

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Nortec Training Limited**

**07 October, 2002**



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

## Overall judgement

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

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

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



## SUMMARY

### The provider

Nortec Training Limited, a company limited by guarantee, was founded in 1984 and is based in the town centre of Banbury. It offers work-based learning for young people in business administration and management, retailing, customer service and transportation, information and communications technology, and engineering. It also offers in-house information and communications technology training courses at its Banbury premises. There are 122 work-based learners, and 47 learners on in-house training courses. The engineering training programme was not inspected as there were too few learners. Nortec Training Limited is also a learndirect centre, but this provision was not inspected.

### Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Work-based learning in business administration and management and in retailing, customer service and transportation are satisfactory. Training in information and communications technology is good. Leadership and management are good, as is equality of opportunity. Quality assurance is satisfactory.

### GRADES

<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	3

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

<b>Information &amp; communications technology</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Other government-funded provision	2

<b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

### **KEY STRENGTHS**

- thorough involvement of staff in continuous company improvements
- good access to learning to meet individual requirements
- good support for learners
- very effective links with employers
- highly effective delivery of information technology course

### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ineffective management of learners' data
- ineffective progress review process for learners
- unsatisfactory retention and achievement rates for business administration advanced modern apprentices

### **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- better implementation of internal verification

## THE INSPECTION

1. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 23 days at Nortec Training Limited (Nortec) in October 2002. Inspectors visited 26 workplaces, interviewed 46 learners and 24 workplace supervisors. They carried out 43 interviews with staff, and observed and graded one learning session. They examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios and records, review documents, assessment records, surveys, external verifier's reports, minutes of meetings, plans, policies and procedures. Inspectors studied Nortec's most recent self-assessment report which was produced in July 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Information & communications technology	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

## THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

### Context

2. Nortec, a Banbury-based company limited by guarantee, offers work-based learning for young people. Training is generally given to employed learners in the workplace and most learners are recruited by direct marketing to employers. New companies are contacted through the use of a company which specialises in recruitment of employed young people into modern apprenticeships. Some off-the-job training is offered at Nortec's premises, and at a college for learners in engineering. Driver training is carried out at a specialist driving school. The management team consists of the managing director, an operations director, and seven managers. The company employs 35 staff, of whom 25 are full time and 10 are part time. At the time of inspection, the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) were funding 122 learners. There are 55 advanced modern apprentices, 60 foundation modern apprentices, and seven on national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes. In addition to this, there are 47 learners on an information and communications technology (ICT) course, called 'IT Champions', which is a course developed by Nortec and funded through co-financing by the local LSC and the European Social Fund (ESF). Nortec also offers a range of commercially funded training courses, and has approximately 300 people registered for learndirect courses. Nortec recruits learners throughout the local LSC area, but most of the learners come from the Cherwell district, which includes the towns of Banbury and Bicester.

3. In May 2002, the unemployment rate in the Cherwell area of Oxfordshire was less than 1 per cent, compared with 1.7 per cent in the Southeast and 3 per cent nationally. Banbury has an unemployment rate of 2.7 per cent. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in Oxfordshire was 50 per cent, compared with 47.9 per cent nationally. The 1991 census shows that the proportion of the population in Cherwell from minority ethnic groups is 3.6 per cent compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. In Banbury, the minority ethnic population is approximately 2 per cent.



### **Work-based learning for young people**

4. In most areas of learning the achievement and retention rates are satisfactory. The exception is for advanced modern apprentices in business administration and management, where the rates are unsatisfactory. There is some slow progress towards qualifications in retailing and ICT areas. Recent success rates in the key skills tests for learners have improved, with a current pass rate of 92 per cent.

5. All learners are employed and are generally well supported in the workplace by their assessors and by their employers. There are effective links between Nortec and most employers. Formal reviews with learners take place regularly but are not fully effective. There is good development of learners' job skills, particularly in the retail area. Assessment in business administration is good. There are some unsatisfactory aspects of target-setting in the retail area.

### **Other government-funded provision**

6. Training on Nortec's 'IT Champions' course is good. It was designed to fill an identified skills gap in the Cherwell area and the teaching is very good. The course is well designed and learners have an appropriate degree of flexibility and clear personal targets. Learners are positive about how their improved IT skills are benefiting their businesses. The learning centre is appropriately equipped.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

## Grade 2

7. Nortec has a managing director who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the company. She is responsible to the board of directors, which is made up of the two company directors and a non-executive chairman. The managing director is assisted by an operations director and seven managers, most of whom take part in routine management team meetings. The company has eight departments which support the work-based learning programmes, as well as a number of other commercial and ESF-sponsored training courses. The company is guided by a small number of strategic business objectives which form the basis of the employees' appraisals. There is no other management plan. A staff handbook includes equal opportunities, grievance, and health and safety policies. Quality assurance procedures have been produced to cover some aspects of the company's operational and administrative operations and further procedures are being developed. A full self-assessment report was produced in July 2002 by a group who sought the views of a range of staff. It was preceded by two other reports.

