

REINSPECTION REPORT

North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade & Industry Reinspection

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

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- 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.

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry (NECC) is a limited company and is owned by its members. It is the largest chamber of commerce in the country, and the only regional one, and has headquarters in Durham, and nine training centres throughout the Northeast region, located in the main cities and towns. NECC holds contracts with five regional Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), Tees Valley, North Yorkshire, Durham, Tyne and Wear, and Northumberland, and with Jobcentre Plus. Training is provided in land-based provision, construction, engineering, business administration, information and communication technology (ICT) retailing and customer service, hospitality, hairdressing, health, and foundation programmes. Land-based provision and hairdressing were not included in the reinspection as there were too few learners. When the reinspection took place, NECC had 2,032 learners, 120 more than at the time of the previous inspection. Five hundred and fifteen are advanced modern apprentices, 975 are foundation modern apprentices, 403 are on work-based learning for young people, 135 on Jobcentre Plus-funded programmes for adults, and three on New Deal 18-24.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Construction

2. There are 107 learners on construction work-based learning programmes. Of these, 50 are advanced modern apprentices, 54 are foundation modern apprentices and two are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2. There is one adult on the longer occupational training (LOT) programme. Most learners are employed, and the rest are on work placement. All off-the-job training is carried out at a college of further education which learners attend for one day each week or on block release. The remainder of the time is spent in the workplace working towards their qualification. Assessment is carried out by qualified assessors in the workplace.

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

3. There are 383 learners working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in engineering, performing manufacturing operations, and the laboratory technicians qualification. One hundred and twenty-six learners are advanced modern apprentices, and 168 are foundation modern apprentices. Eighty-nine are on work-based learning for young people. NECC offers engineering at seven of its sites. Some learners attend college for one day a week throughout their training. Others take all their training in the workplace. Most off-the-job training is subcontracted to local colleges of further education.

Business administration, management & professional

4. There are 893 learners in business administration, management and professional. Four hundred and seventy-seven are foundation modern apprentices, 229 are advanced modern apprentices, and 78 are on NVQ training. Youth learners work towards NVQs in business administration, accounts, estate agency, legal administration and other specialist areas. There are 107 learners on work-based learning programmes for adults, following LOT programmes. A further two learners are on New Deal 18-24. Business administration, management and professional programmes are offered in all NECC's training centres. Youth learners are trained and assessed in the workplace. They have access to structured off-the-job learning sessions at NECC's centres. Adult learners receive most of the training and assessment at one of NECC's centres. Some attend work placements for part of the week, depending on need and availability.

Information & communications technology

5. There are 77 learners in ICT, 48 foundation modern apprentices, 24 advanced modern apprentices, three learners working towards level 3 NVQs and two people on work-based learning for adults. Learners work towards qualifications in either installing and supporting ICT or using ICT. ICT programmes are offered at six of NECC's centres, in Newcastle, Darlington, Middlesbrough, Redcar, Sunderland and Northallerton. Staff carry out training and assessment at NECC's centres and in the workplace.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

6. There are 236 learners in retailing, customer service and transportation, 59 are working towards NVQs in retail operations, 104 on a customer service programme, and 73 working towards warehousing NVQs. Thirty-eight learners are advanced modern apprentices, 159 are foundation modern apprentices and 18 are on work-based learning for young people. There are 21 adult learners. Nine are on LOT, 11 are on the intensive activity period (IAP), and two on a retail routeway which is run in partnership with Galleries Training and Employment Link (GTEL), an initiative supported by an insurance company, Jobcentre Plus and Galleries Centre Management. Most training and assessment takes place on the job. Learners who are working towards NVQs in retailing and warehousing attend some off-the-job training sessions.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

7. Two NECC centres offer training towards catering qualifications. There are 68 learners, of whom 10 are advanced modern apprentices, 56 are foundation modern apprentices and two are working towards level 2 NVQs. All learners are employed. The advanced modern apprentices are all working towards hospitality supervision. Of the foundation modern apprentices, 48 are working towards bar service at level 2 and seven are working towards food preparation and cooking. NECC has three assessors, and uses an external consultant to carry out some of the internal verification. Most training and assessment is carried out in the workplace. Training towards technical certificates takes place at one of NECC's centres.

Health, social care & public services

8. NECC has 229 learners on the dental nursing programme. Eight are advanced modern apprentices and 33 are foundation modern apprentices. The others are working towards NVQs at levels 2 or 3. Learners are either employed or on work placement in dental practices. Off-the-job training is provided from four training centres, Sunderland, Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Darlington. Some learners in rural areas attend small centres of training located in local dental practices. There is some additional training planned by employers. NECC's training advisers provide all training and assessment.

Foundation programmes

9. There are 19 learners on foundation programmes. Seventeen are on Life Skills and two are on the basic employability training (BET) programme. Life Skills learners attend one of NECC's training centres for 16 hours each week, working to improve their confidence, employability, and literacy and numeracy skills. The length of the programme varies according to the needs and circumstances of the individual learner, but averages 19 weeks. BET learners attend NECC for 30 hours each week. They focus mainly on improving their literacy and numeracy skills, but also develop their interpersonal and job seeking skills. All training and assessment is provided by NECC's staff.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	18
Number of inspection days	83
Number of learner interviews	192
Number of staff interviews	67
Number of employer interviews	73
Number of subcontractor interviews	3
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	10

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

10. When NECC was inspected in November 2001, health, social care and public service and equality of opportunity were found to be satisfactory. Construction, engineering, business administration, ICT and retailing were unsatisfactory. Hospitality was very weak. Leadership and management and quality assurance were judged to be unsatisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory or better.

GRADES

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

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

	Inspection	Reinspection
Construction	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults		None

	Inspection	Reinspection
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

	Inspection	Reinspection
Business administration, management & professional	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults		3

	Inspection	Reinspection
Information & communications technology	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults		None

	Inspection	Reinspection
Retailing, customer service & transportation	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults		3

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	Inspection	Reinspection
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	5	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	5	3

	Inspection	Reinspection
Health, social care & public services	3	2
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	2

	Inspection	Reinspection
Foundation programmes		2
Contributory grades:		
Life Skills		2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults		None

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

11. Learners have good opportunities to work towards relevant additional qualifications, especially those in engineering, ICT and retailing, where the take up and success rate are particularly good.

12. Rates of retention have improved since the previous inspection, and are now satisfactory or good across all areas of learning. It is too early to say whether these improved retention rates will translate into comparable achievement, but early indications are positive. On most programmes, learners are making steady progress towards their qualification. Some learners in ICT, retailing and care are making slow progress. In hospitality, there is a very good rate of achievement of technical certificates.

13. There is good progression into employment on the dental nursing programme. Learners who are working towards retailing, customer service and warehousing qualifications also progress into jobs at a good rate. Those who are already employed often have their job role and responsibilities extended to match the increase in their skills. On all programmes, learners increase their confidence and improve their employability.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	4
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Business administration, management & professional	0	4	4	0	2	0	0	10
Information & communications technology	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	5
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	5
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	5
Health, social care & public services	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	4
Total	0	7	19	8	2	0	0	36

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	4
Business administration, management & professional	0	3	2	1	1	0	0	7
Information & communications technology	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Health, social care & public services	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	5
Foundation programmes	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Total	0	5	6	8	2	0	0	21

14. The quality of teaching is satisfactory or better across all areas of learning. Of the 19 taught sessions observed, 60 per cent were graded good or better, with a further 32 per cent satisfactory. Generally, tutors are creative in their approach and use a wide range of appropriate materials. Learners enjoy the off-the-job training sessions and participate well.

