

INSPECTION REPORT

Positive Outcomes Limited

09 December 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Overall judgement

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

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

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

SUMMARY

The provider

Positive Outcomes Limited is a private company, which offers training in vocational courses in Nottinghamshire. It has recently moved to its new premises in a business centre in Mansfield. Positive Outcomes Limited offers training to adult and young learners in retailing, customer service and transportation, business administration, management and professional and information and communications technology. There were too few learners in information and communications technology to be inspected.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the quality of work-based learning in retailing, customer service and transportation, and business administration, management and professional is unsatisfactory. The leadership and management of Positive Outcomes Limited are unsatisfactory, as is the company's approach to equality of opportunities and quality assurance.

GRADES

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

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

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- good staff development

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KEY WEAKNESSES

- inadequate planning of learning
- weak assessment practices
- slow progress for some learners
- inadequate management of equal opportunities
- inadequate promotion of equal opportunities
- incomplete quality assurance arrangements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of meetings
- more use of management information

THE INSPECTION

1. Five inspectors spent a total of 19 days at Positive Outcomes Limited (Positive Outcomes) in December 2002. They interviewed 36 learners and carried out 25 interviews with the staff. The inspectors visited 29 employers and interviewed nine of them. They also observed a range meetings to review learners' progress and assessment. They examined a range of written material, including learner's portfolios of evidence, the company's plans, policies and procedures and the reports of the awarding bodies. The inspectors studied the company's self-assessment report and its development plan, which was written in July 2002 and updated in October 2002.

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Positive Outcomes was established in 1997 as a private training organisation to provide mainly government-funded training to young people in Mansfield and the surrounding areas of Nottinghamshire. There are currently 157 modern apprentices on work-based learning programmes, of whom there are 13 foundation modern apprentices and 65 advanced modern apprentices in business administration, management and professional. There are 37 foundation modern apprentices and 34 advanced modern apprentices in retailing, customer service and transportation and eight advanced modern apprentices in information and communication technology (ICT). Positive Outcomes has a contract with Nottinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). All the learners are employed in local businesses ranging from small businesses to national companies.

3. The two managing directors who founded the company jointly manage the company. One managing director is responsible for the overall management of the company, while the other director has responsibility for the co-ordination and development of training programmes. In addition to the directors, the company employs 10 members of staff. There are two full-time office staff and two full-time assessors who are all working towards their assessor qualifications. The six part-time qualified assessors report to the director who has training responsibility.

4. The economy of the district is dominated by the service industries, accounting for around 71 per cent of all employment. In May 2002, the unemployment rate in Mansfield was 4.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 3 per cent. The 1991 census shows that 4.6 per cent of the population in Mansfield are from minority ethnic groups, compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent. In September 2001, the proportion of school leavers in Mansfield achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 36 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

5. The retention rates in retailing, customer service and transportation and also in business administration, management and professional courses are satisfactory. Learners in retailing, customer service and transportation receive good individual support, but the quality of their training is unsatisfactory. The planning of the learning is ineffective and individual target-setting is poor. Some learners' progress is also slow.

6. The learners in business administration, management and professional have good learning opportunities in the workplace. However, the learning is inadequately planned and the progress reviews are inadequate. The assessment practices are weak and some learners' progress is slow.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

7. Positive Outcomes is owned and managed by its two directors. The managing director takes responsibility for financial and administrative matters, while the development director manages training, assessment and internal verification. There are also 10 staff members. The office manager, assisted by an administrator, carries out a number of key administrative functions, including the monitoring of progress against contract, the development of policies and procedures, and the maintenance of staff records. The business development executive is responsible for marketing, and the monitoring of health and safety. There are eight assessors who visit learners in the workplace to oversee their learning and carry out assessments. The company is developing policies and procedures for quality assurance, but they are still in draft form. There is an equal opportunities statement, which is given to learners when they start their training programmes. Positive Outcomes has been carrying out self-assessments since early 2001. The company completed its latest self-assessment report in September 2001 and this was revised in July 2002 in preparation for inspection.