### STRENGTHS

- very effective staff development systems
- thorough involvement of staff in continuous company improvements
- effective action to improve learners' experiences
- good access to learning to meet individual requirements
- good level of awareness of equal opportunities by learners and staff

### WEAKNESSES

- ineffective management of learner data
- insufficient monitoring of subcontractor
- no continuous audit of the company's quality assurance procedures

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- further develop quality assurance procedures
- better implementation of internal verification
- more marketing to under-represented groups

8. There is a very effective system for developing staff. The directors are very supportive of staff development, and staff are well equipped to improve their services to the learner. There is a very comprehensive and effective induction which includes a mentoring system. The training and development system is very well structured. Staff are required to undergo appropriate professional training, and are encouraged to develop their competences. Training needs are regularly discussed, specifically at

appraisal interviews. Individual training requests, or company requirements, are considered by the management board and are quickly processed. Staff maintain their own detailed personal development records, and more general notes are kept in separate folders. A comprehensive and up-to-date staff handbook covers a range of topics. The appraisal system is thorough. After monthly interviews for the first three months of employment, appraisals are carried out every six months and are recorded in detail, with agreed action points. The appraisal system is based around the company's business objectives, attempting to link the strategic aims and values of the company with an individual's role.

9. Management systems encourage staff to be fully involved in improving learning programmes. Using evidence from staff, the management board reviews training programmes and changes the company's aims when appropriate. A variety of working groups and meetings allow effective communication and action. Investors in People, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people, meetings are held every month, and all staff are required to attend. The meetings allow for group presentations on topics such as employment law or equal opportunities, and then smaller cross-departmental groups for the interchange of ideas. The discussions are minuted and passed to management for action. The quality improvement group has focused on the self-assessment process, but it has also been responsible for the associated development plan. From a very early stage, the group has identified actions to overcome perceived weaknesses. Other groups, such as assessors meetings, learners progression, health and safety and quality assurance projects, have been given a degree of independence for action. All these groups report to the regular management board meetings.

10. The company collects a large amount of data about learners in many formats, some of which are used by the directors, groups or individuals in their routine business. However, there is no clear reason for the collection of much of the data. Much of the data are not analysed in any meaningful way. There is no clear structure to the way data, or analysis, are passed to the various levels of management. Learners' data leads to little formalised review, target-setting or action-planning.

## **Equality of opportunity**

## **Contributory grade 2**

11. There is good access to learning for all learners at Nortec. For instance, the company deals with the difficulties of having learners spread over a wide geographical area. Distance learning material for key skills training is used effectively to ensure equality of access for learners who have restricted mobility. There is a detailed initial assessment for these learners. Staff keep a database of individual learner's development needs, and send out regular workbooks to develop those skills identified through the initial assessment process. Learners can also e-mail or telephone staff at Nortec. Learners are offered individual coaching for key skills in the workplace. Before the introduction of this system, only 37 per cent of learners passed the key skills test, but since the system was started, 92 per cent of learners have passed. In addition to these modes of learning, learners are offered evening sessions at the premises in Banbury. This is not well used at present, but learners want to have the sessions available. Learners who have basic skills needs are able to join learndirect sessions. Nortec also has a few learners who have significant learning needs, and in some cases learners are referred to another training provider who specialises in appropriate training. Nortec also offers training at foundation level with this training provider, which allows the inclusion of a wider range of learners. Nortec uses the services of Oxfordshire County Council to provide support for learners who speak English as an additional language, and to translate information.

12. Creative ways have been used to enable learners who have physical disabilities to achieve their qualifications. A learner who has profound hearing impairment has achieved the qualifications by producing photographic evidence and witness testimonies. The assessor ensures that there is a sufficient range of assessment activity and sources to cover the requirements of the NVQ. Furniture in the computer suite has been adapted to suit the requirements of a learner who has a disability. The main training department, refreshment facilities and learning resources are accessible to learners who have restricted mobility.

