

REINSPECTION REPORT

EEF West Midlands Technology Centre Reinspection

31 October 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

The Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) is the representative organisation for engineering in the United Kingdom, covering 6,000 engineering and manufacturing companies. The Engineering Employers Federation West Midlands, with over 1,100 member companies, is the largest association of 13 regional associations. In 1998, the employer members made the decision to offer an engineering apprenticeship and an employee training scheme for its members and purchased an engineering training centre. The training centre offers work-based learning for young people in the training centre in Birmingham and in a range of companies. Since the previous inspection, the centre no longer offers training for adults funded by Jobcentre Plus. The centre is accredited to offer learndirect courses as part of the Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Training Alliance learndirect hub. It also offers bespoke short courses for companies which are funded by the members and do not form part of the inspection.

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Work-based learning for young people in engineering is good, as is the leadership and management and the approach to equality of opportunity. Arrangements for quality assurance are satisfactory.

Grades awarded

	Inspection	Reinspection
Leadership and management	4	2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity	3	2
Quality assurance	4	3

	Inspection	Reinspection
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3	2
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- good links with schools and employers
- good strategies to attract additional financial resources in engineering
- effective measures to widen participation
- excellent resources
- good retention rates for advanced modern apprentices
- very good training opportunities for learners

KEY WEAKNESSES

- insufficient use of data for continuous improvement
- inconsistent supervision of the learners in the mechanical engineering workshop

THE REINSPECTION

1. The reinspection process commenced on 25 March 2003. There were two interim visits and a final visit was carried out on 31 October 2003. Three inspectors spent a total of 14 days at the Engineering Employers Federation West Midlands Technology Centre (EEFWMTC) during this period. They interviewed 16 learners and carried out three interviews with employers and 22 interviews with staff. They also visited four work placements and interviewed two subcontractors. They observed six learning sessions, examined learners' portfolios of evidence, policies and procedures, awarding body reports, learners' files and internal verifier records. At each stage of the reinspection process, EEFWMTC's self-assessment report was updated and examined by inspectors.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at reinspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	2	3	1	0	0	6
Total	0	0	2	3	1	0	0	6

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

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

STRENGTHS

- good links with schools and employers
- well-managed initial training in engineering
- good strategies to attract additional financial resources in engineering
- effective measures to widen participation
- effective internal audit arrangements
- effective actions to improve the quality of provision

WEAKNESSES

- slow development of business-planning processes
- insufficient use of data for continuous improvement
- insufficient observation of training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better monitoring of achievement data relating to under-represented groups

2. There are good links with schools and employers. EEFWMTC produces an annual directory of vacancies which contains advertisements from over 80 companies. It maintains close contact with the companies and offers an initial assessment and interviewing service. The directory is updated regularly and is circulated to all schools in the West Midlands area, together with leaflets which promote engineering as a career. Libraries and careers services are also given a copy. EEFWMTC arranges a number of open days and taster events for young people. Over 700 applications are received each year. Applicants can also apply online on the EEF's website, which also advertises vacancies. Employers highly regard the service they receive from EEFWMTC and ensure that the training they provide is relevant to its needs. Employers value the ability of EEFWMTC's training staff to multi-skill learners in a range of activities which would not necessarily be possible in their place of employment. EEFWMTC monitoring officers meet every six to eight weeks with work supervisors or employers and the opportunity is taken to discuss the progress of their learners and the content of the training schemes. Some employers visit the training centre on a regular basis to monitor the progress of their learners during the first year of off-the-job training. The same employers influence the training specification of work carried out by learners. There is an employers advisory group which meets regularly. Learners are surveyed each year to identify their satisfaction with the training they receive.

3. Learners spend their first year at the training centre developing their skills in different areas of engineering. All learners follow the same course whether they are employed on the advanced modern apprenticeship or in receipt of a training allowance on the foundation modern apprenticeship. This enables the foundation modern apprentices to maximise their potential and to proceed directly to the second year of the advanced programme. This first year is well planned and well structured. There is a good range of activities, which progressively develops the learners' skills. The training is arranged to suit the individual needs of learners. Since the original inspection, a tutor mentor has been appointed. Each learner meets with the mentor at approximately six-weekly intervals to discuss individual needs. The mentor also closely monitors those learners who have additional needs in literacy, numeracy or language.