STRENGTHS

- good staff development

WEAKNESSES

- insufficiently focused strategic planning
- inadequate management of equal opportunities
- inadequate promotion of equal opportunities
- incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- insufficient evaluation of learners' and employers' views
- ineffective internal verification

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of meetings
- clearer appraisal targets
- more use of management information

8. There is a comprehensive programme of staff development. New assessors are sponsored by Positive Outcomes to take the assessor qualification, while those with more experience are trained to be internal verifiers. More experienced staff also mentor the newly appointed staff. Employees carry out a range of other professional development activities, which have been identified through their appraisal and are relevant to their job role and the needs of the business, including training in health and safety and information technology (IT). Information about the training taken is collected

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by the office manager and is used to update individual staff development records, and to use as a basis for subsequent appraisals. Positive Outcomes offers training towards the assessor qualification free to employers, and five are currently benefiting from this opportunity.

9. Appraisal arrangements are satisfactory. Managers carry out regular, thorough appraisals of their staff. New employees have a satisfactory induction to the company, and are appraised every six months, and those with more experience are appraised annually. Appraisals comprise a self-evaluation by the appraisee, and a comprehensive discussion with one of the directors about progress, problems and targets for the future. The targets are appropriate to the needs of the company and of individual staff members, but are not always set within clear timescales.

10. The management of the company is open and consultative, and employees have appropriate opportunities for regular, informal discussion with both directors. Internal communication is satisfactory. Staff meet formally once each month to discuss a range of issues, including contracts and equal opportunities. The office manager meets each month with the managing director to discuss administrative and contractual issues, and with the training director to discuss learners' progress. Adequate minutes are taken from each of these meetings. They are readily available for reference, but are not routinely distributed to members of staff. It is not always evident from one meeting to the next whether actions have been followed up. Positive Outcomes' directors maintain a range of appropriate external links. They regularly attend events run by the local LSC and meetings of the local provider network group. They have a particularly productive relationship with another training provider in the area, with whom they meet to share ideas. Their relationships with employers are positive and well managed.

11. The strategic direction of the company is insufficiently clear. There is a business plan which focuses on financial matters, but it was written in 2000 and has not been updated. The directors have recently identified four business objectives, which have been shared with staff in the form of a newsletter. However, they have insufficient detail, and do not set out exactly what is to be achieved, by when, and how success will be measured. The development plan contains few measurable success indicators, and has not been updated to reflect progress or the lack of it. For example, improvements to the initial assessment process were scheduled for completion by October 2002, but they have not been achieved and there is no revised achievement date in the plan. Staff are not consulted in the identification of the business objectives, and are not clear as to what they are, or what needs to be done to meet them. The directors have not set company targets to improve performance with regard to retention and achievement rates or equality of opportunity.

12. Positive Outcomes uses a commercially designed management information system, which provides data on learners' gender, ethnicity and achievement. This is now being used satisfactorily to identify trends in performance, and some initiatives are under way to assess the issues highlighted. For example, the directors are aware that some learners leave early because of constraints on their time. The managing director is developing a

website which will enable learners to submit work on-line, to widen their access to training and assessment. This is not yet complete, and it is too early to say how effective it will be.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

13. There is inadequate management of equal opportunities in Positive Outcomes. The company has an equal opportunity statement, and there are some equal opportunities policies and procedures, but the policies are not clearly detailed and are not understood by the learners and staff. Most learners do not have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Positive Outcomes does not systematically monitor the employers' equal opportunities policies and procedures and has an over reliance on the employers' policies to protect the learners. The company does not have clear procedures to deal with the learners' concerns on harassment, bullying and complaints. The policies do not refer to relevant legislation, and are not suitably adapted to the learners' needs. For example, in the health and safety procedure, the needs of the learners who have a physical disability are inadequately considered. The policies are not systematically reviewed and updated and there is no regular monitoring of compliance.

14. There is inadequate promotion of equal opportunities. The learners are given some information on equal opportunities during their induction, but the information is not adequate and is not sufficiently reinforced at learners' progress reviews. There is insufficient publicity material to reflect the diversity of population of the area. There is also insufficient use of positive images in the learning material.

15. The company monitors equal opportunities data based on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability. However, the information is not evaluated and used as a basis for the policies to improve the recruitment and retention and achievement rates of groups with diverse backgrounds and cultures.