13. Learners and staff have a good level of awareness of equal opportunities. Nortec has had an equal opportunities policy since the company's creation in 1984, and it has been regularly reviewed. It includes clear and effective procedures for dealing with harassment and bullying. There is a comprehensive system for dealing with complaints and detailed notes record the actions taken. Learners have an effective and memorable induction to equal opportunities and, on a frequent and regular basis, are reminded that they can report discriminatory behaviour. The company has recently created an attractive and readable learning pack for learners and staff, which covers equal opportunities, including recent legislation. The new pack is clearly written, comprehensive and designed as a teaching aid for use throughout a learner's programme. It is used in conjunction with a more detailed booklet created for assessors, who support the learners' understanding.

14. Staff have received recent and good staff development on equal opportunities. They have studied employment law which is useful when visiting workplaces. The company has analysed data on the ethnicity of learners over the past four years, but this information has not yet been used to set targets. Nortec currently has 3 per cent of its

learners from minority ethnic groups and it has recently held an open day, which it publicised on posters written in languages which are spoken in the community as well as English. It is currently discussing with an Asian youth group in Banbury, ways in which it can serve the needs of the young people in this group.

15. Employers are aware of Nortec's equal opportunities policy, and are fully involved in ensuring the safety of the learner. This has included learners being protected from ageist discrimination and abusive behaviour from customers. Learners are very certain that they would be fully supported by Nortec and their employers if they were concerned about discriminatory practices.

16. Nortec have made some attempts to recruit from under-represented groups. They have begun market research to assist them in this work.

## Quality assurance

## Contributory grade 3

17. Effective actions have been taken to improve the learners' experience. Feedback on the quality of the company's training is obtained from a number of sources, including learners' and employers' questionnaires and through visits made by assessors and reviewers. Actions to improve training are discussed at team meetings and with individuals. For example, one employer was given extended feedback on the training for their employee after a negative comment on a feedback form. A learner received extra help from Nortec to develop their numeracy key skill after feedback from an employer. Actions are implemented effectively and employers are informed of the improvements made.

18. There has been insufficient evaluation of the quality of the training given by a local subcontracted further education college for a number of years. One visit to the college has been carried out which included observing two lessons. Nortec and college personnel have met to discuss the college training and Nortec receives progress reports on its learners. However, Nortec has not routinely received reports from the college on the quality of its provision, such as external verifier reports and internally produced self-assessment reports. A driving school has been contracted recently to provide driver training for road haulage learners. The driving school has worked with Nortec previously. Procedures to monitor the quality of the training are to be agreed.

19. Over the past 18 months, the formal auditing of the operation of the company procedures has been suspended during the development of the new operating procedures. Auditing arrangements are being developed as part of the new quality assurance procedures.

20. Quality assurance procedures have been developed for some aspects of the company's operational and administrative operations. The procedures are based on an international quality assurance standard. They include youth training, NVQ assessment, ESF courses, human resources and customer service and complaints procedures. The procedures have been established with the close co-operation of the company's staff and are comprehensive and clear. Guidance notes support the operation of the procedures. Procedures for other areas of the company's operation, such as private courses and health and safety, are in the process of being developed.

21. The internal verification processes across all the areas of learning meet the requirements of the awarding bodies. Assessors and internal verifiers meet to standardise the assessment practices. Verification covers the range of units and evidence used, but the planning of how this will be undertaken is not sufficiently comprehensive. All portfolios are verified on completion and a selection are verified during their production. Feedback is given to the assessors on the quality of this process, but the learners are not given any feedback on the quality of their portfolios. Learners' portfolios are sampled and assessment is observed.

22. A quality assurance manual gives an overview of the services offered by Nortec and there are statements on specific service standards. The policy, which is included in the manual, identifies the company's commitment to quality assurance and staff responsibilities for implementing quality assurance procedures. The policy identifies that the suitability and effectiveness of the quality assurance systems will be reviewed every six months by the senior management team, but this has yet to be carried out.

23. Workplaces used by learners are checked for health and safety risks. An initial visit identifies the level of risk associated with the workplace and confirms that the employer's liability insurance is current. There are planned dates to upgrade the health and safety check and the expiry of liability insurance. All but a few of the records are current.

24. The self-assessment report produced for the inspection was the third produced by the company. It was based on work carried out by the quality improvement group, which identified and acted on a range of strengths and weaknesses before the final production of the report. The company's staff are actively involved in the production of the report through their Investors in People working groups. Most of the weaknesses identified by inspectors were not identified in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report contained some strengths which were considered to be no more than normal practice.

