

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Steps to Work (Walsall) Ltd Reinspection**

**19 August 2003**



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. 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
- the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes 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.



## SUMMARY

### The provider

Steps to Work (Walsall) Ltd, is a private company which was established in March 1999. The company is based in the centre of Walsall. It provides a range of services to the many local communities in the north Black Country Metropolitan Borough of Walsall. The Jobcentre Plus contract includes work-based learning and New Deal 25+. There are 16 clients in the programme centre and 45 in Gateway foundation programmes. Thirteen clients are in the intensive activity period and 14 are on short job-focused training. Twenty-two of these clients are in retailing and transportation placements and the remaining clients are on work placements in engineering, business administration and health, social care and public services. There were too few clients in these areas to be inspected separately.

Steps to Work (Walsall) Ltd's board of directors oversees the company's work. The chief executive, who reports to the board, has overall responsibility for running the company. The funded provision manager and a project co-ordinator manage the programmes, which are financed through Jobcentre Plus. Five project officers, work-placement providers and subcontractors provide the training for the clients. A team in the company's offices in Walsall provides administrative support.

### Overall judgement

The ALI's inspection in June 2002 found that training for Jobcentre Plus provision for retailing, customer service and transportation and foundation programmes was unsatisfactory. Leadership and management, equal opportunities and quality assurance were also unsatisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were good.

### Grades awarded

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity	4	2
Quality assurance	4	2

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:		
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	4	2

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	Inspection	Reinspection
Foundation programmes	4	2
Contributory grades:		
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	4	2
Programme Centres	4	2

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following key strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

### KEY STRENGTHS

- good retention rates
- good individual support for clients
- very comprehensive arrangements to promote equality of opportunity
- good arrangements for quality assurance
- particularly thorough target-setting for achievement and retention

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- insufficient support for numeracy, literacy and language
- insufficient detail in minutes of directors' and managers' meetings on achievement and learning

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of short-term learning targets
- more detail in the operational plan on dates for targets and responsibilities

## THE REINSPECTION

1. Reinspection of Steps to Work (Walsall) Ltd (Steps to Work) was carried out in three stages, over nine inspection days. The first visit was on 24 February 2003. The second stage was completed on 19 and 20 May 2003 and the final stage on 18 and 19 August 2003. Inspectors interviewed nine clients and three work-placement providers. They carried out 12 interviews with members of staff and the chair of the board of the company. A range of documents was examined, including a sample of clients' work and 10 clients' personal development plans. Inspectors also studied the most recent self-assessment report which was produced in March 2003.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Foundation programmes	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>

Grades awarded to learning sessions at reinspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Foundation programmes	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

### STRENGTHS

- clear strategic direction
- particularly effective use of additional funding
- good partnerships with external agencies
- very comprehensive arrangements to support equality of opportunity
- good arrangements for quality assurance
- particularly effective target-setting for achievement and retention

### WEAKNESSES

- insufficient detail in minutes of directors' and managers' meetings on achievement and learning
- inadequate self-assessment report

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more detail in the operational plan on responsibilities and dates for targets
- better reporting on observations of learning to the board and managers
- more detailed recording of information on clients' informal concerns

2. The board of directors and the chief executive of Steps to Work have established a particularly clear strategic path for the company. This is to recruit and provide sustainable employment and training for those people from groups who have difficulty finding work, whose learning skills are not well developed, and to help the borough of Walsall develop the economic and social well-being of its residents. The company's mission statement and operational plan clearly reflect these aims. Well-motivated managers and staff have a very good understanding of the mission and the plan and are particularly committed to their success. Staff contribute well to strategic- and operational-planning. Managers and staff work hard to achieve the mission and the plan by providing training which overcomes obstacles to learning and employment for those from areas of high unemployment, and who have been under-represented in traditional forms of education and training. The operational plan, although comprehensive, has insufficient detail on responsibilities and target dates.

3. Steps to Work has maintained the strength from the previous inspection of particularly effective use of additional funding. The company uses funds from a range of sources other than those from Jobcentre Plus. These include the European Social Fund (ESF), the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and Health Action Zones. Since the



previous inspection, further external funding has been gained from New Deal for Communities and regeneration zone funds. These additional funds are used well to help clients gain employment and complete their programme of learning by providing a very high standard of accommodation, protective clothing and guidance and counselling services, and, in particular, further finance and support for those from areas of high deprivation and those with disabilities. This strength is recorded in the self-assessment report.