15. **In all areas of learning, workplaces are varied, carefully selected and well matched to learners' needs.** Learners develop a good range of skills in the workplace, and are valued by workplace supervisors and other work colleagues.

16. **Learners at NECC are very well supported.** They receive frequent, well-planned workplace visits, which are timed to meet their needs and those of their employers. Learners have good access to NECC's staff between visits. They receive effective help with personal and practical problems, and are referred to specialist agencies for help when appropriate. Employers are very supportive of learners, and workplace problems are resolved quickly and effectively. Learners trust the staff who work with them, and are confident of their ability to help them resolve their difficulties.

17. **Learners receive a thorough initial assessment of their needs and abilities.** Those

who need it receive appropriate support to improve their literacy, numeracy or language skills. Induction is detailed and generally memorable. In most areas of learning, progress reviews are thorough. However, the short-term targets for learners in construction, business administration and foundation are insufficiently detailed or clear.

18. When the previous inspection took place, the teaching and assessment of key skills were poor in most areas of learning. Key skills are now introduced early in most learners' programmes, and key skills evidence is gathered at the same time as NVQ evidence. Additional key skills projects and assignments are well-designed and are vocationally relevant. Most learners clearly understand the key skills component of their qualification framework. In engineering, about a quarter of apprentices are making slow progress through their key skills units.

19. Resources are satisfactory in all areas of learning, and are good in retailing and business administration. Training centres are pleasant, spacious and well equipped, with ample ICT resources.

20. Assessments varied in standard when the previous inspection took place.

Assessment practice has improved since then, and **is now thorough and well recorded in all areas of learning.** Assessment-planning is weak for some ICT learners, and opportunities for workplace assessment are sometimes not taken in business administration and hospitality.

21. **NECC offers a wide range of programmes and appropriate progression routes in all areas of learning.** Staff and managers liaise effectively with employers to ensure that they are meeting local labour market needs. Learners receive clear advice and guidance on the options open to them.

22. **On-the-job training is insufficiently planned.** There are few links between on- and off-the-job training, and employers are not made fully aware of how to adapt their learner's workplace experience to the requirements of their NVQ.

Leadership and management

23. **NECC is well managed.** Managers have clear strategic objectives, which they communicate well to staff. The strategic and operational management of the organisation is particularly well co-ordinated. Particularly effective strategies have been implemented, at corporate and local levels, to improve retention rates.

24. **There are good arrangements for the induction, appraisal and professional development of staff.** Employees access frequent, relevant staff development which helps them to improve their work performance. There are very good internal promotion opportunities for NECC's staff.

25. **Communication within the organisation is very good.** Meetings are frequent, well attended and minuted. Good use is made of the intranet, and of e-mail. Staff feel consulted and informed with regard to key issues, such as strategic-planning and self-

assessment.

26. NECC's target-setting was found to be weak at the time of the previous inspection. This is now satisfactory. There are clear corporate targets for retention and achievement rates. Staff are aware of these, and of what they need to do to help achieve them.

27. **NECC has significantly improved its management of information since the previous inspection.** It has purchased a new management information system, and now produces detailed, reliable data which are used to develop planning.

28. **There are particularly good arrangements for raising and reinforcing learners' understanding of equality** during induction and subsequently, in progress reviews. Most learners have a good awareness of equal opportunities. NECC provides particularly good additional support for learners. The organisation promotes equality well, although some groups are still under-represented on its courses. Employers' understanding of equality of opportunity is not checked thoroughly enough.

29. **NECC's quality assurance** has considerably improved since the previous inspection. It **is now good**. Quality assurance arrangements are detailed, and staff understand them well. There are good systems for the sharing of best practice across the company. The internal verification system is now better organised and more thorough, and is bringing about improvements in assessment practice across the organisation. Better quality assurance is evident in the improved rates of retention across all areas of learning.

30. **Self-assessment is thorough, and involves staff, learners and employers.** NECC's most recent self-assessment report was detailed and objective. Action-planning is used well to bring about improvement.

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- well-linked strategic and operational management
- good professional development for staff
- thorough reinforcement of learners' equal opportunities awareness
- good support for learners who have additional needs
- thorough, effective arrangements for quality assurance

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough checking of employers' understanding of equality

- insufficient formal observation of on-the-job training

Construction

Strengths

- good practical skills developed in the workplace
- good off-the-job learning resources
- very effective support for learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate planning of on-the-job training
- some insufficiently focused progress review targets

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- good achievement of additional qualifications
- particularly good individual support for learners

Weaknesses

- some slow progress towards key skills achievement
- some insufficiently planned on-the-job training

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- very good accounts programme
- particularly good learning environments in training centres
- wide range of good work placements

Weaknesses

- some missed opportunities for workplace assessment
- insufficient clarity and focus in progress reviews

Information & communications technology

Strengths

- good rate of achievement for additional qualifications
- good work placements
- well-planned off-the-job training
- thorough individual support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor job outcomes on adult programmes
- weak assessment-planning
- slow progress towards NVQ achievement by some learners

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- good progression in the workplace for learners on youth programmes
- good rate of achievement for additional qualifications
- particularly thorough practical and personal support for learners
- well-resourced learning environments

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners
- insufficiently structured programmes for some retailing and customer service learners

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Strengths

- good rate of achievement for technical certificates
- good key skills teaching
- comprehensive progress reviews

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning of on-the-job training
- some missed assessment opportunities

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- good focus on learners' individual needs
- wide range of good learning resources
- good progression into employment
- well-planned on-the-job training

Weaknesses

- slow completion of NVQ units by some learners

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good rates of achievement and retention on Life Skills
- thorough initial assessment
- particularly effective strategies to engage disaffected learners
- very effective support for learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate target-setting for learners
- insufficient staff expertise for teaching literacy and numeracy

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- well-linked strategic and operational management
- good professional development for staff
- thorough reinforcement of learners' equal opportunities awareness
- good support for learners who have additional needs
- thorough, effective arrangements for quality assurance

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough checking of employers' understanding of equality
- insufficient formal observation of on-the-job training

31. There are good links between the strategic management and the operational management of learning programmes. Both are effective. Managers identify clear strategic objectives, which focus on improving the experience of the learner, and on developing the range and quality of training opportunities available. They communicate these coherently to staff. Senior managers, training centre managers and training advisers work closely together to share their different skills and their corporate and local knowledge, to implement NECC's strategic objectives, to improve the quality of training, and to improve performance. Good use is made of cross-organisational staff and working groups to focus on areas in which improvements are required, and to share good practice.

32. Since the previous inspection, NECC's managers have implemented a range of measures to improve rates of retention and achievement among learners. The organisation has purchased a new management information system which provides far more reliable data than before, and is appropriately used to identify trends in performance. Where achievement or retention rates are found to be poor within a particular centre, staff and managers work together to identify and deal with the source of the problem. For example, it was found that some learners were leaving soon after starting their work placement. A learners' charter has now been introduced to ensure that learners who are in a new work placement are visited very frequently, so that their anxieties can be quickly resolved. Rates of retention are showing an upward trend in all areas of learning, and early indications are that achievement is also improving. At the time of the previous inspection, staff were not set targets for the retention and achievement of learners. Clear and appropriate performance targets are now set for each centre. Staff are aware of their targets and of the part they play in meeting these.