#### Good Practice

*Nortec supports the individual needs of staff. Several members of staff have been encouraged to gain qualifications at a variety of levels, and have been promoted in line with the skills acquired. The company has a flexible approach to its workforce, allowing career breaks and flexible working arrangements to fit in with family commitments.*

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	48	3

25. Nortec offers NVQ and modern apprenticeship training in business administration and management. There are 17 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQ level 2 and 26 advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQ level 3. Five learners are on NVQ courses. All learners are employed. As well as the subcontracted recruitment system, Nortec staff attend careers conventions and school presentations. When required, Nortec assists potential learners to find suitable employment. Learners are given relevant information and advice on NVQ programmes. Learners are then enrolled and undergo a short induction including initial diagnostic assessments which are used to assist in the planning of appropriate training programmes. Training advisers give pastoral support to learners and monitor satisfaction and general progress. Assessment is carried out in the workplace by Nortec's own assessors. Key skills training is offered through a range of support and materials. Job-specific training is the responsibility of the employer.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	31		32		35		30		7						
Retained*	2		3		20		16	53	3	43						
Successfully completed	1		2		12		12	40	3	43						
Still in learning	19		6		1		0	0	0	0						

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



Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98								
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	17		9		6		10		2							
Retained*	0		6		4	67	7	70	1	50							
Successfully completed	0		2		3	50	6	60	0	0							
Still in learning	12		5		0	0	0	0	0	0							

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

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98								
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	5		10				3		3							
Retained*	0		4				2	67	3	100							
Successfully completed	0		4				2	67	3	100							
Still in learning	4		1				0	0	0	0							

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

## STRENGTHS

- effective assessment process
- good support for learners
- comprehensive key skills training

## WEAKNESSES

- unsatisfactory retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices
- ineffective progress review process for learners

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better information on modern apprenticeships for employers

26. There is good initial assessment, including a skill scan for matching job roles to

programme content, and suitable diagnostic assessment. There is an effective team of assessors who are enthusiastic and competent. Assessments are carried out appropriately in the workplace and employers are given regular reports on learners' progress. Evidence is gathered from a wide variety of sources, using the full range of methods. Portfolios are well organised and well presented and contain a wide range of well-recorded evidence. The frequency of assessment visits is determined by the progress of the learner, but normally take place every four weeks. Action-planning at these visits is thorough and is recorded on a formative assessment review sheet. The learner is given clear guidance on what to do before the next visit. The action plan forms a sound basis for the next assessment.

27. Learners are very well supported. They are given a short but thorough induction, including good information about their chosen programme. They are generally knowledgeable about the process. Learners' workplaces are suitable and employers are very supportive and are usually actively engaged in the learning process. Many employers have modified learners' work roles to meet qualification requirements. Learners have good levels of support from Nortec's staff and responses to enquiries are prompt and effective. There are excellent working relationships between assessors and learners, which motivate the learners to achieve their qualifications. Training advisers give learners additional pastoral support during reviews. Health and safety, equal opportunities and employee rights and responsibilities are covered thoroughly and are generally well understood.

28. There is comprehensive training in key skills, and achievement is fostered and promoted by Nortec's staff. Nortec's assessors are taking key skills tests at level 3 to improve their understanding of the system and there is a specialist key skills co-ordinator. Learning materials are good and include a wide range of relevant work packs which are available to all learners. Learners are offered individual support when required. Initial assessment is well used to target individual development needs. Key skills are generally an integral part of the portfolio evidence. There has been significant improvement in the results of the key skills tests with 100 per cent pass rate for the latest entrants in business administration and management.

29. Achievement and retention rates for advanced modern apprentices are unsatisfactory. Of the 104 advanced modern apprentices who started between 1997-98 and 2000-01, only 28 per cent have completed the full modern apprenticeship framework. The maximum possible achievement rate for the 2000-01 starters will be 25 per cent if all six learners still on the programme are successful. Nortec identified the unsatisfactory retention and achievement rates as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Retention and achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices are satisfactory. Of the 27 who started training between 1997-98 and 2000-01, 40 per cent have completed their full framework and five are still in learning. The retention rate over the whole period is 67 per cent.

30. Progress reviews take place every 12 weeks, but the process is ineffective. Reviews are planned to be carried out by training advisers, separate from the assessment

process, but due to limited staff resources many recent reviews have been carried out by the learner's own assessor. Reviews are often superficial and progress is considered in a very general way. Targets for achievement are not set during reviews and learners are not challenged.