4. At the previous inspection, Steps to Work had good partnership relationships with external agencies and this strength remains. The company's board has representation from a wide range of community organisations including the SRB areas, the local council, further education, the National Health Service (NHS) and housing associations. However, there has been no attendance recently from the representative for the business sector. A senior manager from Jobcentre Plus is an adviser to the board. The links with the two local jobcentres are good. The company has good relationships with local businesses through its own employment agency and the Business Link co-ordinators. Relationships with New Deal co-ordinators have been developed effectively so that the co-ordinators have a good understanding of the opportunities the company can offer clients. The company uses these links well to provide work placements, work experience and employment opportunities for clients.

5. The minutes from the company directors' meeting have insufficient detail on achievement and learning. Directors are given useful reports on the performance of clients, but they are not given any commentary on the quality of learning. Minutes of the directors' and the managers' meetings do not record discussions on the quality of learning for clients and only rarely include information on achievement and retention rates. This weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report.

6. Development of provision to support literacy, numeracy and language needs has been slow. This is due in part to insufficient clarity between Steps to Work and Jobcentre Plus about what provision can be provided. The company has a clear written development plan on the provision of support for literacy and numeracy and the use of language. The plan has an implementation timetable, a schedule for staff development and development of client awareness about literacy, numeracy and language support, and an outline of the marketing requirements.

## Equality of opportunity

## Contributory grade 2

7. At the previous inspection, the promotion of equality of opportunity was unsatisfactory. It is now thorough and comprehensive. Management and staff have clear responsibilities for equal opportunities and these include a designated programme co-ordinator to lead in this area. The equal opportunities policy and charter are clearly written. The well-written clients' charter which outlines clients' rights and responsibilities, is displayed prominently in all areas of the training centre and is included in the induction booklet. Equal opportunities is discussed and explained to clients at induction and is covered particularly well at dedicated training events. Clients' understanding of equal opportunities at these training events is checked using a questionnaire, and further training is provided if necessary. Staff have regular training on equal opportunities and their knowledge is good. All employment advertisements and job descriptions have a very clear emphasis on equality of opportunity. Work-placement providers that do not have their own equal opportunities policies and procedures have to adopt those from Steps to Work. A recent development has been equal opportunities training for work-placement providers. The company can provide a wide range of adapted materials, specialist equipment and support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Steps to Work has links with a wide range of agencies which can support clients who have personal issues, learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Translators can help with learning and recruitment if a client's first language is not English. Marketing materials use images which promote diversity. The company's mobile information unit visits areas where there is high unemployment among minority ethnic groups, to promote Jobcentre Plus provision. The company routinely collects and analyses data on recruitment, retention and achievement based on disability, gender and ethnicity. The company's training centre has good access for those with restricted mobility.

8. There are established measures to eliminate harassment and bullying, and procedures for complaints. Only one client so far has used these procedures formally and the matter was successfully resolved. Steps to Work and clients have been able to resolve problems before reaching the formal stage. However, records are not kept of the informal issues clients raise for further investigation and for analysis of trends in clients' concerns.

**Quality assurance****Contributory grade 2**

9. Since the previous inspection, Steps to Work has made significant progress in resolving weaknesses in quality assurance. This includes the writing of a quality assurance framework, a quality assurance manual and a policy. Monitoring of work-placement providers and subcontractors is now systematic and covers reviews of client outcomes and comparison with other providers and subcontractors. Where there is under-performance, steps are taken to resolve problems. An established programme of questionnaires records clients' views at induction, during and at the end of training. There is now regular observation of learning using clear criteria. The results of the questionnaires and observations are discussed at team meetings and actions are taken to remedy problems. For example, equal opportunities training now includes more workshop activities after clients considered there was too much input from tutors. However, no summary reports are produced for managers and the director on the observation of learning. The company is working towards Investors in People, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people, as well as an external quality award. The establishment of thorough quality assurance arrangements has seen retailing and transportation, and foundation programmes recover from unsatisfactory provision to good; job outcomes and retention rates increase between 2001-02 and 2002-03; and learning sessions improve to being satisfactory or better.