Learner's progress through their qualifications is closely monitored. The performance of training advisers is monitored, and they are given support to improve where necessary.

33. Communication within NECC is clear, and particularly well focused. Staff are consulted and kept informed through a range of meetings, e-mail, and through the organisation's well-designed intranet system. The intranet contains minutes of meetings, policies and procedures, training materials and briefing notes on a range of issues. Staff value the intranet and use it effectively as part of their daily working routine.

34. There are effective and well-established arrangements for the professional development of NECC's staff. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. New employees attend a well-planned and comprehensive induction. Appraisals are thorough, and result in the identification of training needs which are readily met. Between appraisals, staff have regular, informal meetings with line managers. Employees feel valued by the organisation, and well supported by their colleagues and managers. Staff attend a range of relevant training courses which help them improve their performance. NECC runs a scheme which enables staff to receive a subsidy towards the fees of approved external courses, and the rest is paid on successful completion. Staff particularly value this opportunity and use it well. There are good internal progression opportunities for NECC's employees. About 75 per cent of NECC's staff, including some directors, have reached their current position in the organisation through internal promotion. Twenty of the staff began their career with NECC as learners. These staff are particularly good role models for current learners.

35. The quality of the work of subcontractors is monitored effectively. In addition to the use of contracts and service level agreements, NECC's managers carry out a formal audit of the subcontractor's provision including, where appropriate, observations of training sessions. Subcontractors have dealt effectively with many of the concerns expressed by learners.

36. When the previous inspection took place, key skills training was inadequate. Since then, NECC's managers have taken appropriate and largely effective steps to improve the approach to key skills. A co-ordinator for key skills and literacy and numeracy skills has been appointed to ensure that key skills are taught and assessed early in learners' programmes, and are an integral part of the NVQ training. Key skills are now well delivered in most areas of learning. The organisation has appropriate arrangements for identifying and supporting learners who have literacy, numeracy or language needs. Qualified and experienced tutors provide guidance for staff, or additional training for learners, when necessary.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

37. NECC's staff work effectively to ensure access to learning for all learners. Travel allowances are clearly explained to learners from the outset, and special travel arrangements are made for learners who live in rural or outlying areas. NECC allows learners who are no longer eligible for funding to remain in training to complete their qualifications. Tutors hold evening training and coaching sessions for learners who

cannot attend daytime off-the-job learning sessions. They arrange visits at home for learners who cannot come to the training centre. Additional support is readily available for learners who need it. For example, learners who have writing difficulties are provided with a portable dictation machine and extra computer tuition, and are given extra time to complete their training.

38. Learners receive thorough training on equality. This has improved since the previous inspection, and is now identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. During learners' induction, NECC's equal opportunities policy is explained to them, and they are given a simplified copy of it. Learners then attend a full-day's training on equal opportunities, during which they participate in a range of well-planned activities and discussions to raise their awareness of key issues. A well-focused approach is taken to reinforce learners' understanding; during progress reviews they are asked questions on equal opportunities from a pre-prepared list. The questions prompt discussion about issues such as harassment, and provide an opportunity for learners to share problems they might have. Learners who are unable to answer a question, or who show a lack of awareness, are provided with extra, individual training. In general, learners have a good understanding of equal opportunities, although a few are unclear about some aspects of it.

39. NECC's managers collect recruitment data on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability, and are aware that some groups are under-represented on NECC's training programmes. Staff at most centres have taken part in a range of activities to promote training courses, and have formed good links with local community groups. At the time of the previous inspection, there was some gender stereotyping in NECC's promotional literature. Marketing materials now contain images which challenge traditional gender roles. NECC's most recent marketing campaign was devised in consultation with a group of learners, and is designed specifically to appeal to young people.

40. NECC has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and clear procedures to cover bullying and harassment. The complaints procedure is straightforward, and complaints are dealt with promptly and appropriately. NECC's personnel manager has responsibility for equality, and chairs the equal opportunities working party, which meets twice each year. She provides staff with regular, useful updates on changes to equality legislation. All NECC's staff attended a recent training course to raise their awareness of equal opportunities. They value this, and consider that it has increased their skill and confidence in dealing with learners' queries on equality.

41. Some of NECC's sites are inaccessible to wheelchair users. NECC's managers are aware of this and have made arrangements for learners with restricted mobility to be transported to other NECC sites which have better access. The need for good access is a prime consideration for managers sourcing new sites for NECC.

42. NECC's measures to assess employers' understanding of equality are insufficient. Employers receive a copy of NECC's equal opportunities policy and are required to sign a form to confirm their compliance with this. NECC's commitment to equality is clearly stated in the handbook which is sent out to employers. However, their understanding of

the policy, the handbook, and of equality in general, is not checked, and equal opportunities issues are not discussed with them subsequently.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 2

43. NECC's staff place a priority on continuous improvement, and quality assurance is actively and effectively managed. This strength is recognised in the self-assessment report. The quality assurance system is now clear and comprehensive and located on the company's intranet, where it is readily accessed by all staff. The quality assurance manager and the training development director held a series of meetings and workshops for staff to explain the quality assurance system. The staff's poor understanding of the quality assurance system was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection, but staff now understand the system well, and use it with confidence.

44. When the previous inspection took place, best practice was not being shared across sites. The organisation has resolved this weakness, and sharing of good practice is a key feature of the improved quality assurance arrangements. There are best practice groups representing most areas of learning and several cross-organisational aspects of provision. Minutes from their regular meetings are placed on the intranet. Training materials which have worked well are quality assured by NECC's managers, then placed on the intranet to be shared with all staff. Over the past year, two internal monitoring officers have worked closely with staff and managers in training centres to ensure that NECC's procedures are understood and followed by staff. They have worked on an individual basis with many members of staff, drawing up action plans to help them improve their performance. The information gathered by monitoring officers has been well used by the best practice groups to refine and improve quality assurance procedures and ensure that they meet the needs of learners, staff and the organisation. However, there are still inconsistencies in the quality of some processes. For example, progress reviews are carried out better in some areas of learning than in others. NECC's managers are aware of this, and progress reviews are now observed so that the inconsistencies can be dealt with.

45. Learners' and employers' views are systematically collected and used to improve provision. A range of questionnaires are used to gather information at key stages of the learning programme. The content and format of the questionnaires are regularly reviewed and amended to ensure that they provide data which is useful to the organisation. Completed questionnaires are thoroughly analysed in the form of a report with clear action points, which are included in NECC's post-inspection action plan. Issues raised by particular learners or employers are carefully followed up, and managers make good use of the information for the self-assessment report. Programme review groups have been established for some areas of learning. These provide a useful opportunity for learners and employers to meet and exchange ideas about how learning programmes might be improved. They have been very well received by learners and employers.

46. NECC's approach to internal verification has recently been revised and substantially improved. The new system works well. Internal verifiers now take a full-time role. This

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enables them to provide well-planned support for assessors and to facilitate the sharing of best practice. The internal verification of written and practical assessment is now more thorough, and assessment practice is improving across the organisation.

47. The self-assessment process is thorough and makes good use of feedback from all stakeholders. Staff are closely consulted with regard to the judgements and the grades given in the self-assessment report. NECC's most recent self-assessment report is detailed and objective. It accurately identifies many key strengths which were also identified during the reinspection. Most of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment had been satisfactorily resolved by the time of the reinspection. The report was accurate on five of the reinspection grades given, and was too low on the other six. NECC's action plan is detailed, well shared with staff, and regularly updated. Most of the weaknesses identified during the previous inspection have been satisfactorily resolved.