31. Many employers' understanding of the modern apprenticeship programme has been developed through involvement with their learners. Some employers expressed a wish for better initial information.

**Good Practice**

*Nortec is supporting a pilot scheme which uses e-learning to assist progress for some advanced modern apprentices. This is aimed at supporting those learners who will respond to learning in this way, or do not have close support in the workplace.*

**Information & communications technology**

**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other government-funded provision	47	2

32. Nortec offers in-house courses in ICT, and supports some young people on work-based learning. Nortec has recently designed a 27-week training programme for adult learners, called IT Champions. The aim of the programme is to equip learners to be IT software and hardware trouble-shooters in their companies. The initiative is co-financed by the LSC and ESF. It is not accredited, although learners may subsequently wish to attempt an examination-based qualification in IT or an NVQ. The course entry requirement is a working knowledge of standard office software applications at approximately level 2. In the first group, which started the course in May, 46 learners started and 26 remain. Of the 30 who started in July, 21 remain.

33. There are eight advanced modern apprentices, in using IT or networking and operations and two foundation modern apprentices who started last year. As there was only a few work-based learners, it was not graded separately.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	2		6		11		9		2						
Retained*	0		1		5		7	78	1	50						
Successfully completed	0		0		2		5	56	1	50						
Still in learning	2		5		1		0	0	0	0						

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

Work-based learning for young people															
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)															
	2001-02														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	2														
Retained*	0														
Successfully completed	0														
Still in learning	2														

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

Work-based learning for young people															
NVQ Training															
	1998-99		1997-98												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	10		14												
Retained*	10		12	86											
Successfully completed	10		12	86											
Still in learning	0		0	0											

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

### STRENGTHS

- well-planned training on all programmes
- very good support for learners on all programmes
- highly effective delivery of IT course

### WEAKNESSES

- some slow progress in work based learning

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- further development of initial assessment for IT course

34. The training is well planned on all ICT programmes. There is a clear scheme of work for the IT Champions course. A detailed lesson plan for each session sets out aims and objectives, topics, timings and resources as well as the teaching methods. The

programme is well organised into discrete modules with a test at the end of each. The results are discussed with learners and the tutor revises the learning plan accordingly. This approach enables competences to be matched against NVQ units for future progression. The IT Champions programme has been tailored to match the needs of local small and medium-sized businesses. Consultation took place through effective marketing networks and from feedback on short commercial management courses. Additional feedback is gained from learners through a questionnaire halfway through the course and regular informal discussions with the tutors. There is insufficient data as yet to make judgements on retention and achievement rates. The company's informal research suggests that most learners leave early because of pressure of work or other commitments. Modern apprentices are regularly visited by their assessor and are given specific targets and feedback on progress. Workplace supervisors are actively involved in this process. Some supervisors create tasks or adapt working patterns so that learners can generate additional evidence for a competence.

35. There is very good support for learners on all programmes. Regular and helpful contact takes place between Nortec's staff and employers. Work placements are appropriate with ICT being the main task rather than a minor element of other work. Learners report that they can contact anyone at Nortec and receive a helpful and courteous response. Extra key skills support has been given to learners in the workplace and at workshops in the training centre. A self-assessment test is being introduced for new learners, but this is not fully developed. Current learners are not assessed until they start the training programme, and a few find this unsuitable.

36. The delivery of the IT Champions course is very effective. A good working atmosphere motivates learners and maintains their interest. The resources and teaching are very good. Effective questioning is used to check learners' understanding and learners feel free to ask questions. There is a flexible approach to content and pace, within a well-defined structure. Learners can stop and go over things at any time, and can vary the pace and content. Good reference materials are provided for learners to use in the sessions and in the workplace.

37. Some learners are progressing slowly in the work-based learning programmes. One learner has been training for nine months and has not achieved any of the units, and some learners are still training after their planned completion date. Learners are not given any materials to support the background knowledge unless they ask for them. Progress reviews do not check specific progress and are only pastoral. Assessors, rather than independent training advisers, have carried out some of the reviews. There has been several management initiatives and staff changes in this area in the past year and progress for current learners is improving.