16. Positive Outcomes has identified these weaknesses in the self-assessment report and has taken steps to improve them in its action plan. The company has recently given higher priority to equal opportunities and the responsibility for equal opportunities now lies with a manager and both directors to monitor the progress of the action plans. The manager responsible for equal opportunities has developed a detailed action plan to rectify these weaknesses. Two managers have also attended equal opportunities training and are updating the company's policies and procedures. For example, there is a stronger focus on equal opportunities during the induction for the new learners. These learners have a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities, but it is still insufficient. This new initiative has not impacted on most of the learners and the overall impact of the action plans cannot be assessed.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

17. Positive Outcomes has incomplete quality assurance arrangements and this was identified in the self-assessment report. Since June 2002, the office manager, with some guidance from an external consultant, has begun to develop a quality assurance statement and a quality assurance policy, and a set of procedures for key aspects of training and assessment. Positive Outcomes is taking a particularly measured and thoughtful approach to the development of the procedures, which are clearly written, and based on the specific requirements of the company. However, the procedures are still only in draft form. The draft procedures have not been shared with assessors, and are not yet used to assure quality or ensure continuous improvement. Each procedure indicates what measure will be used to monitor its effectiveness. Positive Outcomes does not have a system for monitoring the on-the-job training given by employers.

18. Internal verification takes place very regularly, and is adequately planned. However, some aspects of the process are unclear. The director and the three internal verifiers accompany assessors on their workplace visits, and observe them carrying out coaching, portfolio-building, assessments and reviews of progress. All outcomes are recorded on an internal verification sampling sheet, whatever has been observed. This gives no distinction between learning and assessment for learners and assessors. The written feedback on observations is detailed, but is often descriptive rather than evaluative, and gives insufficient information about what has been carried out well, and what might be improved. The internal verification of portfolios is regular, but some of the written feedback has insufficient detail. There is no effective system for recording corrective actions which have been taken as a result of internal verification. Internal verification has not identified the weaknesses in assessment found in both areas of learning during the inspection.

19. The company's system for gathering feedback from learners and employers is insufficient and this was acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Some learners complete a questionnaire at the end of their programme, which is then analysed by the directors. The questionnaire has undergone several revisions, but it is still poorly designed. It contains mainly closed questions and gives insufficient opportunity for learners to express their views freely. None of the feedback has been used to improve learning. A questionnaire for completion by employers has recently been devised, but is not yet in use.

20. The directors, in consultation with other staff members, wrote the company's self-assessment report. It was updated before inspection with the guidance of a consultant. The report is detailed, and provides useful background information about the company, the way it operates, and the rationale behind its judgements. It identifies some key weaknesses, for example, in initial assessment, the planning of learning, and quality assurance. However, it overstates the importance of some of the strengths, and underestimates the importance of some weaknesses. The grades given for the areas of learning are too generous, but the inspection team's grades matched those given for leadership and management. The action plan appended to the self-assessment report is detailed, but

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is not kept up to date. It contains too few measurable success indicators.

Good Practice

One of Positive Outcomes' assessors asked an employer to observe her while she carried out an assessment on his learner, to ensure that she was working to the quality standards set by the employer. The employer provided written feedback to the assessor. He was very positive about her performance, and about her commitment to meet the needs of his company.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	78	4

21. There are 78 learners in business administration, management and accounting, all of whom are employed. There are 65 advanced modern apprentices, of whom 34 are in management training, 30 are in business administration training and one in accounting training. There are also 10 foundation modern apprentices in business administration training and three in accounting training. Learners can start training at any time of the year. Most learners are recruited through direct enquiries from employers and learners or in response to promotional activities. The recruitment process includes an interview and initial assessment of all applicants. All learners attend an induction given by Positive Outcomes' staff at their workplace. All modern apprentices are employed and are visited at least each month in the workplace for training and assessment of their national vocational qualification (NVQ) and key skills. Learners have a formal review every three months. There are seven qualified assessors who all assess administration, five assess management and one assesses accountancy. Two staff are working towards assessor qualifications. Five staff are qualified internal verifiers, one is a qualified external verifier and one is a qualified adviser for accreditation of prior learning.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	13		42		40											
Retained*	0		3		10											
Successfully completed	0		0		7											
Still in learning	13		34		18											

*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

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Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		13		8											
Retained*	0		1		5											
Successfully completed	0		1		4											
Still in learning	3		9		1											

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

STRENGTHS

- good learning opportunities in the workplace

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate planning of learning
- inadequate progress reviews
- weak assessment practices
- some slow progress

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better reinforcement of induction
- better recording of initial advice and guidance
- better arrangements for updating of occupational competence
- better range of learning materials for administration and accounting

22. Workplace learning opportunities are good. Learners are given good on-the-job training, which is appropriate to their work role. Workplace supervisors have a wide range of occupational experience. Learners demonstrate good development of skills and most employers give learners good opportunities to progress. A few learners have gained promotion. For example, one management learner has recently been promoted to the role of team leader and one administration learner is now responsible for training new receptionists. Other learners have had their job roles expanded and given more responsible tasks.