48. A system for observing off-the-job training has been introduced since the previous inspection. The system is satisfactory, and results in useful feedback to staff. However, there is insufficient monitoring of the quality of training and learning in the workplace. There is no observation of on-the-job training and not enough formal evaluation of the interaction between learners and their workplace supervisors. The inadequate planning of on-the-job training is a reinspection weakness in several areas of learning.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	103	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	1	None

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good practical skills developed in the workplace
- good off-the-job learning resources
- very effective support for learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate planning of on-the-job training
- some insufficiently focused progress review targets

Achievement and standards

49. Retention rates have improved significantly since the previous inspection, and are now satisfactory. Of the learners who started since 2001, over 70 per cent are still in learning, and are making satisfactory progress through their NVQ and key skills units. Retention rates for those starting since 2002 are particularly good, at 85 per cent, but it is too early to say whether this improving trend will translate into comparable achievement.

Quality of education and training

50. Learners have effective individual coaching from workplace supervisors, and develop valuable practical skills. Many of the tasks involve working with construction materials from traditional crafts, which are not frequently encountered in modern building projects. They carry out a range of practical tasks, and quickly increase their confidence and expertise. However, there is insufficient formal planning of the on-the-job training, and it is not effectively linked to the learner's NVQ. Training advisers, assessors and workplace supervisors sometimes have informal discussions about evidence requirements, and how these might be met through workplace activities. However, these discussions are insufficiently thorough, and are rarely recorded. In most cases, it is left to the learner to identify the requirements of the NVQ and match them to the work available.

51. Off-the-job training sessions are well planned and often imaginatively taught. Key

skills training was weak at the previous inspection, but it is now satisfactory. Key skills are now introduced at an early stage in the training programme and are appropriately linked to the NVQ. Most learners are producing a good standard of work and are on target to achieve on time.

52. Off-the-job training resources are varied, are good quality, and well maintained. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. Workshops are spacious, clean and well equipped, with sufficient hand tools to meet learners' needs. Most classrooms have recently been refurbished and have data projectors and interactive whiteboards, which trainers use well. Learning materials are well designed and are used effectively. Training advisers are well qualified and have good industrial experience, which they use to good effect in teaching sessions.

53. Training advisers and employers work very effectively together to support learners. The self-assessment report recognises this strength. Training advisers make frequent, well-planned workplace visits, during which they review learners' progress. Learners have contact details for their training advisers and are encouraged to get in touch between workplace visits if they need to. Learners value the accessibility of training advisers, which they find reassuring and motivating. Learners receive good practical support for obtaining and attending work placements. Learners who live in isolated areas are provided with free transport to off-the-job training sessions. Those who need personal support or help with financial difficulties receive this readily. Two learners who have been identified as having dyslexia have been allocated writers to help them with classroom and examination work. Learners are encouraged and supported to gain additional qualifications. Initial assessment and induction are well planned and appropriate to the needs of learners.

54. NECC makes satisfactory arrangements for the identification of learners' literacy, language and numeracy skills. Those who need it receive appropriate additional support from specialist staff at a local college.

55. Assessment is satisfactory. Assessment is thorough and accurate, and takes place regularly. Good use is made of unit accreditation. Workplace assessment, which was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection, is now well planned, and is appropriately supplemented by witness testimony from work-based supervisors. Evidence is varied and good.

56. NECC provides a satisfactory range of construction programmes for learners. These include wood occupations, plumbing, brickwork, painting and decorating, plastering and trowel trades and electrical installation. In planning programmes, NECC takes into account the views of employers and the requirements of the local labour market, potential learners and the wider community.

57. The targets set during progress reviews are sometimes inadequate. In some cases, targets are not set at all. In others, they are insufficiently focused, and only require the learner to continue working towards their qualification, without specifying what this involves. Some of the targets do not have clear timescales and they are not helpful in

guiding the learner through their NVQ.

Leadership and management

58. There is a clear management structure in construction and effective communication with and between all staff. Staff are clear about the organisation's targets, and about their part in meeting them. Since the previous inspection, there have been significant improvements in the monitoring of learner's progress.

59. NECC maintains effective partnerships with colleges of further education in the development of its construction training. It monitors them closely and is very responsive to the views of learners. When learners expressed dissatisfaction with the training they were receiving from one subcontractor, the agreement was terminated and a more appropriate subcontractor was found.

Engineering, technology & manufacturing**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	383	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good achievement of additional qualifications
- particularly good individual support for learners

Weaknesses

- some slow progress towards key skills achievement
- some insufficiently planned on-the-job training

Achievement and standards

60. Learners take a wide range of additional qualifications, including the foundation certificate in health and safety, a site-safety passport, first aid, lift truck driving and an introduction to computers. This is identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Over 85 per cent of current learners have taken additional qualifications, and nearly all complete them successfully. The additional qualifications are relevant to the needs of the construction industry and they are valued by learners who improve their confidence and employability.

61. Rates of retention are satisfactory and improving. The proportion of advanced modern apprentices who remain in learning has risen from 73 per cent in 2001-02 to 91 per cent in 2002-03. The same period showed an increase from 41 per cent to 82 per cent for foundation modern apprentices, and from 30 per cent to 64 per cent for NVQ learners. Most learners are making satisfactory progress through their NVQ.

62. Twenty-six per cent of apprentices are making slow progress through their key skills units, or have had key skills introduced late in their programme. In one particularly poor case, a foundation modern apprentice has yet to start key skills and has only one week remaining of their programme. In other cases, learners have been training for between nine and 11 months, and have yet to start gathering key skills evidence. The weakness in key skills delivery is acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

Quality of education and training

63. There is particularly good individual support for learners. NECC's staff are very approachable and provide good individual support on a wide range of issues. Training advisers visit learners in the workplace frequently, in some cases every two weeks. Learners are given the mobile telephone number of their training adviser and are encouraged to make contact with them to discuss issues of concern. Employers also support learners well, in terms of the requirements of their learning programme, and for personal and occupational problems. One learner was not attending a local college on a regular basis because he was uncomfortable with aspects of the programme. The employer and NECC's staff worked together to support the learner, whose attendance improved dramatically. The learner is valued by his employer, and is now progressing well with his qualification. Learners enjoy their learning programmes, and speak highly of the support they receive from NECC's staff, from workplace supervisors, and from colleagues.

64. There is satisfactory teaching of practical skills and background knowledge. Staff are well qualified, occupationally competent and have appropriate industrial experience. Learning sessions are well planned and resources are used effectively to maintain learners' interest. Tutors make good use of practical equipment to demonstrate techniques and learners take an active part in learning sessions. There is good reinforcement of health and safety during practical training and background knowledge sessions. Effective use is made of questioning to confirm learners' understanding.

65. Learning resources are varied and appropriate. Classrooms and workshops are well-maintained and suitably equipped. Workplace resources are satisfactory. Some learners gain a wide range of skills through the use of technical, modern machinery and very expensive test equipment, along with a wide range of tooling and equipment. Learners feel that their training programmes are well managed and well organised.