**Good Practice**

*Nortec has made particular efforts to support learners, including the adapted furniture for a learner who has a physical disability and assistance offered to a learner who has poor vision and limited mobility.*

**Poor Practice**

*Learners who were carrying out maintenance on computers did not have the appropriate wrist bands and rubber floor mats to ensure electrical isolation.*

**Retailing, customer service & transportation**

**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	56	3

38. There are 29 learners in customer service, of whom 15 are foundation modern apprentices, 13 are advanced modern apprentices and one is a NVQ level 2 learner. There are 15 learners in the retailing occupational area, of whom 13 are foundation modern apprentices, one is an advanced modern apprentice and one is a NVQ level 2 learner. There are 12 learners in transporting goods by road, all of whom are foundation modern apprentices. Learners are all employed and a subcontractor recruits most of them through direct marketing to employers. A subcontractor provides the driver training. Assessors visit learners in the workplace for assessment, and training advisers visit learners to review their progress. There is no off-the-job training for the NVQs. The self-assessment report identified one of the strengths, but none of the weaknesses.

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

Work-based learning for young people														
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	14		17		33		57		23				
Retained*	0		4		20	61	18	32	14	61				
Successfully completed	0		3		16	48	9	16	11	48				
Still in learning	9		3		1	3	1	2	0	0				

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

Work-based learning for young people														
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	57		4		10		10		1				
Retained*	1		3	75	5	50	2	20	1	100				
Successfully completed	0		0	0	1	10	2	20	0	0				
Still in learning	39		1	25	0	0	0	0	0	0				

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



Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		2		5		7		3							
Retained*	0		1	50	1	20	4	57	3	100						
Successfully completed	0		0	0	1	20	4	57	3	100						
Still in learning	1		1	50	0	0	0	0	0	0						

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

### STRENGTHS

- good development of learners' job skills
- effective links with employers

### WEAKNESSES

- some slow progress towards qualifications
- poor target-setting

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more effective progress reviews

39. There is good development of learners' job skills and confidence and the training meets learners' needs and aims. The way the programmes are taught encourages learners to think about the way they do things at work, find information for themselves and gives them a broader understanding of their workplace. Where there are several learners in a work placement, they support each other and learners recommend the programmes to their friends and colleagues. After being on the training programme, several learners have been promoted into supervisory positions and many choose to progress to higher level qualifications.

40. Links with employers are very effective. Nortec's staff frequently inform employers of their learners' progress. Assessors also have good relationships with employers. Employers help the learners to undertake work and projects which will assist in generating evidence for their qualifications. Assessors ensure that projects are an integral part of the employer's business. Employers and other colleagues in the

workplace support learners with witness testimonies.

41. Some learners make slow progress towards achieving their qualifications. Some have been training for many months and have only achieved one or two NVQ units. One learner has had four different assessors and is only now starting to make progress in his modern apprenticeship. Nortec has recruited new assessors this year and learners are beginning to get back on schedule. Key skills are an integral part of the vocational training and the current focus is on passing the external tests. There is little key skills evidence in learners' portfolios, although projects have been planned. Assessors are taking key skills qualifications at level 3.

42. Achievement and retention rates are satisfactory. Between April 1997 and March 2001, 36 per cent of all learners completed their planned learning. During this time, 28 per cent of foundation modern apprentices, 36 per cent of advanced modern apprentices and 47 per cent of NVQ learners completed their training programmes. Between April 1997 and March 2001, 48 per cent of all learners reached the end of their planned learning programmes. During this time, 47 per cent of advanced modern apprentices, 48 per cent of foundation modern apprentices, and 59 per cent of NVQ learners reached the end of their planned learning programmes.

43. Target-setting for learners is poor. Target dates on individual learning plans are for completion of the whole programme and there are no interim targets for completion of units. Individual learning plans are not updated to take account of learners' progress and achievements. There are regular progress reviews, but they are not effective and include few targets. Assessors and training advisers meet each month at progression meetings to discuss learners' progress. However, the training advisers do not follow up any problems during progress reviews. Assessment plans are a list of tasks to be completed by the assessor's next visit, so learners are clear what they have to achieve in the short term, but there are no long-term milestones. Learners are unsure about the progress they have made, what they will work on next, and when they are likely to finish.

44. Induction and initial assessment take place in the workplace and are satisfactory. Learners can recall the information from induction, including health and safety and equality of opportunity. Recently developed equal opportunities materials are excellent and have further developed the learners' and employers' awareness of equality of opportunity. Training advisers carry out an initial assessment of the learners' current level of key skills and matches the NVQ to the learner's job role.

45. Assessments take place every four weeks. Learners' portfolios are good and demonstrate their competence. Assessors use a range of diverse evidence. Learning resources are available to support the key skills.

**Good Practice**

*A learner who is profoundly deaf has been well supported to achieve his qualification. Nortec's assessor worked with the learner to use creative and imaginative ways of gathering evidence. The learner is very motivated by his achievement.*