23. The planning of learning in business administration, management and accounting is

inadequate. There is some poor use of individual learning plans. Plans for most learners identify the target qualification and key skills, but they do not set clear milestones. Initial assessment is ineffective and does not identify the learners' training needs. It is insufficiently used to develop an individualised programme of learning. On most learning plans there are no clear short-term targets. There are better records for more recent starters, but there is insufficient information against which progress can be measured. A significant number of long-term targets are not measurable. Most learners are unable to reflect adequately on their overall progress. For some learners, the same target is set over several visits with no progress made. For most learners, targets have no detailed objectives and timescales and are insufficiently specific to NVQ or key skills outcomes. Some targets are not always shared with supervisors. Arrangements for training and assessment are not clearly identified in individual learning plans. There is no planned co-ordination of the learning programme or work activities. Some of the learning plans do not allow sufficient time on the employers' premises to work on the apprenticeship programme. Learners are given satisfactory initial advice and guidance, but it is not well recorded. All learners complete key skills initial assessment tests, the results of which are recorded for most learners on their individual learning plans.

24. Learners' progress reviews in business administration, management and accounting are inadequate. Assessors do not effectively evaluate and monitor learners' achievement against their individual learning plan. During the progress review, the learning plan is rarely referred to, or updated. Supervisors are often not involved in the development of individual learning plans and most are not directly involved in the progress reviews, although some are asked to provide written comments. The learner and the employer are not given a copy of the review paperwork. There is insufficient monitoring of health and safety and equal opportunities during some learners' reviews.

25. Assessment practices are weak. The assessments are not systematically planned for all learners. Some have assessment plans, but they are not sufficiently detailed. There is a narrow range of assessment methods used for many learners and an over reliance on learners' written statements. Observed workplace assessments are few and portfolio evidence is inadequately authenticated as being the work of the learner. There is insufficient feedback on learners' assessment. Most of the assessors reference all learners' portfolio evidence. Learners often collect a large amount of evidence over several visits before the assessor takes the portfolio to cross-reference it. Most of the learners are unclear how their evidence contributes towards their qualification.

26. There is slow progress towards achievement of the NVQ and key skills for a number of learners in administration, management and accounting. There are learners who have been in learning for 12 months or more, but have none of the units completed and very little evidence in their portfolios. For these learners the key skills assessment is not always identified and planned. The action plans and feedback forms for these learners are not sufficiently detailed and do not explain how the work-based evidence can be used to satisfy the requirements of the awarding body.

27. The resources for learners are adequate. For management learners there is a set of

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modules covering some of the background knowledge for management. For administration there is a range of handouts covering topics such as copyright and data protection, but they are not widely used. There is only one handout on 'jargon busting' for accountancy learners. Positive Outcomes has identified in its development plan the need to develop a more comprehensive range of learning materials for administration and accountancy learners. All learners have access to CD-ROM packages covering typing, spreadsheets and other office-based applications. The staff are suitably qualified for all occupational areas except for accounting which is insufficient for assessment and internal verification. Most of the assessors are part time and all are offered staff development and work towards additional qualifications. However, occupational competence is not kept up to date. There are adequate arrangements for pastoral care and exit counselling. The assessors give good pastoral advice and this is recognised by the learners. Learners who do not complete their programme of learning during the agreed period are still fully supported by Positive Outcomes.

28. Currently, none of the learners has basic skill needs, but there are arrangements for support to meet any identified needs. Basic skills are not systematically tested. An initial assessment of learners' job roles is carried out against the NVQ standards, by the learners and Positive Outcomes' staff. All learners have a satisfactory induction, but there is insufficient reinforcement of induction content throughout the programme.