66. Assessment is satisfactory. Assessment-planning takes place routinely after each assessment has taken place. There is adequate use of work-based assessment, and the results of assessments are clearly recorded. The weaknesses in motor vehicle assessment which were identified during the previous inspection, have been resolved. There are satisfactory arrangements for the initial assessment of learners, and for the identification of their literacy, numeracy and language needs. Well-planned additional support is available for learners who need it. The range of programmes available to learners is varied, and meets their needs and those of employers. Learners receive good guidance from NECC's staff about the options available to them, and about progression opportunities.

67. On-the-job training is insufficiently planned. This was a weakness identified during the previous inspection which has not been effectively resolved. On-the-job activities do not always cover the evidence requirements of the NVQ, and there are inadequate links between on- and off-the-job training. Training advisers agree on-the-job training goals with learners during their work-based assessments and progress reviews. However, these

are not always shared with the workplace supervisor. Some workplace supervisors have insufficient knowledge of their learners' NVQ programmes.

Leadership and management

68. Engineering programmes are well managed. Communication among NECC's staff and with external partners is regular and thorough. The internal verification system has recently been revised, and is now improved. Internal verifiers from all centres meet regularly to discuss best practice and other relevant issues. Internal verification documents are thorough and feedback to staff is detailed and helpful. Useful staff development has taken place for all staff involved in progress reviews, assessment observations and internal verification. There are regular observations of assessors with sufficiently recorded feedback.

Business administration, management & professional**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	784	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	107	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- very good accounts programme
- particularly good learning environments in training centres
- wide range of good work placements

Weaknesses

- some missed opportunities for workplace assessment
- insufficient clarity and focus in progress reviews

Achievement and standards

69. Retention rates are satisfactory and improving. Nearly 70 per cent of learners who have started training since 2001 have been retained or are still in learning. For foundation modern apprentices, retention rates have improved from 43 per cent in 2000-01 to 70 per cent in 2002-03. Fifty-six per cent of advanced modern apprentices were retained in 2000-01, and this has increased significantly for 2002-03 starters, to 89 per cent. The retention rate for NVQ learners increased from 53 per cent in 2000-01 to 85 per cent in 2002-03. Most learners are making good progress through their qualification.

70. A good proportion of adults achieve their learning goals. Of those who started in 2001-02, over 55 per cent achieved and nearly 70 per cent were retained. For 2002-03 starters, 49 per cent have already achieved their learning goals, with 22 per cent still in learning. Job outcomes on adult programmes are poor, at less than 20 per cent.

Quality of education and training

71. NECC's accounting programmes are particularly well managed, well taught and effective. Off-the-job training for accounting learners is well structured, and training staff are knowledgeable and experienced. Trainers make useful and appropriate reference to learners' work experience during training sessions. Workplace supervisors are closely involved in the learning process. They are well informed about what learners do during off-the-job training sessions, and plan the on-the-job training to enable them to gain practical experience which builds on their off-the-job training. Learners' portfolios of evidence are very good. They contain a wide variety of evidence from the workplace as

well as work-based simulations devised by the awarding body. Accounting learners gain useful additional qualifications which complement their overall programme, including and examination-based information technology (IT) course and basic IT courses. These additional qualifications enhance learners' experience and provide additional skills which are appropriate to the accountancy profession.

72. The learning accommodation in NECC's training centres is welcoming, generally spacious, well equipped and well furnished. Most centres have a pleasant area where learners can take their breaks and socialise. IT resources are generally very good, comprising industry-standard software and ready access to the internet. Staff to learner ratios are good. Staff have relevant occupational experience and a keen enthusiasm for their subject. Most hold appropriate qualifications for teaching and assessment. There is continuous professional development for staff, who attend awarding body updates, in-house training and academic courses at local universities. Learners are keen to attend the centres and particularly appreciate the professionalism of the staff and the support they offer.

73. Work placements are varied, appropriate and well matched to learners' requirements. Employers include a university, a large building society, solicitors, and estate agencies. Learners can move between placements to meet their individual needs and aims. Placements provide a good range of learning opportunities which develop personal skills, employability and occupational competence. Workplace supervisors recognise the value of training and support learners well. When the previous inspection took place, there was inadequate communication between NECC's staff and employers. This weakness has now been resolved. Employers are now given sufficient information to enable them to understand the requirements of their learner's NVQ, and to plan on-the-job training. The good links with employers are identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Learners make good use of opportunities to assume responsibility and become valued team members. Most learners progress from placements to employment during the period of their training.

74. Initial assessment is satisfactory and is used to create learners' individual learning plans. Good use is made of a diagnostic assessment for key skills, which learners can choose to repeat at any time as a way of checking their own progress. This improves their motivation. Individual learning plans are appropriately detailed and well used.

75. NECC has a good strategy for supporting learners' development with literacy and numeracy. Appropriate diagnostic tools are used when necessary and the results are used to plan an individual programme of support for learners, delivered through a series of occupationally relevant workbooks. If learners have a particular weakness, they often work on a project which enables them to concentrate on this area. For instance, a learner who identified that she found measuring difficult was given a project to plan the refitting of the kitchen in the training centre. Learners are making satisfactory progress in improving their literacy and numeracy skills.

76. Off-the-job training is well structured and of a satisfactory standard. In the better sessions, learners are encouraged to contribute examples from their own work

experience and they demonstrate good understanding of the subject matter. Learners have individual coaching from trainers about how to select and present evidence. Learners' portfolios are of a satisfactory standard. Key skills are delivered early in programmes, with some examples of good use of accreditation of prior learning. There are specific, well-planned sessions to support the development of key skills.

77. NECC provides a very wide range of business administration, management and professional programmes, which are ample to meet the requirements of learners and employers. Good guidance on progression routes is available to learners at the start of their programme and throughout their training.

78. Some aspects of assessment are satisfactory. Assessment is thorough and well planned, with satisfactory observation of performance. However, workplace supervisors are insufficiently involved in the assessments and opportunities for assessment in the workplace are sometimes not taken. Some learners collect too much evidence, without fully understanding why it is needed. In some cases, there is an over-reliance on personal statements written by the learner. Some learners are making slow progress towards their qualification. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report. The weaknesses in assessment have been identified through internal verification, and plans have been put in place to deal with them. It is too early to say how effective these will be.

79. Some of the progress reviews in administration are insufficiently clear and focused. The targets are vague, and the monitoring of progress against previous targets is not thorough or detailed. The focus of reviews is often narrow, with insufficient emphasis on learners' achievements in the workplace. In some instances, the frequency of reviews does not meet contractual requirements.

Leadership and management

80. Leadership and management are satisfactory. In recent months initiatives have been introduced to improve internal verification, the sharing of good practice and the monitoring of learners' progress. There are early indications that these initiatives are impacting positively on learners' experience.

81. Action has been taken to improve staff retention and there is evidence of wide consultation between management and staff, using strategies which include regular meetings, within and between centres and well-developed use of the company's intranet. The use of the intranet is of particular value in giving staff access to quality assurance procedures and documents.

82. There have been recent initiatives to improve the promotion of equal opportunities. Staff have attended training and now provide specific sessions on equal opportunities to learners.

Information & communications technology**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	75	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2	None

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good rate of achievement for additional qualifications
- good work placements
- well-planned off-the-job training
- thorough individual support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor job outcomes on adult programmes
- weak assessment-planning
- slow progress towards NVQ achievement by some learners

Achievement and standards

83. Learners achieve additional qualifications at a good rate. Sixty per cent of learners who have started since 2001 have achieved a computer literacy qualification and 50 per cent have achieved a health and safety qualification. Foundation modern apprentices who are working towards installing and supporting ICT are enrolled on a course which will provide them with a level 2 qualification which is additional to their framework. These additional qualifications increase learners' confidence and make them more employable.