4. EEFWMTC is particularly successful at securing additional financial resources to support its apprenticeship programmes. The training workshop has the latest industry standard equipment in a wide range of engineering disciplines. Since the original inspection, the workshop has had a total refurbishment which was made possible by a regional development grant. EEFWMTC also offers project work to the industry sector and this has been very successful in attracting industry funds to also support the modern apprenticeship programmes. EEFWMTC offers commercial courses to its employers, and the funds are invested in the modern apprenticeship programmes.

5. Staff meetings take place each month where staff are updated on finance and recruitment. Courses are also discussed. Management meetings take place every month and each manager presents a detailed report on their activities. Since the previous inspection, all staff are now involved in review meetings which determine the quality assurance arrangements for their part of the learning programmes.

6. At the previous inspection, there was only one formal agreement for the monitoring of training with subcontractors. Agreements are now in place with most subcontractors. Progress review meetings with the major subcontractor now takes place each month and with the other subcontractors reviews take place quarterly.

7. The monitoring of the performance of staff and associates is satisfactory. Staff have annual appraisals with their manager where target and objective setting has improved since the original inspection. All staff receive training as identified in their appraisal. The company uses 15 associates on a part-time basis and their performance is reviewed by the lead internal verifier who carries out workplace assessments and reviews the visit reports and assessment documents on a monthly basis. Regular meetings are held with the associates and attendance has improved since the previous inspection.

8. At the time of the reinspection, the business plan had only just been agreed. The plan was devised by a small staff working group and was agreed by the director. The plan clearly indicates the business targets. However, most staff have not been involved in the development of the plan, nor do they understand how the plan is relevant to their area of the business. Due to the late introduction of the plan, the review processes are not yet formalised.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

9. EEFWMTC has taken effective action to widen participation in its training programmes, and this strength was identified in the self-assessment report. The organisation is involved in several projects which aim to introduce young people to engineering. These include working with women who are interested in science and technology, and a mentoring project for young people in year 9 at school. This project seeks to match young engineering employees with school pupils to help them make realistic decisions about careers in the engineering and manufacturing sector. EEFWMTC runs a technology tree project which aims to bring together engineering companies and local primary schools to allow school pupils to experience work placements and work shadowing. EEFWMTC has identified the poor participation of women in engineering and has offered taster days for local girls' schools. A wide range of marketing methods are used to ensure that EEFWMTC reaches all members of the local community. These include an annual directory of engineering vacancies, bus advertising and EEFWMTC's own website. All advertising material includes the non-stereotypical images such as women engineers.

10. EEFWMTC has developed a good strategy to tackle discrimination by employers during recruitment. The organisation collects data on the ethnicity and gender of all applicants. The data are then analysed and compared with the data of those learners who gain employment and start training. EEFWMTC has recognised that although it is successful in attracting applicants from minority ethnic groups, less than half of them gain employment and start training. As a result of this, EEFWMTC have run 'fair recruitment' workshops for employers and publicise case studies of good practice. Realistic targets have been set to increase the recruitment of women and young people from minority ethnic groups in 2003-04. Currently the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is 18 per cent, and 10 per cent of learners are women. These figures represent a significant increase in participation of under-represented groups since the previous inspection. While participation rates are carefully monitored, there is little monitoring of achievement related to under-represented groups.

11. The monitoring of equality of opportunity during training is satisfactory. Changes have been made since the previous inspection and equality of opportunity issues are now monitored at the learners' monthly review. Employers' policies are also monitored. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and have recently started project work to produce an equality of opportunity policy that learners can easily understand. The main organisational policy is satisfactory and includes anti-harassment and complaints procedures. There were no significant weaknesses identified at the time of reinspection.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

12. The previous inspection identified inadequate quality assurance arrangements as a weakness. These arrangements have now significantly improved. Detailed quality assurance policies and procedures are now in place, covering most aspects of the training process. Most procedures focus on compliance and are cross-referenced to the audit schedule. The audit schedule is informed by risk assessments associated with key training processes. Approximately one-third of these processes have been audited. Internal audits have identified weaknesses and these have been resolved. EEFWMTC has recognised the need to deal with continuous improvement issues in addition to compliance with procedures, and has established four quality improvement groups. These groups have effectively monitored the post-inspection action plan. There are currently no procedures for self-assessment, but the self-assessment process is satisfactory. Learners and employers are able to contribute to self-assessment through representation on the quality improvement groups and advisory group respectively. All staff were consulted during the production of the self-assessment report. The monitoring of the development plan is satisfactory.