10. An improvement needed at the previous inspection was to develop target-setting for achievement and retention. The company has done this and now has thorough and very effective target-setting arrangements. This strength was not recognised in the self-assessment report. The directors set overall achievement and retention targets for Jobcentre Plus provision and there are now targets for all Jobcentre Plus programmes and areas of learning. Each project officer has targets for their clients. The process of determining the target figure for retention and achievement rates is sound. It is based on managers and staff discussing and agreeing target figures based on Jobcentre Plus contracts, previous client retention and achievement rates, local benchmarks and particularly the need to improve the proportion of clients being retained and gaining employment. Targets are monitored each week and each month. If targets are not achieved, measures are taken to ensure that they are met. The improvement to the target-setting arrangements has led to an increase in the proportion of clients gaining employment and being retained. Between 2001-02 and 2002-03, there was an increase overall of 10 per cent for clients gaining employment and a 12 per cent increase in the proportion being retained.

11. The self-assessment report is inadequate. The company has a process for self-assessment, which includes the views of staff, partners and learners. The report is a detailed document, but it is nearly all based on the inspection report for June 2002 and, with the exception of two additional judgements, contains no new assessment on the quality of the provision. However, the company has made some judgements about its provision, but these are not included in the self-assessment report. For example, the most recent development plan shows actions to resolve weaknesses which are not in the self-assessment report.

**Good Practice**

*The regular and effective analysis of data indicated that in some parts of the borough of Walsall the number of unemployed women in Jobcentre Plus programmes was low. Steps to Work is resolving this by a programme of open days where one of the key aims is to attract more unemployed women on to training programmes through the use of other government-funded programmes to introduce Jobcentre Plus provision.*

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	22	2

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

### STRENGTHS

- good retention rates
- good personal development by clients
- particularly effective individual support for clients
- good work placements
- good resources to support learning

### WEAKNESSES

- poor completion of client development plans

12. Retention rates are good for clients in retailing and transportation, and this was identified in the self-assessment report. Retention rates were also assessed as a strength in retailing and transportation at the original inspection. In 2001-02, 81 per cent of clients were retained for the expected duration of the intensive activity period (IAP) and for work-based learning for adults. At the reinspection, the retention rate for both programmes had increased to 87 per cent in 2002-03. In the same period, the proportion who achieved a job on these programmes also increased. In 2001-02, 49 per cent of clients gained employment. In 2002-03, this increased by 13 per cent to 62 per cent.

13. Clients' personal development in the IAP and work-based learning for adults programmes is good. Clients develop their personal skills as well as their occupational skills. For example, in retailing, the clients have improved their customer care skills so that they are considerably more confident and are able to deal with the range of needs of each customer. A client in lift truck operations developed his personal and occupational skills to a level that he was able to gain employment as a lift truck instructor. Another client has been employed by the company as a support technician and tutor.

14. The company's staff give good individual support. Staff take particular care to select work placements which meet the clients' job aims and personal needs. Clients are given

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good individual training to help them gain employment. The staff also offer a high level of support on personal issues. They are particularly strong at motivating and encouraging clients to remain in training when they are faced with significant personal issues outside of training. Clients have very good working relationships with the company's staff. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report.

15. The good quality and range of work placements was identified at the previous inspection and at the reinspection. Work placements are in small to medium-sized local businesses and large national companies. In each case, the work-placement provider offers good, relevant work experience and learning opportunities to clients. Clients who are in large companies are often included in company training programmes. Clients in smaller organisations have good individual training from work-placement staff and managers. Many work placements are able to offer employment at or before the end of clients' training.

16. There are good resources. The training centre has training rooms that are equipped to a high standard with computers, video facilities and training and learning aids. Good discrete interview rooms have been created for client interviews, reviews, and other meetings. Clients have access to good information and communications technology (ICT) facilities. They have their own individual secure areas on the training centre information technology (IT) network to store their work and are able to access the internet for job and other information. There are good learning materials including useful packs on effective curriculum vitae writing and interview techniques. There is a useful range of videos. Work-placement providers also have good resources, accommodation, equipment, training facilities and materials.

17. The clients' personal development plans and records are poorly completed. For example, they are often blank or contain only one or two entries to indicate progress. One client's review indicated a need for supervisory training, but this was not recorded in the reviewer's written comments. In most instances, little detail of job and career aims is noted. In some cases, this information does not link with the learning provided by Steps to Work. Clients currently complete personal development plans with little guidance from staff on how to record progress. Even when learning targets are accurately recorded, there are no dates for their achievement.