84. There are clear indications that retention rates are improving. Only one of 19 advanced modern apprentices who started since 2001 has left. Retention rates for foundation modern apprentices are satisfactory. Some learners are making steady progress through their qualification, but progress for others is slow. Four foundation and two advanced modern apprentices who have been training for about a year have not achieved any units, and all have missed target dates for the achievement of units. A further four learners have achieved only one or two units. Internal verifiers have identified this issue and have started to deal with it.

85. Job outcomes for adult learners are poor. Of the 37 adults who started training since 2001, none have gained employment, although a satisfactory proportion has achieved their learning goal.

Quality of education and training

86. Off-the-job training is well planned and this was recognised in the self-assessment report. Trainers make effective use of a good range of learning activities, including games, icebreakers and group activities. Workbooks are clear and learners find them easy to use. Trainers offer good individual coaching for learners who are finding particular topics difficult. Learners work productively, and support each other well. Training accommodation is well decorated, bright and airy and workstations have ample room for notes and manuals. When the previous inspection took place, the teaching and assessment of key skills were weak, but this has now improved. Key skills are introduced early in the programme, and are an integral part of the NVQ.

87. As the self-assessment report states, learners benefit from good work placements where they develop commercially valuable skills, including particularly good technical skills. For instance, one learner who works on a help desk has developed a website containing 'top tips' and answers to frequently asked questions for those he supports. His employer, a large international software company, has placed this on its intranet. Another learner has set up an online radio station on the internet. Unemployed learners improve their employability while at NECC. They benefit from being able to use their new skills in a work environment and familiarise themselves with the needs and culture of the workplace. Thirty per cent of unemployed youth learners progressed into employment during their placement in 2001-02. Employers are supportive and provide good encouragement. Many arrange and fund further training for their learners. Most have a clear understanding of the requirements of their learners' qualification. However, a minority of employers are unwilling to allow employed learners time off to attend the off-the-job training.

88. Training advisers and assessors support learners well. Learners receive frequent, productive visits in the workplace. Effective individual support is provided for learners who face personal or practical difficulties. Induction is thorough and well planned, and provides learners with a good knowledge of their rights and responsibilities and a clear understanding of safe working practices. Learners have a particularly good appreciation of the requirements of their framework. Progress reviews are regular and detailed, and result in the setting of helpful short-term targets.

89. Support for additional literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. All learners have their literacy and numeracy thoroughly assessed and further diagnosis of specific needs takes place when needed. Appropriate additional support is provided by vocational tutors and assessors and, where necessary, from a basic skills specialist.

90. Learning resources are satisfactory. Trainers and assessors have wide industrial experience and sufficient technical knowledge to deliver all parts of the programme effectively. Training materials are plentiful and clearly written. Most of the computers meet current industrial standards, but some are too slow and are not equipped with the latest software.

91. ICT programmes are sufficiently varied to meet the needs of learners and employers. Work placements are particularly well matched to learners' individual requirements. Learners receive appropriate initial guidance, and detailed information about progression and employment opportunities in their chosen field.

92. Assessors do not co-ordinate assessment effectively with off-the-job training, or with learner's job roles. They are insufficiently aware of some learners' activities at work and do not take advantage of opportunities to assess learners' skills in the workplace. For example, one learner had developed a website on his company's website, containing tips for staff, and answers to frequently asked questions, but this has not been assessed. Assessment plans have insufficient detail and assessment is sometimes inefficient. One learner has generated 22 pieces of evidence for a unit, but has not yet achieved it. Learners are insufficiently clear on what they need to do to complete units.

Leadership and management

93. Managers have taken effective action to improve achievement and retention rates. Staff understand NECC's corporate targets, and are clear about the personal contribution they are expected to make towards their achievement. The new management information system is used effectively to identify areas of under-performance. Training advisers and assessors receive good individual support from managers. Recent improvements to internal verification have already impacted positively on assessment practice.

94. Subcontracted provision is effectively quality assured. NECC's managers take good account of the views of learners, employers and subcontractors.

95. Staff promote equal opportunities well to learners. Managers have made satisfactory attempts to deal with gender imbalances through presentations to schools and careers conventions, and through celebration of success achieved by female learners. However, women are still under-represented on ICT programmes.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	215	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	21	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good progression in the workplace for learners on youth programmes
- good rate of achievement for additional qualifications
- particularly thorough practical and personal support for learners
- well-resourced learning environments

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners
- insufficiently structured programmes for some retailing and customer service learners

Achievement and standards

96. A good proportion of learners work towards and achieve additional qualifications. There has been a significant increase in the number of learners taking additional qualifications, from 30 per cent in 2001-02 to 79 per cent in 2002-03. The additional courses, all of which effectively complement the main learning programme, include the foundation certificate in health and safety, first aid training, lift truck operations, manual handling, fire awareness and computer training. These qualifications improve learners' confidence, extend their range of skills and add to their employability.

97. Learners are carefully matched to work placements, and many progress into full-time employment with their placement. This is identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Learners receive good on-the-job training from managers, supervisors and experienced colleagues. In addition to gaining appropriate job skills, they demonstrate greater confidence, improved customer service skills, and a more mature and proactive approach to work tasks and projects. For many, their work role becomes more responsible as their training improves their performance. Some are given responsibility for managing specific work processes, others for training junior staff.

98. For the adults there is a satisfactory rate of progression into jobs, with 30 per cent gaining employment during their programme. A good proportion of adults achieve their learning goals. Of those who started in 2001-02, 79 per cent completed their programme. For 2002-03 starters, 58 per cent have achieved so far, and 10 per cent are still in learning. A satisfactory 60 per cent of the New Deal 18-24 clients are in training

since 2001 achieved their learning goal.

99. Rates of retention on youth programmes have improved since the previous inspection. Of all those who started since 2001, over 60 per cent have been retained or are still in learning. This is a satisfactory proportion. However, some learners make slow progress through their NVQ. Some learners who have been on programme for several months have not yet achieved their first NVQ unit, and are only just starting to gather key skills evidence. Some learners, who have been training for as much as a year, have little NVQ evidence in their portfolios. Some learners have experienced one or more changes of training adviser, causing delays in their progress.

Quality of education and training

100. Employers and training advisers work well together to support learners. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. Training advisers have a detailed knowledge of their occupational areas, and use this to provide effective guidance for learners. Their good knowledge of individual learners enables them to provide appropriate personal support. The frequency of workplace visits has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Workplace visits are made early in the morning, in the evenings, or at weekends, if this meets learners' needs. Employers value their learners and include them fully as part of the work team. One employer has organised and paid for driving lessons to enable his learner to take on additional responsibilities in the workplace. Another ensured that a learner could open a bank account by acting as guarantor for the bank. Learners on a work placement in warehousing are provided with appropriate personal protective clothing, for example steel toe capped boots, overalls and high visibility jackets. NECC's staff and employers work together to ensure that learners can attend off-the-job training sessions when needed, and either employers or training advisers provide transport for those who live in rural areas.