13. There has been effective action to improve the quality of the provision since the previous inspection. Much of this action has been facilitated by the quality improvement groups. The co-ordination of on- and subcontracted off-the-job training has improved, as has the training and assessment in key skills. There is better monitoring of equality of opportunity during training. Quality assurance arrangements and internal verification have also improved. The arrangements for assessment and verification are satisfactory. The monitoring of subcontractors is also satisfactory.

14. There is insufficient use of data for continuous improvement. EEFWMTC makes little use of target-setting, except with regard to recruitment and learners' retention and achievement. Some of the performance indicators associated with quality assurance procedures are vague and difficult to measure. There is insufficient use of data to identify patterns or trends in terms of learner participation or success. However, the new management information system will have the ability to produce a wide range of relevant reports. Questionnaires are issued to learners and employers on an annual basis, although the response rate from learners has been poor. There has been some analysis of the responses to these questionnaires and some action has taken place to resolve specific issues.

15. There is no formal observation of training at EEFWMTC. Informal monitoring of training takes place by seeking feedback from learners during reviews and the annual survey. There is some informal observation of training by the centre manager, lead internal verifier and workshop manager. Training at subcontracted providers is subject to observation under the quality assurance arrangements of the providers, but there is no direct observation of training at EEFWMTC to use as a basis for continuous improvement.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	242	2

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

STRENGTHS

- excellent resources
- good retention rates for advanced modern apprentices
- very good training opportunities for learners
- good portfolio work
- careful attention to health and safety at the centre

WEAKNESSES

- inconsistent supervision of the learners in the mechanical engineering workshop
- delayed start to NVQs at level 3 for some learners

16. Resources are excellent. Since the original inspection a major capital investment programme has enabled an upgrade in most specialist engineering areas and the very latest industry-standard equipment has been installed. Learners program milling machines, lathes and routers using laptop computers. Prior to downloading the programming routine to the machine tools, the software is enabled to simulate the finished manufactured product in 2D or 3D. Learners make use of this virtual reality simulation from the early stages of their training. Its incorporation into workshop exercises assists in the understanding of the final manufactured product and helps develop the learners' motivation. Resources for the teaching of electrical and electronic wiring are very good. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2 units in the wiring and testing of domestic installation are taught using wiring boards which have dedicated specialist tool kits and test equipment. Similar facilities have been installed for the teaching of skills associated with the wiring of electronic control equipment. Learners are given good workbooks which contain a series of graded exercises. The workbooks enable learners to progress at their own pace and also provide a detailed guide to the opportunities of evidence compilation for the relevant NVQ units. Information technology (IT) and computer aided design (CAD) resources are also excellent. There is also a well-resourced IT room used by learndirect learners as well as other learners.

17. Retention rates for advanced modern apprentices are good. The current retention rate for learners who started in 2000-01 is 74 per cent. In this year EEFWMTC originally recruited 41 learners. A further 20 were transferred from another local training provider which had ceased to provide training. The retention rate to date for the previous 41 learners is 88 per cent. The retention rate of the learners who were transferred is 45 per cent. In the year 2001-02, 67 advanced modern apprentices started their training and their retention rate is also 88 per cent. Most of the advanced modern apprentices are on target to complete the framework although some will do so after the accepted time has elapsed. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices is satisfactory. For those who started in 2000-01, the retention rate is 60 per cent. The next intake was in 2002-03 and their retention rate is 66 per cent. Learners recruited to follow the NVQ at level 2 have a poor retention rate. In 2000-01 the retention rate was 48 per cent and in the following year it dropped to 34 per cent. This mode of training is no longer delivered by EEFWMTC.

18. Learners who started the advanced modern apprenticeship in 2000-01 have not yet reached the end of their programme, and the maximum achievement rate possible is 64 per cent. For those who started in 2001-02 the rate increases to 74 per cent. The achievement rate for those on the NVQ at level 2 at the end of the first year of off-the-job training is very good. For modern apprentices who started in 2000, the achievement rate for the NVQ at level 2 was 90 per cent and dropped slightly to 89 per cent in the following year. Achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices is satisfactory for 2000-01 at 60 per cent. The learners who started training in 2001-02 have not yet completed their programmes, but the maximum possible achievement is also satisfactory at 66 per cent.