### Good Practice

*A 'trivia' quiz is held each Friday, with prizes such as gift tokens, to encourage clients to attend end-of-week jobsearch training sessions. Previously, many clients were absent from these sessions, but numbers are now increasing as a result of the quiz. One week, the winning team's prize was donated by clients to a children's nursery in an adjacent part of the building.*

**Foundation programmes****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	45	2
Programme Centres	16	2

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

**STRENGTHS**

- good retention rates
- well-planned and well-presented learning sessions
- good individual support for clients
- particularly well-located and attractive learning environment

**WEAKNESSES**

- insufficient support for literacy, numeracy and language

**OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- better use of short-term learning targets

18. Retention rates for clients on foundation programme are good. To prevent clients leaving early, Steps to Work changed its induction process to ensure that clients are better informed on what is available from the company. This has significantly reduced the number of early leavers from the Gateway and programme centres. In 2001-02, 62 per cent of clients were retained on the Gateway for the expected duration. In 2002-03, this increased to 82 per cent and in 2003-04, so far, the proportion has risen to 89 per cent. For programme centre clients there has also been an upward trend in retention rates. In 2001-02, the proportion of clients retained was 62 per cent. In 2002-03, this increased to 84 per cent, and so far, in 2003-04 the proportion has increased to 91 per cent. The proportion of clients who gained employment from the programme centres in 2002-03 was 58 per cent. This was a 25 per cent increase on 2001-02. The Gateway is less successful. In 2002-03, only 31 per cent gained employment. However, Steps to Work achieves some of the highest employment rates from the Gateway, of providers in the local Jobcentre Plus district. In addition, nearly 10 per cent of clients progressed from Gateway to other New Deal 25+ programmes.

19. Learning sessions are well planned and well presented. There is a range of carefully planned learning sessions to meet the needs of clients. Sessions use comprehensive learning packs which include trainers' notes, master copies of handouts and materials for

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visual presentations. Many sessions make good use of professionally produced video training packs. The objectives of learning sessions are clearly explained to clients and are frequently reinforced during the session. Staff are skilled in using good training methods to organise sessions effectively and to maintain the interest of most clients. Schedules of forthcoming training sessions are prominently displayed so that clients are aware of what training is available. During progress reviews, further opportunities for learning are reinforced. Clients speak positively about learning sessions and recognise how they contribute to their personal development and learning goals. Questionnaires identify that clients consider the training to be good or excellent. To help continually improve the quality of the provision, staff evaluate each learning session. The induction sessions are now effective at introducing clients to the company and their programmes of learning. However, parts of the induction session do not sufficiently involve the clients.

20. Individual support for clients is good. Staff have a wide range of knowledge and experience which is used effectively in coaching sessions and to resolve problems and queries promptly. The standard of support helps clients to identify their work-related skills and experience and produce good curriculum vitae. Reviews of progress are used to motivate clients, to identify barriers to gaining employment and to agree actions to overcome these barriers. Advice on benefits is available and clients make good use of this service when considering whether they can afford to apply for less well-paid jobs. Alternative and additional funding is used well to enable some clients to enter waged employment as part of their progress into full-time sustainable employment. When appropriate, a careers adviser is available to help clients explore alternative employment and career possibilities. Clients speak positively about the individual support they are given.

21. The company's attractive training centre is particularly well located for clients. This was a strength at the previous inspection. The centre is situated near to Jobcentre Plus offices and is close to all the main public transport routes which serve the borough of Walsall. The training centre is of a very high standard and provides a professional environment in which clients respond positively. The centre is well decorated, clean and very comfortably furnished. Training rooms are of a high standard and there are good rooms available for confidential interviews. However, there are limited opportunities for clients to make private telephone calls to potential employers.

22. Arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support are insufficient. There is insufficient clarity between Jobcentre Plus and Steps to Work about who is responsible for identifying clients' additional needs. Some Jobcentre Plus advisers carry out an assessment of clients' literacy, numeracy and language skills and provide Steps to Work with this information. However, many clients are referred to foundation programmes without this being considered. The company does not carry out an initial assessment of these skills. Staff provide additional support for clients on an individual basis after learning sessions. However, staff are not qualified to assess literacy, numeracy and language skills or to offer training and support, and there are no materials to develop these skills through jobsearch activities. Steps to Work has recognised the need to



provide support in this area and staff have attended training to raise their awareness of literacy, numeracy and language issues.

23. Clients' personal development plans have improved since the previous inspection and now contain learning objectives and actions. Most reviews now adequately cover the progress clients make towards these objectives. However, the actions and the objectives are not sufficiently specific. Individual learning plans generally list the training courses or jobsearch activities that clients will carry out, but they do not state the specific short-term learning targets which include the level of skill that clients need to reach.

**Good Practice**

*One training room has a 'disability awareness' wall. A poster of some of the common sign language hand signals is displayed along with a Braille copy of a Steps to Work leaflet.*