101. NECC's training centres are well equipped with large, well furnished rooms, and ample IT work stations with up-to-date hardware and software. There are informative and attractive displays on the walls relating to qualification frameworks, health and safety, and learners' progress. There is a well-resourced library containing a good range of videos and workbooks. Training materials are well designed, and NECC's intranet enables training staff to share materials which have worked well. NECC's adult learning programme based at the Galleries in Washington is particularly well resourced. The accommodation has been refurbished to a high standard and provides an environment which is conducive to adult learning. It is divided into discrete areas for specific training purposes, and includes rooms which are used for group training sessions, and individual counselling sessions. There is a mini-suite for computer training and a retail training room, equipped with electronic tills and bar-code scanners. There are particularly good photographic displays to celebrate learners' success. Training advisers are appropriately qualified and have substantial occupational experience.

102. The initial assessment of learners' skills and abilities is satisfactory. The arrangements for assessing learners' key skills levels have improved since the previous

inspection, and are now adequate. Learners' needs relating to literacy and numeracy training are appropriately met. Those who need additional support use well-designed workbooks, in conjunction with coaching from training advisers, to improve their skills.

103. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Assessments are regular and flexible in response to individual learners' needs. Assessment-planning is thorough. Reports on the observation of learners' performance are detailed and are appropriately referenced to qualification standards. Good use is made of oral questions. Feedback to learners is positive and helpful.

104. Learners receive an adequate induction to their programme. Learners' knowledge and understanding of equal opportunities is satisfactory, and in most cases, they have a good awareness of qualification appeal procedures and the role and identity of the internal verifier. However, some learners have little awareness of the content and purpose of their individual learning plans.

105. Some learners' programmes have insufficient structure. For those who do not attend off-the-job training sessions, there are insufficiently clear arrangements for the delivery of background knowledge. Learners' individual learning plans do not identify a clear structure for on-the-job training, nor do they identify how on-the-job training will be linked to the NVQ. This weakness is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Although reviews of learners' progress involve a detailed discussion between learner, employer and training adviser, some of the short-term targets recorded are insufficiently clear, challenging or measurable. Not enough reference is made to the long-term targets in learners' individual learning plans. A small number of employers are unclear about their learner's progress through the NVQ.

Leadership and management

106. The management of retailing, customer service and transportation programmes is satisfactory. Suitable measures have been taken to improve achievement and retention rates, and to deal with other weaknesses identified during the previous inspection. Communication between staff, managers and employers is thorough and effective. Strategies for sharing best practice are working well.

107. Internal verification arrangements are adequate. The new approach to internal verification, adopted in mid-2003, is improving the quality of assessment. Staff have a satisfactory understanding of current assessment requirements.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	68	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good rate of achievement for technical certificates
- good key skills teaching
- comprehensive progress reviews

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning of on-the-job training
- some missed assessment opportunities

Achievement and standards

108. Of the 67 learners on programme, 65 per cent have so far achieved one or more of their framework technical certificates. Rates of retention are satisfactory and improving. Of those who started in 2002, over 70 per cent are still in learning. This is a substantial rise from the previous year, when the rate was 50 per cent. Learners are making satisfactory progress through their NVQ units, and are achieving within their expected timescales. During their programmes, learners improve their confidence and ability to work independently.

Quality of education and training

109. Key skills are particularly well taught and assessed. This represents a significant improvement since the previous inspection, when there was no key skills training at all. Learners' key skills ability is now thoroughly tested at the start of their programme, and they receive well-planned individual coaching to help them with areas of weakness. Key skills are introduced at the beginning of learners' programmes and are very carefully explained to them. Learners fully understand the key skills requirements of their framework. Much evidence on key skills is gathered alongside the NVQ evidence through the learners' practical tasks. Some is collected through particularly well-designed projects and assignments, which are occupationally relevant, and are enjoyed by learners.

110. Learners' progress reviews were judged to be inadequate at the time of the previous inspection. They are now well planned and extremely thorough. Progress reviews involve a detailed discussion of the learners' progress through the NVQ, in the

workplace, and with their personal development. Targets are well-focused and challenging, but realistic. They make it clear what the learner needs to achieve by the time of the next review. Individual learning plans are used at each review to remind the learners of their long-term targets, and are amended to reflect the review, and the learner's achievement. The quality of reviews is monitored by NECC's managers, who provides training advisers with written feedback that highlights areas that they need to improve.

111. NECC's training advisers make frequent, flexible workplace visits and meet learners every two or three weeks for assessments or progress reviews. These visits are well planned and productive. Relationships between learners, training advisers and employers are good. There are satisfactory arrangements for induction and initial assessment. Induction is thorough and generally well remembered by learners. Initial assessment accurately identifies learners' ability and support needs, but full account is not always taken of prior learning, as learners with prior experience have similar targets to those new to the industry. Learners who have additional needs in literacy, numeracy or language receive appropriate support.

112. Resources are satisfactory. Staff are well qualified, with good industrial experience. Training centres have well-equipped training rooms and good IT facilities. Appropriate course books are provided for technical certificates and learners have access to a range of supporting material for the NVQ. The range of hospitality provision is sufficient to meet the needs of learners. They receive adequate guidance on the progression routes and career opportunities available to them.

113. The on-the-job training received by learners is not effectively linked to their off-the-job training, or the requirements of their NVQ. Training advisers do not provide employers with enough guidance on the on-the-job training required, and workplace learning is sometimes not effectively planned. Many work placements have good in-company training programmes, which learners participate in and value. However, the relevance of these programmes to the NVQ is not sufficiently explored or emphasised.

114. Assessment opportunities which arise between visits from NECC's assessors are not effectively used. As part of their work role, learners regularly perform tasks which could be used as evidence for their NVQ. This naturally occurring evidence is not captured or used. One training adviser has on occasions asked the learners to complete diary evidence sheets authenticated by their supervisors. However, this useful strategy is insufficiently used.

Leadership and management

115. Hospitality programmes are satisfactorily managed. The programme has grown since the previous inspection and this has been appropriately managed by the recruitment of additional staff and some restructuring. Staff communicate well with each other and with managers. They are aware of NECC's corporate targets, of the targets for their training centre and area of learning. They understand their personal role in helping

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achieve these targets.

116. Internal verification has improved since the previous inspection, and is now satisfactory. Comprehensive new procedures have been introduced. All assessors have recently been observed by the internal verifier and they have received helpful, developmental feedback.

Health, social care & public services**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	229	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good focus on learners' individual needs
- wide range of good learning resources
- good progression into employment
- well-planned on-the-job training

Weaknesses

- slow completion of NVQ units by some learners

Achievement and standards

117. Rates of achievement and retention are satisfactory. Of the 155 learners who started in 2001, 20 per cent have already completed the framework and 46 per cent are still in learning. Eighty-one per cent of the 157 learners who started in 2002 are still in learning. Most learners are making satisfactory progress through their qualification.

118. A good proportion of learners progress into employment. In 2000-01, 79 per cent progressed into employment. Most of the learners currently on programme will become employed when they achieve their qualification. Learners develop their self-confidence and maturity as they progress through their programme. Many are given relevant additional training by their employer, which increases their skills, employability and confidence.

Quality of education and training

119. The three main training centres have a well-equipped demonstration dental surgery which learners use to develop practical skills for the workplace. There is a wide range of textbooks, professional publications, videos and workbooks to support learners' study. Training advisers are all qualified and experienced dental nurses. They are up to date with knowledge and practice and maintain useful links with the examination board and relevant professional bodies. Learners have good access to computers at each centre, and use them well to produce portfolio evidence. The good training resources are identified as a strength in NECC's self-assessment report.