29. The retention rates are satisfactory. In 2001-02 and 2000-01, 81 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively, of the advanced modern apprentices who started are still in learning. Achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices are also satisfactory. In 2000-01, 50 per cent of the learners completed their framework.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	71	4

30. There are 71 learners in retailing, customer service and transportation, all of whom are employed. There are seven learners working towards qualifications in retailing, one is an advanced modern apprentice and six are foundation modern apprentices. There are 16 learners in call-handling operations, nine of whom are foundation modern apprentices and seven are advanced modern apprentices. There is one foundation modern apprentice in distribution and warehousing. There are 47 learners in customer service, 29 of whom are advanced modern apprentices and 18 are foundation modern apprentices. Learners can start training at any time of the year. Most are recruited from local businesses with some joining through recommendation or Positive Outcomes' recruitment activities. The recruitment process includes an interview and initial assessment of all applicants. All learners attend an induction by Positive Outcomes' staff in their workplace. All modern apprentices are employed and are visited at least each month in the workplace for training and assessment of their NVQ and key skills. Learners have a formal review every three months. There are seven qualified assessors and two are working towards assessor qualifications. Five staff are qualified internal verifiers, one is a qualified external verifier and one is a qualified adviser for accreditation of prior learning. Training and assessment take place in the workplace and learners are visited every month. Employers provide on-the-job training.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	15		14		44											
Retained*	0		1		27											
Successfully completed	0		1		18											
Still in learning	15		9		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

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Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	21		21		29											
Retained*	0		3		12											
Successfully completed	0		2		12											
Still in learning	19		13		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

STRENGTHS

- good additional support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- poor planning of learning
- some slow progress for foundation modern apprentices
- insufficient observation of learner performance

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better reinforcement of induction topics

31. There is some good additional support for learners. Some assessors give individual support in order to improve the learners' understanding of their courses. Additional material has been prepared to help learners understand the requirements of the awarding bodies. In one particularly good work placement, an assessor, with the support of the employer, is available one day each week where a number of learners are carrying out a variety of awards at different levels. Assessors provide learners with contact telephone numbers to ensure that queries can be resolved between scheduled visits. The learners value this arrangement. Resources are adequate for the learners. The learners have access to a range of CD-ROM-based material covering typing skills, spreadsheets, databases and other office-based applications. A customer service skills module has also been developed to support learners.

32. There is poor planning of learning and this was identified in the self-assessment report. An initial assessment is carried out through an internally devised key skills test

and a variety of other means, including discussion with the learners and their employers. However, this approach is not sufficiently objective to assess and identify the most suitable level of courses for some learners. The result of the initial assessment is not systematically used for all learners to plan their learning. Most learners have an insufficient knowledge of their individual learning plan. The plans are not always sufficiently detailed and do not explain how the work-based evidence can be used to satisfy the requirements of the awarding body. Neither do they systematically identify opportunities for key skills assessment. A significant range of evidence collected by learners is referenced against the framework requirements by the assessors, without the learners having a clear understanding of their role in this process. Individual target-setting for learners is ineffective. There are no short-term target dates agreed for the completion of NVQ units. Assessors do not always establish clear timescales for completion of work in the individual learning plan. Meetings with learners do not follow up on previously agreed activities, and learners are not sufficiently aware of their progress towards the completion of the framework. Some assessors set unrealistic timescales. For example, one learner expected to complete a 24-month advanced modern apprenticeship within a seven-month period. Recently, individual learning plans have been included in the learners' portfolios and are used to identify additional learning needs. However, this new arrangement has not impacted on most of the learners, and it is too early to assess its full impact.

33. There is some slow progress among foundation modern apprentices. There are two learners who started their qualification before April 2001 and are still in learning eight months after the proposed completion date. Twenty-seven per cent of foundation modern apprentices who commenced their award before August 2001 are still in learning, four months after the expected end date.

34. There is insufficient observation of learner performance in customer service, with an over reliance on reports and witness testimony. Evidence for portfolios is mainly based on work reports, answers to assessment questions and projects. Professional discussions are used to assess the learners' understanding of the work submitted.

35. The retention rates are satisfactory. Thirty per cent of those starting in 2000-01 and 60 per cent of those starting in 2001-02 are still in learning. The achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices and foundation modern apprentices in 2000-01 are unsatisfactory at 41 per cent for both groups.

36. The induction process is satisfactory, but some learners are not clear about certain aspects of it. There are currently no learners with basic skills needs, although the company has adequate arrangements in place for the provision of basic skills should the need arise. There are adequate arrangements for pastoral care and exit counselling.