19. Learners are trained beyond the requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework. Additional qualifications are available in information and communications technology (ICT), welding, manual handling, first aid and abrasive wheels. During their first year, all learners attend an accredited health and safety course. Learners attend local colleges of further education to take the relevant qualifications for their modern apprenticeship framework. In addition, some learners progress to higher national programmes. The quality and variety of work placements are good. Some learners are employed by large aerospace engineering companies, others by small specialist engineering subcontractors. During their training some learners qualify to work on specialist calibration and component tests before they complete their modern apprenticeship.

20. Learners' portfolios are good and include a diverse range of evidence including digital photographs, drawings which detail manufactured products, circuit diagrams and company or product documents. In some cases, the description of tasks are extensive and well written, but the opportunity to use these as evidence towards the key skills is not taken.

21. Careful attention is paid to health and safety at the centre. There is a nominated manager who has specific responsibilities for health and safety. Regular monthly

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meetings are held with learners and staff to review health and safety. Staff and learners also produce a quarterly newsletter which highlights issues and good practice. An external consultant is also appointed to carry out regular audits of the workshop.

22. EEFWMTC has taken a number of management decisions which have resolved the weaknesses from the previous inspection. Although individual learning plans are still kept in learners' files at the training centre this does not have an adverse affect on the learners' knowledge of their progress towards qualifications or achievement. Individual progress reviews take place every six to eight weeks, during which clear targets are set and progress towards previously agreed goals are monitored. Workplace supervisors take part in the reviews and, whenever possible, schedule learners' subsequent work to ensure that targets are met. Employers and learners each receive a copy of the review paperwork. Another copy is filed in the learner's individual learning plan. EEFWMTC's staff monitor the progress of learners and make use of sophisticated IT equipment to update the learners' records.

23. Since the original inspection, considerable changes have been made to the internal verification system. The lead internal verifier meets regularly with other engineering internal verifiers on a formal basis and minutes are kept. The lead internal verifier also meets with engineering assessors to ensure the consistency of the verification process. Internal verification now takes place on a continual basis as learners complete units towards their engineering qualification. EEFWMTC has substantially reduced reliance on the use of witness statements by learners who are on NVQ at level 3 programmes and has implemented a policy of training workplace supervisors in assessor qualifications free of charge. A considerable increase has been made to the amount of on-the-job assessment carried out by EEFWMTC's assessors.

24. The delivery of literacy and numeracy training, key skills and additional qualifications are subcontracted to a specialist technology centre in a local college which is in modern purpose-built accommodation with up-to-date teaching equipment. As EEFWMTC has high educational entry requirements for courses, particularly for the advanced modern apprenticeship, only a small number of learners access additional support for literacy, numeracy and English language. When this is used, arrangements are satisfactory and support the learning in engineering programmes. Satisfactory service level agreements are in place. College staff report daily to EEFWMTC on absence from classes. EEFWMTC's staff meet formally with college tutors every two months. Meetings are structured, well minuted and resulting actions are monitored. Informal meetings take place on a more regular basis and there are frequent exchanges of e-mails which alert EEFWMTC's staff to learners' problems. EEFWMTC's staff do not attend or receive minutes of end-of-year course review boards. At the beginning of their course, learners are given comprehensive course handbooks as part of the college induction process which links to their training at EEFWMTC's training centre. All learners take part in an initial assessment to determine their additional learning support needs. The results of these diagnostic sessions are fed back to EEFWMTC's staff.

25. Despite the ratio of instructors to learners in the main mechanical workshop being

approximately eight to one, supervision levels are inconsistent. In one session, 25 learners were taking part in planned activities which included good-quality briefs with three instructors in the workshop. In this session, some learners were motivated and worked to a high standard, showing evidence of detailed planning, without the need for supervision. In the same session other learners were unsupervised and were disengaged from learning for up to 35 minutes and did not carry out scheduled tasks.

26. All learners complete NVQ at level 2 performing engineering operations as a full-time off-the-job course in the training centre. At the end of this period, learners start working in their company and continue to attend the supporting college courses they have started during their off-the-job training. Some learners experience considerable delay in beginning their NVQ at level 3. Six months after achieving the NVQ at level 2 in performing engineering operations, three learners had still not been issued with the NVQ at level 3 criteria or logbooks. During this period some learners had been seconded to two different departments at their place of work and through lack of knowledge of the NVQ at level 3 standards had not collected evidence.

Good Practice

Learners complete a self-evaluation tick sheet to identify their prior competences and experience before starting work books which detail competence tasks to be covered. At the end of the exercise the sheet is re-marked and progress is discussed with their instructor.