120. Training in the workplace is well planned and this was identified in the self-

assessment report. Learners work alongside experienced and qualified staff who provide clear and effective demonstrations of dental routines and practices. Learners quickly develop good practical skills, and increase their confidence. There are good links between the practical training provided on the job, and the learning which takes place off-the-job. NECC's training advisers liaise effectively with workplace supervisors to identify which new skills learners need to develop, and how this might be achieved.

121. Learners' individual needs are carefully assessed and well met. Their individual learning styles are identified at the start of the programme and this information is used by training advisers to plan appropriate training and individual support arrangements. Training advisers have a good knowledge of learners' personal circumstances and respond quickly and effectively to issues raised by learners or supervisors. Training advisers visit learners in the workplace regularly to carry out assessments and progress reviews. These visits are flexible and are often made at short notice to suit the needs of the learner. Learners know that they can contact staff for additional assistance when needed. They are confident that any issues they raise will be sensitively and effectively dealt with.

122. Progress reviews are sufficiently regular, and involve a thorough discussion of each learner's progress, learning needs and performance. However, some of the targets are insufficiently detailed. Workplace supervisors are aware of their learner's progress and are adequately involved in the review process.

123. There are adequate strategies to meet learners' literacy, numeracy and language support needs. Learners' needs are assessed and met by qualified basic skills tutors, who use a wide range of learning resources.

124. The programme is designed to meet the requirements of a specific group of learners, and it does this well. Learners receive clear information about the opportunities available to them after their training.

125. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Learners agree a clear assessment plan covering all NVQ units. Assessment is thorough, and learners receive adequate written and verbal feedback from assessors. Records of observations are comprehensive and inform the learner of their achievement.

126. A minority of learners are making slow progress through their NVQ. There is a strong emphasis on the teaching of background knowledge in preparation for the independent assessment. During this time, insufficient attention is given to the collection of NVQ evidence, and assessment opportunities are not taken. Some learners do not complete any NVQ units during the first six months of their programme. Observation of performance is often delayed with some learners waiting between four and 10 months for the first assessment.

Leadership and management

127. Internal verification is satisfactory. Assessors attend standardisation meetings and are kept updated with awarding body guidance. Observation of assessment practice is thorough and results in developmental feedback to assessors.

128. There is good internal communication within NECC. Staff attend regular meetings in each centre and across centres. Good practice is discussed and improvements to training are planned and implemented. Staff make good use of the intranet to update themselves about organisational changes. Training advisers are aware of their targets for retention and achievement.

129. Learners cover equal opportunities during their induction. Most have a satisfactory understanding of issues relating to bullying and harassment. NECC's staff recently attended training on equality of opportunity, which they found valuable.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	17	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2	None

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good rates of achievement and retention on Life Skills
- thorough initial assessment
- particularly effective strategies to engage disaffected learners
- very effective support for learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate target-setting for learners
- insufficient staff expertise for teaching literacy and numeracy

Achievement and standards

130. Rates of retention and achievement for Life Skills learners are good, and show a steadily improving trend. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. In 2000-01, 67 per cent of Life Skills learners were retained and achieved their learning goals. This proportion improved to 76 per cent in 2001-02. Of the 44 learners who started Life Skills programmes in 2002-03, 66 per cent have so far achieved their learning goal, with a further 29 per cent still in learning and making good progress.

131. Learners on Life Skills and BET programmes increase their confidence during their learning programme. They develop a range of skills to help them seek and obtain employment. Learners take additional qualifications in topics such as first aid and health and hygiene, which broaden their skills and make them more employable.

132. Rates of retention on BET are satisfactory and have averaged over 60 per cent since 2000. Achievement improved considerably in 2002, with over 60 per cent of starters achieving their learning goal.

Quality of education and training

133. Initial assessment is well planned and comprehensive. This strength is recognised in the self-assessment report. The process begins with a detailed initial interview involving the learner, Connexions or Jobcentre Plus personal adviser, and a training adviser from NECC. The interview covers a variety of topics, including the learners' job

aims, previous experience, and personal needs. It is sensitively carried out and provides a good starting point for the learning process. Learners are asked to complete a range of appropriate initial assessment activities, the results of which are used appropriately to identify support needs and to plan an individual programme of learning for each learner.

134. NECC's trainers are skilled and experienced in working with disadvantaged learners, and those whose experience of education has been negative. NECC recognises this strength in the self-assessment report. Trainers use a wide range of practical activities, which learners enjoy, to build teamworking skills, confidence and employability. Activities are carefully planned to meet learner's individual interests. For example, learners at one training centre are designing, costing and making a garden area. NECC's staff have developed particularly positive relationships with representatives from the emergency services and from youth offending teams. They use these to develop interesting training activities, such as a trip to the fire station, which gives learners an insight into the impact of hoax calls and a visit to the local magistrates court. As their training progresses, learners become more confident in discussion, improve their listening skills, and become better at working in groups. They support each other well. When necessary, trainers sensitively but effectively challenge learners' inappropriate behaviour. Learners value the opportunity to work towards certificates in first aid, and health and hygiene. Assessment is regular, thorough, and appropriate to the needs of the learner group. Learners receive detailed feedback on their work.

135. Learners have very good support from NECC's staff and where appropriate, from workplace supervisors. Foundation learners come to NECC with a range of personal, social and learning difficulties, and staff deal with these sensitively, effectively and with due regard for confidentiality. Learners have confidence in their trainers, and feel able to ask for support. NECC's staff maintain good links with a range of specialist support agencies which have expertise in addiction, rape and sexual abuse and homelessness, and they refer learners appropriately. The good support for learners is identified as a strength in the self-assessment report.

136. Resources are good on the Hexham site, which is pleasantly laid out and well equipped. Learners on this site have good access to computers and to the internet. The other two centres are adequately resourced, although computers there are not linked to the internet. Trainers develop and share a wide range of appropriate training materials.

137. Foundation programmes are sufficient to meet the needs of learners. There are good progression opportunities on to mainstream courses and learners receive appropriate guidance about the range of opportunities available to them.

138. Only one member of staff is qualified to teach literacy and numeracy skills, although most of the Life Skills learners need support in this area. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report. Opportunities to integrate the development of literacy and numeracy skills into other teaching activities are sometimes not taken. There is little evidence in portfolios that learners' numeracy skills are developing. NECC is aware that this needs improvement, and three foundation trainers are working towards a relevant qualification. A new scheme of work for the teaching of numeracy has recently

been introduced, but it is too early to say how effective it will be.

139. The targets which are set for learners during progress reviews, are insufficiently detailed. Often, they do not identify the specific steps needed for each objective, and the timescales within which their goals should be achieved. Learners are unclear about their targets, and about their progress towards the achievement of their learning goals.

Leadership and management

140. Foundation staff are well managed and well supported. They have good professional development opportunities, which they value. Communication between the centres which offer foundation programmes is good, and there is appropriate sharing of ideas, learning materials and good practice. Meetings are regular and well recorded, and are underpinned by good informal communication.

141. Staff give due consideration to equality in all aspects of their work with learners. However, some learners do not fully understand issues such as harassment, bullying and discrimination.

142. Effective measures are taken to quality assure foundation learning programmes and to ensure that learners' experiences are positive. NECC's staff and managers give close consideration to feedback from learners, and use this to improve the training.