hours. There are good arrangements for learners to contact assessors. Working relationships are good between assessors, learners and employers. Some learners are encouraged to give peer support. There is good access to practical resources, including the use and loan of laptops, specialist textbooks, past test papers, cameras and portable dictating machines. There is effective pastoral support including advice on careers, health issues and personal development. Specialist agencies are used where appropriate to provide support and guidance on welfare concerns. Induction is satisfactory. There are some good examples of support for learners with dyslexia and those who speak English as an additional language.

77. Learning resources are generally satisfactory. Relevant course booklets for the technical certificates are given to the learners two weeks before they start their learning programmes. Many learners receive textbooks from their employers to support their learning. Where these are not supplied, VT Plus has a limited number available. VT Plus's staff have good occupational experience and relevant qualifications. Most workplaces have a good range of up-to-date equipment to help learners develop their skills.

78. A new computer-based resource is used by assessors to carry out assessment of

learners' numeracy and communication and language skills. It also provides relevant training for learners. However, in Oxfordshire, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire, it has only been recently introduced and is not fully established. Although some employers do not allow learners time away from their work to use this resource, it is used appropriately to carry out initial assessment of new learners in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire and Sussex. It is not being used fully for diagnostic purposes in Wales and is not completed fully with learners in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire.

79. Qualified assessors are not always present to countersign judgements made by trainee assessors during workplace observations. Portfolio countersigning does take place. Internal verifiers do support assessors but their reports do not contain details on some key issues about invalid judgements.

80. There is not enough access to additional industry training for some learners on sport programmes. They are only able to work towards a small range of industry skills qualifications. Learners aiming to become personal trainers are unable to substitute alternative instructor qualifications in place of the standard industry skills certificates, even if they already hold them. Learners in hospitality can only work towards a small range of technical certificates.

81. In sport, employers and learners do not fully understand the requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework. The focus is mainly on the practical skills developed during the range of off-job training courses. They are, however, given sufficient information to enable them to make informed choices about the training programmes.

82. Key skills arrangements are inadequate. Some learners have qualifications that exempt them from taking key skills. However, this is not always identified by the vocational assessors at the start of the programme. Some assessors do not have adequate key skills training or experience. There is insufficient structured key skills training and assessment. Key skills training and assessment were not introduced at the start of the programme for those learners who have been on programme for some time in Oxfordshire, Avon, Somerset, Lancashire, Cheshire, Hertfordshire and Staffordshire. Although some learners are able to attend key skills workshops, some of these are not planned or taught well. Not enough constructive feedback is provided on talks given by learners. Some learners have attended workshops and completed mock tests but have not improved sufficiently to pass key skills tests. Some good key skills resources are used in the Northeast and Northwest, including relevant books and websites for occupationally relevant projects. In London, Oxfordshire, the Northeast, the Northwest and Wales there is very good key skills project work. This was developed between learner, employer and assessor and has improved business performance.

83. Assessment in sport is poor. There are insufficient workplace observations of some learners. Most assessment is of simulated work activities. There is not enough assessment of learners' everyday work. Learners do not receive adequate feedback after assessment. Assessment plans are not adequately detailed and generally list evidence requirements rather than planned assessments. Some assessors do not inform learners if a competent performance has been achieved. Learners' understanding and commitment

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to the value statements of sport is often neglected. Some learners are coached through assessments and judged as competent by their assessor. Assessors rely on evidence produced during the gym instructors' programme for learners on coaching teaching and instructing NVQs. Arrangements for external tests are poor in sport. Learners are not adequately prepared for the tests. They do not have access to practise papers. Invigilation arrangements for external tests are not consistently applied with some learners sitting tests in an office environment. In some cases, assessors or employers also carry out the invigilation of their own learners.

84. Individual learning plans are not used effectively. Individual learning plans are not routinely examined or updated as part of the review process. Initial assessment is not used to produce detailed individual learning plans. The plans are not always used effectively to plan all aspects of the learner's programme. Start and target dates are not always recorded. Most learners are given a copy of their individual learning plan but it is generally not referred to or kept up to date. Learners and employers do not fully understand the individual learning plans. There is insufficient recording of learners' prior achievement, additional achievements and additional learning needs. For hospitality learners, individual learning plans do not adequately reflect individual learners' needs and progression and are not used to help them progress. In London, employers and learners are fully involved in the development and use of the plans which are appropriately detailed and include target and achievement dates.

85. Progress reviews are poor. Where targets are set they are not adequately detailed and do not help learners to progress. Learners and employers have a poor understanding of the review process. Employers are not routinely involved. In sport, they are only required to sign the review document after it has been completed. The review document is not adequate for the detailed recording of the discussion. Learners are not always encouraged to comment on their own progress or targets. The reviews are not always used to reinforce equality of opportunity. Learners' progress is not systematically tracked during reviews. Learners are sometimes unaware of their progress to date. Learners are visited frequently in the workplace and a progress review form is always completed. Some good short-term targets are set for learners in London, Wales and the Southwest.

Leadership and management

86. The internal verification process is new and is satisfactory. Some staff, however, are not fully aware of the content of the new occupational standards. There is a good process for recording and evaluating learners' and employers' comments. Trends are monitored and reported through area and internal verification meetings.

87. There is insufficient co-ordination of training. Most of the training is provided by the employer in the workplace. Although most companies have their own staff training schemes, these are not used by VT Plus's staff to develop the individual learning programmes. Vocational assessors do not adequately convey the training needs of learners to employers. The skills and knowledge gained by learners are not sufficiently recognised and cross-referenced to the NVQ. There is no systematic approach to

adequately monitor on-the-job training provided by employers.

Health, social care & public services

Grade 3

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Work-based learning for young people | 990 | 3 |

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good development of learners' practical skills in the workplace
- very good individual learner support by assessors

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion
- weak planning and co-ordination of off-the-job training
- insufficient support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs

Achievement and standards

88. Current retention rates are very good at 81 per cent for foundation modern apprentices, 75 per cent for advanced modern apprentices and 87 per cent for learners following NVQs only. The current retention rate in Hereford and Worcester and Somerset is 100 per cent.

89. Learners develop good practical skills in the workplace. Portfolios are well presented and many learners develop good independent and collaborative research skills. Learners also develop good self-confidence in the workplace. They fully understand their on-the-job training and the professional values of care and early years settings.

90. Learners make slow progress towards framework completion. In 2001-02, many learners did not complete their framework in the expected time. This has been identified in the self-assessment report and action has been taken to improve achievement rates. There has been some slow implementation of key skills. However, the current key skills achievements rates are now satisfactory.

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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|----|---------|-----|---------|----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA) | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | 16 | | 284 | | 67 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 0 | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 0 | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 16 | | 230 | | 31 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|----|---------|-----|---------|-----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA) | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | 36 | | 795 | | 117 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 6 | | 37 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 1 | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 36 | | 596 | | 12 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|---|---------|-----|---------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| NVQ Training | 2003-04 | | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | 6 | | 134 | | 5 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 8 | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 7 | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 6 | | 117 | | 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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

Quality of education and training

91. Assessors provide very good individual learner support. Assessors make frequent visits to learners in the workplace and increase these to provide additional support. They quickly tackle changing circumstances, which may require learners to complete the programme quickly or risk leaving the programme early. Assessors deal effectively with confidential or difficult issues. There is good individual guidance in portfolio-building. Progress reviews are generally satisfactory, although the recording of target-setting is

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weak. For some learners there have been staff changes and assessments have been delayed. The company has recently produced a plan to rectify this. Employers provide a thorough workplace induction. Many employers help learners to develop good practical work skills through additional training, some of which leads to nationally recognised certificates. In one geographical area, learners have access to a training programme on aspects of bereavement provided by a national funeral company. Some learners are involved in self-help groups. Employers re-arrange work duties to ensure that learners can meet the NVQ requirements. All learners work alongside appropriately experienced staff. Some employers allocate study time, but other learners have to use their off-duty time. VT Plus does not monitor this consistently. Some assessors monitor equal opportunities during progress reviews, but others do not. Not all learners have a good understanding of equal opportunities or their rights.

92. Resources are satisfactory. Learners have access to textbooks and laptop computers are available on loan. The company has recently bought the licence for some commercially produced, online learning resources, which assessors are beginning to use. This is not fully established in all areas. Some learners have access to the Internet. Some employers provide additional resources for the learners. The rooms used for progress reviews, and coaching and training sessions vary with employers. In some cases, meetings with the learner are carried out in public places or in rooms with frequent interruptions. Some area offices do not have adequate access for people with restricted mobility.

93. The overall planning and co-ordination of off-the-job training is weak. Assessors mainly work with individual learners, with some occasional small group work in some areas. There is no particular schedule to support off-the-job training. Some learners do not understand how the elements of their training relate to each other and are unsure of how best to tackle the background knowledge. They do not always know when training has taken place.

94. There is insufficient support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs. Some learners who have been on programme for some time have been identified as needing this support but have not received it. The provider has identified that there is an insufficient number of staff appropriately qualified to provide this support. Assessors are not always confident in providing numeracy support. However, in Hereford and Worcester, support for key skills and literacy and numeracy is provided by a subcontractor. Key skills training and assessment is inconsistent. In some areas it is introduced at an early stage with some integration into the NVQ. However, in other areas this does not take place.

Leadership and management

95. Internal communication is good. The staff induction programme is effective and provides an adequate range of training and development. Staff are able to shadow other staff in other geographical areas. Shadowing and observation of staff are used extensively as part of the action plan to improve standardisation. This also enables area

managers and internal verifiers to collect feedback from learners.

96. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recent restructuring and additional recruitment has taken place and include improvements to the monitoring of retention and achievement rates. Staff have clear targets and are aware of their progress against them. Retention rates have improved significantly and achievement of units has increased, although it is still slow in some areas. Internal verification is satisfactory.